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Dancing Within Taiwanese-ness: International Folk Dancing Communities in Taiwan and  
California

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in

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by

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The Dissertation of Wei-Chi Wu is approved:

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Dancing Within Taiwanese-ness: International Folk Dancing Communities in Taiwan and California

by

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Dr. Anthea Kraut, Chairperson

This research investigates Taiwanese dancers' practice of international folk dancing through interviews and participant-observation. International folk dancing is a specific dance genre, in which its practitioners explore various regional folk dances around the world, regardless of their ethnicities. I define this practice as a *transnational embodiment*, because it not only covers folk dances from different countries, but also was a government-sanctioned exercise during the Taiwanese Martial Law Period (1945-1987). Furthermore, many Taiwanese immigrants in California are still practicing this dance for the purpose of connecting with people with similar backgrounds. In this regard, international folk dancing is a historical product from Taiwan's Martial Law Period, and it also functions as an instrument to scrutinize some Taiwanese immigrants' conceptions of national and cultural identity in California.

My dissertation starts from post-World War II Taiwan, when international folk dancing was introduced from the United States in 1957 and became a mass exercise of the Taiwanese people during Martial Law. For the National Government at this time,

international folk dancing was a means of presenting Taiwan's political alignment with the United States. For the Taiwanese people, however, this dance form was a way to understand the outside world under extreme limitations on information access outside Taiwan during Martial Law. My investigation then shifts to Taiwanese immigrants' current practice of international folk dancing in California. Though these immigrants do not limit their practice to Taiwan-specific dances and are embodying cultures of others, international folk dancing is a strong *transnational embodiment* that enables these Taiwanese immigrants to reconstruct their idea of home in the United States and to articulate a new definition of Taiwanese identity through practicing others' nationalisms.

Furthermore, I demonstrate that Taiwanese dancers of different generations in both regions are constantly constructing the notions of "folk" and "international" through their diverse living and dancing experiences. I argue that international folk dancing challenges these concepts when compared to previous scholars' examinations. Additionally, this dance form demonstrates its practitioners' cultural awareness that even though the practice seems to be inclusive, its dancers are much aware of issues of authenticity, appropriation, and cross-cultural politics. Finally, this sub-genre of self-choreographed dancing indicates a Taiwanized international folk dancing practice. Self-choreographed dancing was developed by the Taiwanese international folk dancing community during the Martial Law Period, and in California, it is practiced more in the Taiwanese international folk dancing groups but is missing in Western dancers' community. As this sub-genre stretches the ideas of "folk," "international," and the sense of cultural awareness, the dissertation also explores this difference between Taiwanese and Western

international folk dancing communities to emphasize the notion of Taiwanese-ness.

International folk dancing serves to scrutinize relationships between Taiwan and the United States after World War II. Meanwhile, California-based Taiwanese immigrants apply their past dancing memories to their current practice of international folk dancing, suggesting new definitions to existing conceptions of Taiwanese identity. Moreover, the unstableness in the dance form's translations in Mandarin Chinese—*tu-feng-wu* or *shi-jie min-su wu-dao*—indicates that there is no consistent understanding of “folk,” “international,” and even “international folk dancing” itself. The lack of coherent translation furthermore signals varied interpretations of Taiwanese-ness by Taiwanese people from different places and of different generations.

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## Introduction

In late October 2009, the student-based international folk dancing club I joined as an undergrad held a dance exhibition to celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Taipei, Taiwan. International folk dancing is a specific dance genre in which dancers practice dances from around the world—such as Taiwan, Malaysia, Israel, Bulgaria, Italy, and the United States—regardless of their ethnicities. I invited some non-dance friends to come to see the performance, and one of them wrote on her blog after the show, “I thought *tu-feng-wu* was the thing that some elders do in the park. I did not know you could do the splits and all those techniques!”<sup>1</sup> As a person majoring in economics when in undergrad, I only considered myself an amateur dancer at that time. Yet I did not sense happiness in myself and even felt uncomfortable when reading her praise about my techniques; nonetheless, I did not question the reasons for my discomfort. Like most international folk dancers, I have always been aware that this dance form is misunderstood. For instance, I was having a casual lunch in Taipei with a group of women in their late fifties and their daughters who are all outsiders of this dancing community, when one said, “They want a boyfriend or girlfriend. That is why people go international folk dancing,” in response to hearing about me participating in this activity.<sup>2</sup> On other occasions, my friends, who were in their twenties or thirties, watched me in awe and sometimes responded, “isn’t that for the elders and housewives?” when I introduced myself as an international folk dancer.

