

Transitional Significance of Dance Development in Taiwan in the Post-martial Law Period (1987 ~ 2000)

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I. Introduction

The Nationalist government came to Taiwan in 1949 when the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949) ended and hence Taiwan, and its peripheral islands, became known as the Republic of China (ROC). Not long after the Nationalist Party's arrival, martial law was declared and, until its abolishment in July 1987 the Taiwanese society was suppressed by various forms of political control.¹⁾ Dance, like many other activities in Taiwan, was under strict state control during the martial law period. For the government's political purposes, dance in this period was often manipulated as a means of spreading propaganda such as anti-Communism and patriotism.²⁾ In the post-martial law period, the disappearance of strict political censorship has meant that most fields have experienced transformation in terms of structures, practices and/or dispositions. In the same way, the dance field has seen many dramatic changes during this period. Moreover, whatever has disappeared, merged, been invented or re-invented have often been found to have a relation with other fields or foreign factors, particularly in the adoption of new ideas that have emerged in Taiwan during the last decade of the twentieth century. In this paper, I will review the development of dance in the early decades of

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1) J. A. Tai(2009), *Dance as an Institutional Power: A Bourdieuan Approach to Socio-Political Changes in Dance in Higher Education in Taiwan*, Ph.D. Diss., University of Surrey.

2) J. A. Tai(2010b), *Pride, Prejudice and Politics in Dance: The Rise of Dance as a Symbolic Power in Taiwan*(Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing).

the post-martial law period by focusing on the changes that have had an effect on dance development.

II. A New Wave of Chinese Influence

When martial law was abolished in 1987, a formerly repressed creative energy was released. Since then, the development of dance has moved in several directions, causing several major events to occur in the dance field. First, many Taiwanese dance artists took the opportunity to visit China and study dance with Chinese artists, something that was prohibited for thirty-eight years during the martial law period. An exchange of dance talents as well as other forms of interaction has become more common since November 1987 (although political deadlocks remain until the first decade of the twenty-first century).³⁾ Dance companies, masters, and students from both sides visited each other frequently, and these exchanges have given impetus for dance development in Taiwan. Official statistics of a survey taken in December 1997 by the government of Taiwan showed that ten years after the resumption of cross-strait exchanges, the total figure for individuals who participated in cultural and arts exchanges from China to Taiwan was 31,668.⁴⁾

As part of these exchanges, the reformed training of Chinese traditional dance technique and the dances of Chinese minorities introduced by Chinese artists fascinated dancers and audiences alike in Taiwan. In the reformed technique, the older practices were set into a structure that is similar to ballet training but combined the gestures, facial expressions or postures of Chinese traditional dance, e.g., lan hua zhi [orchid fingers]. To most Taiwanese dancers, such training style was fresh and different from the older style of Chinese traditional dance courses where most of the movements were extracted directly from Chinese Peking Opera.

3) Hsiao, C. M. (1998). Cross-strait cultural exchanges over the past decade. *Mainland China Studies*, 41(9): 53-70 + 86; Hsiao, C. M. (1999). Cross-strait academic exchanges: The past ten years. *Mainland China Studies*, 42(4): 93-107; Hsiao, C. M. (2000a). Cross-strait technological exchanges over the past ten years. *Mainland China Studies*, 43(1): 47-61; Hsiao, C. M. (2000b). Cross-strait literary and art exchanges. *Mainland China Studies*, 43(3): 113-129; Hu, K. H. (2003). The interactions of advertising industry between Taiwan and mainland China--A preliminary study. *Fu Hsing Kang Academic Journal*, 79: 129-151; Jang, H. H. (1996). Research on the Change of Relationship between Two Sides of Taiwan Straits (1987-1995) -- The Mutual Intercourse between China's Policy to Taiwan and Taiwan's Policy to China. Master's thesis, Tamkang University, Taipei, Taiwan; Shaw, C. H. (2003). The analysis of the cross-strait political definition basing upon the historical development of cross-strait relations (I). *Prospect Quarterly*, 4(4): 1-36; Shaw, C. H. (2004). The analysis of the cross-strait political definition basing upon the historical development of cross-strait relations (II). *Prospect Quarterly*, 5(1): 95-123; Yang, S. (2003). Cross-strait exchanges: A retrospective. *Exchange*, 72: 25-29.

4) MAC. (1997). Liang an jiao liu tong ji zhai yao (wen jiao lei) [Statistics of cross-strait exchanges (category of culture and education)]. Liang an wen jiao jiao liu tong ji zhai yao-1997.12.11 [Statistics of cross-strait culture and education exchanges - Dec. 11, 1997]. Wen jiao jiao liu tong ji [Statistics of culture and education exchanges]. Liang an tong ji [Cross-strait statistics]. Chinese version. Mainland Affairs Council. Retrieved October 29, 2014, from <<http://www.mac.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=50908&ctNode=5719&mp=1>>.

At this time, many Taiwanese dancers travelled to China to study dance. Scholars and artists from China were frequently invited to give lectures, present demonstrations and to choreograph for dancers in Taiwan. Their techniques and dances became popular material for curriculum in higher education. Under such circumstance, artists who specialized in Chinese traditional dance experienced habitus⁵⁾ change individually and collectively. My observation is that such cultural influence from China has developed into a new force that greatly affected Taiwan's dance field. Its effect and the consequences of its development has significantly affected many dance-major students' dispositions towards Chinese dance and Chinese culture.

III. The Downs and Ups of the Cloud Gate Dance Theatre

This period also saw the closing and re-emergence of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, which remains the first and the only professional dance company in Taiwan to this day. During the late 1980s, while people enjoyed freedom of creativity and speech after the abolition of martial law, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre was facing a difficult financial situation. This financial difficulty caused Cloud Gate Dance Theatre to close in 1988.⁶⁾ Not long after, the dancers of Cloud Gate found it necessary to look for their own space in order to secure positions in the dance field. Thus, numerous dance groups and private dance schools were established during this time, founded by former Cloud Gate dancers.⁷⁾ Then, almost three years after its closing, through the collective efforts of the artists (Lin and his dancers), the media (magazines and newspapers) and sponsors (state foundations such as the Ministry of Culture and private donations such as the Education and Culture Foundation of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, Ltd.), Cloud Gate Dance Theatre announced its return to the stage in 1991.⁸⁾

Since its return, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre has expanded and established its dance school and a second affiliated company. Cloud Gate Dance School was established in 1998,⁹⁾ and, over the years, Cloud Gate Dance School has become one of the most popular and successful dance franchise organizations.¹⁰⁾ The branches of its school offer many dance graduates opportunities to work with

5) In French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory, the habitus is "an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133). In this study, the habitus refers to the beliefs, attitudes, practices, preferences and values in dance of an individual or a group.

6) M. Y. Yang(1998), *Cloud Nine: Lin Hwai-Min and Cloud Gate Dance Theatre*(Taipei, Taiwan: Commonwealth).

7) Y. P. Chen(2003), *Dance History and Cultural Politics: A Study of Contemporary Dance in Taiwan, 1930s-1997*. Ph.D. diss., New York University.

8) J. Chiu (1991, September 13). Cloud Gate's return enlivens modern dance. *Free China Journal*, 5.

9) Information can be found on the website of Cloud Gate Dance School at <<http://www.cgds.com.tw/node/20>>.

children through creative dance lessons.¹¹⁾ Lin founded Cloud Gate 2 in 1999 to foster young choreographers, and to tour campuses and grass-root communities in Taiwan.¹²⁾ Hence, Cloud Gate 2 has toured and performed for students in numerous university and school campuses and also produced several programs for children.¹³⁾ Altogether, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, Cloud Gate Dance School and Cloud Gate 2 occupy the biggest space in Taiwan's dance field at present.

IV. The Expansion of Dance in Higher Education

Another major development is the expansion of the scope of dance in higher education. Until the early 1990s, three institutions offered dance as a subject for study. These were the Chinese Culture College (now Chinese Culture University), the National College of the Arts (now National Taiwan University of Arts) and Tainan Junior College of Home Economics (now Tainan University of Technology). These institutions started as combined high school and first stage of tertiary education (junior college). To be specific, students who graduated from Junior high school may audition for these institutions and spend five years in the dance department for an associate degree. Many alumni of these institutions are now influential figures in the dance field in Taiwan, for example, Yunyu Wang, who is now the president of World Dance Alliance-Asia Pacific. These institutions were gradually upgraded to a higher level and offer bachelor's degrees.