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<sup>1</sup> This experience is seen as a part of author’s collection of informal conversations. I translated her sentence

<sup>2</sup> Author’s collection of informal conversations.

Countless similar situations have occurred, and it actually took me awhile to be mentally prepared and say out loud, “I practice international folk dancing.”

The above mentioned celebratory dance exhibition was not the first time I performed regional folk dances on stage. And since then, I have continued attending workshops and camps and regular gatherings in different cities as a member of this dancing community. I also started taking ballet and Chinese dance classes, which were considered outside the community, because I hoped to improve my physical abilities.<sup>3</sup> My love of international folk dancing eventually led me to leave my marketing-related job and to pursue a masters degree in the performing arts. Even so, I still viewed international folk dancing as a recreational activity and did not think deeply about its historical structure and cultural meaning. I did question why most of my friends viewed this dance form as old-fashioned. I was also confused when I practiced what are known as “self-choreographed” dances with other dancers. Who can be seen or claim themselves as choreographers? What are the criteria of choreographing?

In September 2013, I arrived in the United States to pursue my Ph.D. degree in dance, and was overcome by homesickness. Even though I attended Taiwanese students’ gatherings occasionally, there was an empty space and could not be filled. Then I visited the Bay Area at the end of 2013 and met members of the Silicon Valley Folk Dance Club, which was formed by all Taiwanese dancers. Though I was a stranger to most of its members—I only knew a couple who were alumni of the university from which I

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<sup>3</sup> This statement may seem problematic, as it hints notions that one has to know ballet in order to “be a good dancer.” However, what I mean here is that I, as well as many other international folk dancers, try to be exposed to many different forms of dances to increase my overall dancing abilities; at the same time, ballet, Chinese dances, contemporary dance and hip hop are the majority if one wants to take classes with professional, academic-trained instructors.

graduated—the moment I danced with them, I finally got away from the feeling of nostalgia and of missing my home in Taiwan. This unexpected change in my emotions inspired me to pay more attention to what international folk dancing can be. My interest was less in the content of this dance practice and more about the meanings within and around Taiwanese people’s practice of international folk dancing. What makes this dance practice powerful enough that it has the ability to cure my homesickness? Was it the dances I did with those dancers or the dancing memories brought back to me that were the remedy?

After my unforgettable dancing experience with the Taiwanese immigrants in the Bay Area, I searched online and hoped to find similar opportunities in Southern California. Outside from my original purpose, I was surprised to find some news reports regarding Taiwanese immigrants’ practice of international folk dancing in the United States. The online Chinese language press *Washington Chinese Daily News* in June 2012 reported the founding of the international folk dancing class in D.C.’s Chinese Culture and Community Service Center (CCACC). The four-paragraph short report was entitled “Let Memory Live Again,” and stated that there were already more than ten Taiwanese international folk dancing clubs on the West Coast. Instructors of this newly founded class looked forward to seeing Taiwanese dancers “...return [to the international folk dancing community] and popularize international folk dancing.”<sup>4</sup> A short column in the *Chinese Daily* from the *Sina Online News* (North America) in October 2013 promoted news that the Folk Dance Club of Southern California (FDCSC) would soon start a new

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<sup>4</sup> Yi-Jiun Chen, “Let Memory Live Again,” *Washington Chinese News*, 16 June 2012. C4.