During the late twentieth century many dancers who had studied or worked abroad came back to reside in Taiwan. These dance talent were qualified to teach in higher education and so were hired for those institutions that intended to set up or enlarge their dance programs. First, the dance division under the department of music at Tainan Junior College of Home Economics became the department of dance in 1991. Second, the first graduate program in dance was founded at the National Institute of the Arts (now Taipei National University of the Arts) in 1992.¹⁴⁾ Third, new departments of dance were established at the National Taiwan College of Physical Education (now National Taiwan University of Physical Education and Sport) in 1996 and Taipei Physical Education College (now University of Taipei) in 1998. Thus altogether, there are now six institutions in higher education that

10) As of January 2014, Cloud Gate Dance School has a total number of 21 branches in Taiwan. Information can be found on the website of Cloud Gate Dance School at <<http://www.cgds.com.tw/node/25>>.

11) More information can be found at <<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2013/09/12/2003571925/2>>.

12) CGDT.(2015), Cloud Gate 2. Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan. <http://www.cloudgate.org.tw/eng/CG2/CG2_company.html, January 11, 2015>.

13) Information about Cloud Gate 2 can be found on its website at <<http://www.cloudgate.org.tw/cg2/>>.

14) Information about the university's brief development can be found on its website at <http://1www.tnua.edu.tw/about/super_pages.php?ID=about4>.

offer dance as a degree for study in Taiwan and, except for Tainan University of Technology, graduate programs in dance are offered by the other five.

V. Dance as an Expression of Cultural Identity

One final development of dance in this period has been a wider recognition of its value as an expression of cultural identity and a medium for cultural exchange. Although dance activities for cultural exchanges had their beginnings in the 1960s, these events were not popularly-embraced because most artists were repressed by political censorship.¹⁵⁾¹⁶⁾ However, during the last decade of the twentieth century, the central government started to assist local governments in organizing international events.¹⁷⁾ In 1996, the organization of Nan-Ying International Folklore Festival and the I-Lan Children's Folklore & Folkgame Festival became the prototypes for many other events in the years to come.¹⁸⁾ These festivals offered an opportunity to present many types of Taiwanese ethnic dances. According to the Performing Arts Yearbook published in 1997 and 2001, there were forty-seven registered dance groups in Taiwan in 1996 and by 2000 the number had increased to sixty-five (NCKSCC, 1997, p. 266, 2001, p. 216). The festivals may not have been a direct catalyst for the increase in registered dance groups. Nonetheless, the increased opportunities offered by folklore festivals for dance performances may be taken as encouragement for people performing Taiwanese ethnic dances.

Besides participating in festivals in Taiwan, local dance groups also searched for opportunities to perform abroad. The function of dance as a means for Taiwan's cultural export through folk dance performances was ignited through the trend of attending international folklore festivals. L. C. Kuo, director of the Yi-tzy Folk Dance Theatre, has attended international folklore festivals in France (1998), Italy (1999), Spain (2000), England (2002) and Germany (2006), just to name a few, and acknowledges the legitimacy and reciprocal benefits of cultural export through dance. She states that by performing abroad, her group gained social status by raising its reputation in Taiwan's dance field, while foreign audiences learned about Taiwanese culture through the group's dance performances.¹⁹⁾

15) S. C. Chang(2006). *Dance Performance and Cultural Diplomacy: A Study on the International Performances of Taiwanese Dance Companies (1949-1973)*. Master's thesis, National Taiwan University of Arts, Taipei, Taiwan.