session of international folk dancing class, stating that "...many club members were great student dancers when they danced in their university dance teams in Taiwan," and that the club "...offers joyful recreational activities for the overseas Chinese."<sup>5</sup> I became curious about the meanings international folk dancing bring to these Taiwanese immigrants. Why do these Taiwanese people choose to practice other cultures as a means of connecting with one another? What is it that brings together people to foster a sense of community? Tracing back to Taiwan, what was the role of international folk dancing socially, politically, and culturally in Taiwan? My dissertation sets out to answer each of these questions, since most existing studies postulate folk dancing as a means of maintaining the ethnic identities represented by the specific culture of its performers. In contrast, I seek to contribute to scholarly discussions of how international folk dancing challenges the idea of folk and the question of cross-cultural politics.

I divide this project into two main parts in order to interrogate how international folk dancing complicates the prevailing idea that folk dancing is a cultural representation of its practitioners. The first part examines international folk dancing in Taiwan during and after the Martial Law Period (1949-1987), and the second part focuses on the current practice of this dance form in California. Looking at these two clusters is important, because in studies of both Taiwanese history and of Taiwanese Americans' embodied practices, those practices are often ignored, as are dance genres that currently serve recreational purposes. By investigating international folk dancing in different temporal

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<sup>5</sup> The news statements are translated by author from Mandarin Chinese to English, and the term Chinese here refers to both Taiwanese and Chinese immigrants; "The FDCSC Class Registration," *Chinese Daily* 1 October 2013.

and geographical contexts, we expand the approach to collective memories of Taiwanese Martial Law and in Taiwanese immigrants' perceptions and fulfillment of national identity.

During the Taiwanese Martial Law Period, people's civil rights were severely limited, including the right of gathering; strikingly, international folk dancing was the only permitted group activity by the Taiwanese government.<sup>6</sup> After Martial Law was lifted, there was no need to have an authorized mass movement anymore, so the government stopped supporting international folk dancing related events. In addition, increased freedom in the media and in physical mobility allowed Taiwanese people to participate in various new dance styles such as ballroom dancing, belly dancing, and hip hop dancing. Focusing on the study of international folk dancing, I examine the ways in which this dance practice played a role as both a political tool and a communal activity during and after the Taiwanese Martial Law Period. In the second part of my dissertation, I investigate the curious situation whereby Taiwanese practitioners in California construct their national and transnational identities through practicing other nations' folk dances. Due to the unstable political relationship between Taiwan and China, many Taiwanese people migrated to the United States beginning in the late 1950s. Others arrived in the United States for higher education or with professional skills and have remained in the country since then. Currently in California, international folk dancing is still practiced by many Taiwanese immigrants as a way to connect with each other.

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<sup>6</sup> General Chiang Kai-shek, who led his people retreat from Mainland China, launched the Martial Law in 1949. After his death, his son, Chiang Ching-kuo, became the president of Taiwan. Chiang Ching-kuo declared the end of the Martial Law Period in 1987. Due to the fact that the Taiwanese people did not have the right of election at that time, the idea of "Taiwanese government" refers to the same sovereignty, although the presidents were not the same.

In order to examine how definitions and representations of Taiwanese national identity, or what I call “Taiwanese-ness,” have changed through different time periods and spaces, I suggest the term “transnational embodiment” as a framework. In my research, Taiwanese-ness is presented in three layers through Taiwanese people’s practices of international folk dancing. The first layer is the government’s political ideologies during the Martial Law Period. I posit that following the international folk dancing movements in the United States and doing the same dance practice as the Americans presented an alliance between Taiwan and the United States in opposition to China and Communism. In addition, due to the trend of international folk dancing practice, there was a huge demand for more dances, leading to the emergence of “self-choreographed dancing,” a sub-genre of international folk dancing that will be subtly discussed in later chapters. The addition of self-choreographed dancing to the repertoire contributes to a “Taiwanized international folk dancing,” marking a uniqueness of Taiwanese nationalism while aligning itself politically with the United States and embracing the cultures of others. The second layer of Taiwanese-ness appears in the post-Martial Law Period. Currently, Taiwanese practitioners embody other cultures through international folk dancing as a way to make global connections. Historically, Taiwan was once colonized by Spain, Holland, and Japan. Taiwan’s geographical position also makes it unavoidable to have close connections and cultural exchanges with nearby places, such as China, Japan, and Korea. Moreover, there are more than sixteen indigenous ethnicities around the island, and they all contribute to Taiwan’s cultural hybridity. Thus I define Taiwanese culture as an organic mixture of Chinese and Taiwanese traditions, as well as

influences from other Asian countries and Westerns cultures. In this context, international folk dancing could be an important method for, or a result of, Taiwanese people performing their appropriation of transnationality. The third layer of Taiwanese-ness is shown in the Taiwanese immigrants' international folk dancing communities in California. In the United States, some Taiwanese people practice international folk dancing as a way to connect with each other. These dancers illustrate their Taiwanese identity through performing the dances of others, and I consider this unique phenomenon a productive example for teasing out the Taiwanese immigrants' diasporic experiences through dance studies.

*Transnational embodiment* is the key framework for linking the three layers of Taiwanese-ness. International folk dancing itself is a representation of *transnational embodiment* because practitioners are not limited to practicing dances that only relate to their own cultures. Therefore, Taiwanese people's practice of international folk dancing already performs one sense of transnationality. After Taiwanese Martial Law was lifted, the dance practice formerly used by the Taiwanese government to declare its alignment with the United States became a social dance form in contemporary Taiwan. I view the transnationality of international folk dancing as different in Taiwan and in California, meaning that people with the same cultural lineage (i.e. Taiwanese residents and Taiwanese immigrants in the United States) engage in the same type of dance practice, but demonstrate transnationalism in dissimilar ways. The Taiwanese practitioners in California perform the idea of transnationality through establishing dance spaces that are similar to their memories and/or imagination of those in Taiwan. Transnationality

performed by these Taiwanese immigrants links their earlier dance experiences in Taiwan to their nostalgic memories of these experiences. These memories are not merely about the dance pieces and techniques they practiced, but also about friendships and other forms of relationships, accomplishments they had achieved, as well as being part of the global international folk dancing community.

The above-mentioned situations in Taiwan and in California have inspired my three research questions: 1) How did the Taiwanese government come to sanction international folk dancing, rather than Taiwanese folk/traditional dancing, as the only permitted group activity used to propagate its political ideologies during the Martial Law Period?; 2) What roles does international folk dancing play in representing Taiwanese nationalism, Taiwanese/Chinese identities, and other aspects of Taiwanese-ness through the Taiwanese people's embodiment of other cultures within and outside Taiwan?; 3) After migrating to a new country, how do some Taiwanese immigrants use international folk dancing as a means of connecting with people from the same cultural background? My primary research methods for answering these questions are interviews, participant-observation, and oral history collection. I also employ archival research as a secondary method.

The first part of my investigation covers two temporal periods in Taiwanese history: the Martial Law Period and the post-Martial Law Period. Taiwanese society before and after Martial Law was lifted underwent dramatic transformations, and the Taiwanese people have encountered abrupt changes, including political tensions between Taiwan and China, Westernization in various aspects of the society, as well as cross-generational

conflicts regarding Taiwanese identity, or Taiwanese-ness. Reconsidering Taiwanese history through the lens of embodied practices, I work with Taiwanese international folk dancers in both Taiwan and California. While the Bay Area-based international folk dance groups are my main research targets within the United States, I maintain close connection with many Taiwanese dancers in the Greater Los Angeles Area as well. Although these California-based dance groups have a Taiwanese majority and are all practicing international folk dancing, regional differences exist mainly in the preferred dance styles. Southern Californian groups prefer international-standard-dance-inspired partner dances, which in contemporary Taiwan are considered self-choreographed dancing, while Northern California groups practice more circle dances from places such as Israel and the Balkan region that are considered “more traditional.” These differences affect how the groups determine the content of weekly classes, as well as the repertoires performed during sporadic dance parties and workshops. As I elucidate the differences of political and social dynamics within and between dance groups in Taiwan and in California, I also reiterate how the divergence of these preferences complicates the notions of “folk” and “international,” and raises issues related to cultural awareness, such as appropriation and authenticity.