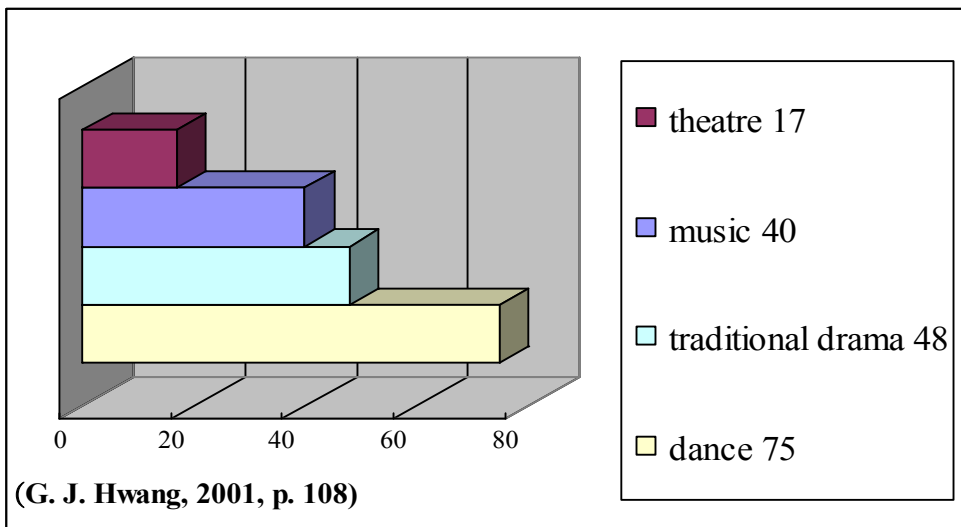
16) More detail of Taiwan's dance for cultural exchange can be found in Y. P. Chen, 2003; Cheng, 2005; Lin, 2001, 2004; Lu, 1995a, 1995b; Tai, 2009, 2010a, 2010b.

17) CCA.(1998), *Wen hua bai pi shu* [White paper on cultural affairs], (Taipei, Taiwan: Council for Cultural Affairs), p.64.

18) *Ibid.*; NCKSCC.(1997), *Fu lu er: deng lu tuan ti gu yu fen bu shu* [Appendix 2: Regional distribution of registered groups], In Y. T. Lue (Ed.), *Zhong hua min guo ba shi wu nian biao yan yi shu nian jian* [Performing arts yearbook 1996](Taipei, Taiwan: National Chiang Kai-Shek Cultural Center), p.266

Moreover, Kuo's experience in attending international folklore festivals fueled her motivation to affirm cultural identity through movement and choreography. For example, in her signature piece, *Celebration* (1999), many movements and steps were adopted from the rituals of local Buddhist festivals. In this dance, she found a way of creating new work from her cultural background, which was ethnic Han culture developed in Taiwan.

Kuo's experience is just one example of many of the dance groups that perform internationally. Their warm receptions by audiences abroad has earned these groups increasing numbers of awards and grants from the government. For example, in my other research²⁰) that cited from Hwang Gwo-je n²¹), he says, "in the year 2000, among the performing groups 75% of the dance groups were sponsored partially or fully by the government for fulfilling the duty of cultural diplomacy." Figure 1 shows that, more than other forms of arts, dance gains more financial support from the government in the year 2000. The higher financial support for dance can be explained by the fact that many dance groups, including professional companies such as Cloud Gate Dance Theatre and amateur groups such as Kuo's dance group, received positive international recognition that impressed the judges of government funding.



<Figure 1> Comparison of the percentage within each performing group that received funding for cultural diplomacy in 2000

However, these examples demonstrate that politics has never stopped its influence on the

19) L. C. Kuo, personal communication, May 21, 2001.

20) J. A. Tai(2010a), The effects of globalisation on the field of contemporary dance and dance education in Taiwan. *Research in Arts Education* 19, pp.183-204.

21) (2001, p.108)

development of dance in Taiwan. Cultural diplomacy through the performing arts was promoted by the government, which has encouraged many more dance groups to perform locally and internationally than ever before.²²⁾ Through sponsoring international festivals both abroad and domestically, political influence on dance has resurfaced, although in a different manner than during the martial law period. That is, although strict political controls such as censorship no longer limit dance artists' creativity, politics has always been involved in dance activities that bear the name of cultural diplomacy. By accomplishing certain diplomatic achievements, dance thrives and receives a big portion of the government's support in funding and publicity.

Since the lifting of martial law, building a Taiwanese cultural identity instead of a Chinese identity²³⁾ has increased in many fields.²⁴⁾ The participants in dance field have found a new enthusiasm to discover and describe Taiwanese identity through movements such as those seen in ethnic Han traditional activities or in aboriginal dances.²⁵⁾ This enthusiasm has evolved into the choreography of new dance works that represent Taiwanese culture in the modern day. The changing of cultural identity from that of Chinese to Taiwanese in social fields and the encouragement in cultural diplomacy from the government has affected the preference and disposition of many artists in the dance field. This has formed a new habitus which is at odds with the habitus maintained by the artists who are still fascinated with Chinese identity, culture and dance.