As an international student who has only been living in California for five years, I have not experienced struggles and hardship as an immigrant. My dissertation is built on my deep gratitude to the Taiwanese international folk dancing practitioners in both Taiwan and California, my respect for the Taiwanese immigrants, and my great appreciation of international folk dancing. I am aware of very few graduate-level scholars

scrutinizing international folk dancing in their research. Some Taiwanese friends asked me whether I practiced ballet or contemporary dance when I identified myself as a dance scholar. As I described my project to fellow dancers, many looked back at me in awe with a question of misunderstanding: “So which country are you focusing on?” I thus came to understand how dance studies can be such a limited idea to others, and how international folk dancing is so marginalized that even its practitioners were surprised that it would be my main theme of investigation.

My personal experience in international folk dancing and my positionality in the community are also crucial in informing my analysis. In line with anthropologist Kirin Narayan’s assertion that the positionality of a researcher in the field is not stable and is instead constantly shifting, I was aware of my positionality as both a researcher and a young and less-experienced dancer in the community. As a relatively young person in the field of international folk dancing, I was often seen as a child that many senior dancers took care of. In some interviews, I became the one who was interviewed and was asked about my plans after graduating and even about marriage. I felt relieved as I brought them back to the topics of my investigation; at the same time, I struggled because I was afraid that I refused their care and consideration. This kind of adjustment in my different positionalities reflects power dynamics in the community and relationships among individuals.

Participation in international folk dancing is declining and the practice itself is in a state of crisis, mainly because current generations in Taiwan consider it a practice specific to a historical period, in other words, as old-fashioned. However, this dance

genre is important to understand as it acquired government sanction during the Martial Law Period, and thus became a part of Taiwanese people's collective memories. In addition, for the Taiwanese practitioners who reside in California, this currently marginalized dance practice serves as a means of connecting people with each other and with their homeland in their Taiwanese diasporic experiences. For these reasons, there is further need to be aware of the significance of international folk dancing to its remaining participants and to contemporary Taiwanese and Californian society.

In the following sections, I will briefly outline the historical contexts of international folk dancing in Taiwan and the Taiwanese Martial Law Period. Second, I will contextualize the ideas of folk, international, Taiwanese-ness, and transnationalism in relation to my project. Then, I will illustrate how I deal with some conflicting terms and translations in my writing. Finally, I will provide a discussion of my research methodologies and a summary of the chapters.

### **0.1 Contextualizing International Folk Dancing as an Individual Dance Practice**

International folk dancing, translated as *tu-feng-wu* or *shi-jie min-su wu-dao*,<sup>7</sup> is a specific dance form that has a different definition than general folk dancing. The use of the term “international folk dance” originated in the United States in the 1930s, and was brought to Taiwan at the end of the 1950s, when the first foreign international folk dancing instructor, Rickey Holden, visited the country. In the 1932 New York Folk

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<sup>7</sup> As I will discuss later in this chapter, the general public in Taiwan today has stereotyped international folk dancing and its Chinese translation, *tu-feng-wu*, as old-fashioned, and has caused a severe decline of the dance population. In the last five to ten years, many student-based dance clubs have changed their club name from *tu-feng-wu* to other titles, such as *shi-jie-min-su-wu-dao*, hoping to get rid of the stereotype that comes with the original translation.