As a consequence of this trend in stressing local cultural identities, many dance groups established in the post-martial-law period now present works aimed at bringing out the spirit of Taiwan.²⁶⁾ Local dance groups have created a new habitus and wider taste in bodily forms for Taiwan's dance field. That is, as Chen Ya-ping observes, they are manipulating local cultural materials to create new works and new creations that are in dialogue with traditional elements.²⁷⁾ Chen sees Taiwanese cultural

22) L. L. Wang(1997), *Tai-wan wai jiao, di zhang "wen hua" ming pian ba* [Diplomacy of Taiwan: Pass out a 'cultural' business card!]. *Performing Arts Review* 57, pp.53-61.

23) Chinese identity was forcefully imposed on the population in Taiwan during the martial law period by the Nationalist government but its ultimate goal was to return to the Mainland and 'liberate' it from the Communists (Tai, 2010b, p.18).

24) Chen, P. L. (2002). From parochialism to Taiwan's consciousness. *Journal of Institute of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen's Doctrine*, 24: 61-71; Wu, Y. S. (2001). The Chinese/Taiwanese identity in cross-straits. *China Affairs*, 4: 71-89; Yu, I. H. (2004). Taiwan consciousness in transition. *Prospect & Exploration*, 2(8): 65-83. CGDT. (2015). Cloud Gate 2. Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan. <http://www.cloudgate.org.tw/eng/CG2/CG2_company.html, January 11, 2015>.

25) Chen, Y. P. (2003). *Dance History and Cultural Politics: A Study of Contemporary Dance in Taiwan, 1930s-1997*. Ph.D. diss., New York University; Chao, Y. L. (2001). Dance, culture and nationalism: The socio-cultural significance of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre in Taiwanese society. In Y. P. Chen & C. F. Chao (Eds.), *Proceedings from the Dance Studies and Taiwan Seminar: The Prospect of a New Generation*. Taipei, Taiwan: National Chang Kai-Shek Cultural Center. pp.172-199; Lin, Y. T. (2001). Dance in the age of globalization: Cloud Gate Dance Theatre and the political economy of touring. In Y. P. Chen & C. F. Chao (Eds.), pp.200-213.

26) For example, the Taipei Folk Dance Theatre since 1988, Formosa Aboriginal Song & Dance Troupe since 1991, and Legend Lin Dance Theatre since 1995.

elements such as ritual gestures, festivals, ceremonial movement patterns, and traditional music and costumes being used in contemporary choreographies. Examples of Chen's observation can be found in works such as *New Face of Fairy Island* (1990) by Taipei Folk Dance Theatre, *The Passing of the Year* (1993) by Formosa Aboriginal Song & Dance Troupe and *Mirrors of Life* (1995) by Legend Lin Dance Theatre.

Moreover, under the trend of recognizing cultural identity in dance, the long suppressed folk arts are being given their due. Taiwanese folk songs and movements that were once condemned as low arts during the martial law period have become treasures for the people of the contemporary era. For example, *Tao-hua-guo-du* [As Peach Blossoms Pass Through] and *Chai-cha-xi* [Tea-picking Opera], are now viewed as part of an intangible cultural heritage²⁸⁾ and are included in cultural preservation projects supported by government agencies such as the Council for Hakka Affairs, and by private foundations.²⁹⁾

VI. Conclusion

This study has documented several examples of the forces affecting the field of dance in Taiwan in the early decades of the post-martial law period. These rapid changes are a result of social transformation and they caused significant transitions in dance development during those decades, although not everyone will assign the same significance to these factors and the changes they engender. In these changes, we can identify foreign cultural influences in the development of dance in Taiwan just as a local cultural identity was striving to find its footing in the dance field. Examples of these influences are listed and discussed as follows.

The first foreign cultural influence came from China. As I have explained, shortly after the resumption of cross-strait activities, Chinese dances gained popularity in most parts of Taiwan. This can be seen as one of the causes that motivated many dance-major students to participate in the National Student Dance Competition for the categories of Chinese classical dances and Chinese ethnic dances in recent years.