Festival Council,<sup>8</sup> visitors were allowed to dance what historian Daniel Walkowitz calls “other people’s” dances, meaning that the audience participated in dances that were not limited to their cultural lineages.<sup>9</sup> This interaction between audience and performers was the first instance of the idea of “International Dance”<sup>10</sup> in the United States. This origin of international folk dancing echoes Betty Casey’s<sup>11</sup> definition of international folk dancers: people of any ethnic background who practice folk dances of various countries to receive mental and physical satisfaction.<sup>12</sup> International folk dancing then became a cultural movement across the United States, with significant populations of dancers in San Francisco, Chicago, and New York. During the Cold War, American practitioners used international folk dancing to celebrate pluralism and anti-Communism.<sup>13</sup>

International folk dancers in Taiwan typically consider 1957, when Rickey Holden first visited the country and delivered a workshop, the starting point of international folk dancing in Taiwan. However, the concept of international folk dancing—dancers of various ethnicities practicing folk dances from around the world—already existed in the

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<sup>8</sup> In 1931, Thomas L. Cotton (1891-1964), Elba Cursay, and Mary Wood Hinman formed the New York Folk Festival Council (FFC). FFC was a private service organization that sponsored folk dance festivals with performers from numerous ethnic organizations, in order to improve relationships among various ethnicities. (Ron Houston, CA: Folk Dance Federation of California, South, Inc., web; Erica Nielsen, *Folk Dancing*, CA: Greenwood, 2011.)

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Walkowitz, *City Folk: English Country Dance and the Politics of the Folk in Modern America* (NY: New York University Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 170; Walkowitz uses this term in *City Folk*. Although it is not exactly the same as “international folk dance” or “international folk dancing,” these terms have almost the same definition, which means practitioners of this dance genre practicing “other people’s dance.”

<sup>11</sup> Bettalou (Betty) A. Casey (1916-2001) was a writer and an international folk dancer who specialized in square dancing and round dancing. When she traveled with John Casey, who served in a branch of the U.S. Information Agency, she had a chance to teach international folk dancing in Manila and Hong Kong.

<sup>12</sup> Betty Casey, *International Folk Dancing U.S.A.* (NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981).

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Walkowitz, *City Folk: English Country Dance and the Politics of the Folk in Modern America* (NY: New York University Press, 2010), 169.

early 1950's. YL,<sup>14</sup> one of my research subjects, is a prestigious dance instructor and a college PE teacher who attended college in Taipei around 1954. She shared her knowledge of international folk dancing during an interview in 2018 with me and another Taiwanese cultural worker from the Yilan International Children's Folklore and Folkgame Festival.<sup>15</sup> In order to make this interview happen, YL generously sacrificed her naptime, and I was startled by her great memory and physical strength as an elder over eighty years old. According to the interview, YL learned folk dances from different Chinese regions, including Tibetan dance and Uyghur dance, as a college student. More surprisingly, her older sister, who attended the same college as herself, was introduced to Spanish dance even before 1954. However, the term *tu-feng-wu* had not been created at that time, and dancers used "regional dances" to refer to these folk dances from different regions. Even though being aware that the Spanish dance was a Western dance form, YL nonetheless was not informed by her teacher of the accurate origins of all the dances she learned, and she assumed that her instructor acquired related materials in China, before the National Government retreated from China to Taiwan.<sup>16</sup> This discovery might add additional layers of complexity to my other findings that international folk dancing was a product of American influence. Nonetheless, this dissertation mainly focuses on the time after the term *tu-feng-wu* began to be applied and this dance genre had been established. YL was the only interviewee who mentioned dancing experiences prior to 1957, and

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<sup>14</sup> I am using initials to refer to all my interviewees to keep them anonymous.

<sup>15</sup> Yilan International Children's Folklore and Folkgame Festival is an annual festival that takes place in Yilan, Taiwan, every summer. One of the features of this festival is the dance and music performances by various national companies and groups from many countries. Many of these companies are children's or young adults' teams, echoing the theme—children's folklore and folk games—of the festival.

<sup>16</sup> Y.L. Interviewed by Teresa Tung, Wei-Chi Wu. February 6, 2017.

unfortunately, none of my interviewees know when the term *tu-feng-wu* was created. Nonetheless, according to my conversations with a dance doctorate student from China, *tu-feng-wu* is an old term used in China before 1949 to refer to different regional folk dances.<sup>17</sup> Given that 1949 was also the year when the National Government retreated to Taiwan from China, I posit that *tu-feng-wu* has applied in Taiwan since then.