During the martial law period, anti-Communism, patriotism and a Chinese identity were forcefully

27) Ya-ping Chen (1994), *Zai di de wu dao jia: hui gui xiang tu zou ru qun zhong de xiang si* [Local dancers: the thought of return to the native culture, stepping into the crowd], *Taiwan Dance Magazine* 5, pp.28-29.

28) Dance is treasured by the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) as an intangible cultural heritage. Intangible cultural heritage includes oral traditions, performing arts (such as traditional music, dance and theatre), social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts (UNESCO, 2014).

29) More information can be found from the website of Council for Hakka Affairs (CHA, 2014).

imposed by the Nationalist government; therefore, political ideology was most important among the rules for any activity, for example, Competition of Chinese Traditional Dance.³⁰⁾ Although political interference severely limited the creative freedom for their choreographies, the awarding of prizes attracted many dance-major students to participate and to adhere to the rules.

In the post-martial law period, the origin of this interest sprang from the autonomous and simultaneous choices of the dance-major students themselves as national politics was no longer coercively involved in most fields after the lifting of martial law. This situation shows that past experiences, for example, practice in Chinese dance, have an influence over the individuals' habitus so their dispositions and aesthetic preferences were molded towards certain directions, that is, Chinese cultures.

Besides the Chinese influence, dance in the post martial-law period has been highly influenced by western culture, mainly the United States and Europe. This influence was seen in the way dance was taught in higher education in Taiwan by higher education by dance artists and dance educators who returned from abroad. Another western influence was the adoption of American government's policy of cultural diplomacy. Both examples, I argue, are demonstrations of westernization which greatly influenced the collective habitus through the experiences of the socialization process and this will be explained as follows.

First, western cultural influence in Taiwan's dance in higher education had its roots ever since the first dance department was established at the Chinese Culture College (now Chinese Culture University) in the 1960s.³¹⁾ As in the post-martial law period, the returning dance talents from the west collectively contributed to the expansion of the scope of dance in higher education, which opened up more opportunities for students to study dance as a major. Furthermore, the graduate programs in dance that were established during this period set a foundation for doctoral degrees in dance to develop in this decade. These examples indicate that the development of dance in higher education in Taiwan has never stopped interacting with western cultures and that paved the way for the current trend of internationalization in higher education in dance.

Second, Taiwan's policy of cultural diplomacy is believed to have its original inspiration from the United States.³²⁾ The detailed explanation of the American model can be found in Naima Prevots' (1998) *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War*. The cultural diplomacy in Taiwan's case is found in the mutually beneficial relationship between the government and dance artists. For both parties, through the activities of dance for cultural diplomacy, the government and participating dance agents receive the benefits they desired. To be specific, by fulfilling the dance artists' desires for

30) J. A. Tai(2010b), pp.21-24.

31) J. A. Tai(2009), pp.35-36.

32) J. A. Tai(2010b), p.24.

overseas performances, positive reputation and acknowledgment from the government and government funding, politics continues to exercise control in dance.

The examples listed above conclude that foreign cultural influences in the development of dance in this period disclose the enduring nature of the habitus. Although change did take place, and can happen in the habitus, its endurance also reinforces the recurrence of past experience from time to time. Under such circumstance, the collective habitus of the dance field modifies and people in the dance field adjust their institutional habitus accordingly. Thus, people in the dance field are constantly searching for means to secure their positions and the power relations among themselves are constantly changing. Many of the changes that took place in this period also suggest that dance is often controlled by the knowledge and power of other people or ideologies outside dance. Overall, dance in Taiwan continues to be subjected to social and political shifts in society.

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Transitional Significance of Dance Development in Taiwan in the Post-martial Law Period (1987 ~ 2000)

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Dance development in Taiwan has gone through several stages in the twentieth century. This study examines the major social changes that have affected dance development in Taiwan in the early decades of the post-martial law period. It focuses on the multi-directional development of dance due to the social transformation after the abolition of martial law. Special attention is placed on changes derived from foreign influence and government policies that have affected the function of dance afterwards. The discussions demonstrates how the habitus has changed in the dance field and why dance artists and educators exercised their agency to adjust to these changes. The purpose of this study is to illuminate how certain aspects of dance development in Taiwan have been affected by the changes.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy(문화 외교); cultural identity(문화 정체성); dance education(무용 교육); habitus(아비투스); performing arts(공연 예술)