International folk dancers practice folk dances from countries around the world, regardless of their ethnicities. Ages of dancers also range widely. I personally have met a white dancer with Greek lineage at an international folk dancing party that featured Easter European dances in Anaheim, California.<sup>18</sup> I have also practiced Georgian and Armenian dances with students of the world dance<sup>19</sup> program from the Brigham Young University at the Stockton Folk Dance Camp, and one of the students shared with me her experiences learning Chinese folk dances with a fan.<sup>20</sup> Besides middle-aged dancers and university students, some dancers in Taiwan bring their children of kindergarten or elementary school age to dance events. We fellow dancers met these kids when they were in kindergarten, and now they are about to attend middle schools. Some of them dance as well as—if not better than—adult dancers. I also know dancers who are in their eighties, and some are even over ninety years old. When I met one ninety-year-old lady at a dance camp in San Diego, she had just had an accident and injured her neck. But she still danced with everyone enthusiastically, and shared with me excitedly how dancers in the

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<sup>17</sup> Field notes. May 2018. Taipei, Taiwan.

<sup>18</sup> Field notes. October 2015. Anaheim, California.

<sup>19</sup> Stated on BYU's dance department website, the World Dance program "is the largest dance program of its kind in the United States..." and "...is the home to the International Folk Dance Ensemble and Living Legends performing groups". I am aware of debates on the usage of "world dance" and "folk dance," however, I leave this issue to later parts of this dissertation.

<sup>20</sup> Field notes. August 2017. Stockton, California.

Greater Los Angeles Area usually carpool to Anaheim, Thousand Oaks, and other cities for dance parties.<sup>21</sup>

The occupations of international folk dancers are as diversified as their ages and ethnicities. In Taiwan, most dancers were introduced to international folk dancing as high school or college and university students, mainly because during the Taiwanese Martial Law Period, the China Youth Corp (CYC) was responsible for the propagation of this dance practice. CYC was founded in October 1952, under the instruction of General Chang Kai-Shek, with the main purpose of gathering the Taiwanese youth and educating them to fight back to Mainland China. The organization was mainly responsible for arranging military training class in universities and colleges in Taiwan.<sup>22</sup> In cooperation with the YMCA, the CYC also held patriotic camps and some recreational activities for high school and college students during Martial Law, including international folk dancing events.<sup>23</sup> Because international folk dancing was so popular in the 1970's and 1980's, most of the colleges and universities had their own student-based international folk dancing club on campus. These dance clubs continue to be the place where new dancers are recruited. Students with different majors also contribute to the diversity of occupation after the graduation. A dance fellow of mine once surprisingly met her eye doctor at a dance party. Another dance peer who is a flight attendant often brings us various snacks from different countries so that we gain better ideas of those cultures. Professors and

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<sup>21</sup> Field notes. May 2015. San Diego, California; Field notes. August 2018. Stockton, California.

<sup>22</sup> *Chinese Encyclopedia Online*, s.v. "China Youth Corp," Retrieved on January 19, 2017, <http://ap6.pccu.edu.tw/Encyclopedia/data.asp?id=227&htm=02-062-0682%A4%A4%B0%EA%ABC%A6~%A4%CF%A6@%B1%CF%B0%EA%B9%CE.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> J.L. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. March 15, 2017; W.L. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. April 10, 2017; H.C. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. June 6, 2017.

doctors in diverse fields such as dance, history, chemistry, bioengineering and public health sometimes turn the dance parties into research and job-application workshops, and I have gained as much benefit from these senior scholars as from dancing itself.

I view the dancers and the dancing communities as crucial to the practice of international folk dancing. Yet, the movement content of this embodied practice is just as essential, and describing the dance practice as “folk dances from around the world” is too vague and all-inclusive. Other than categorizing dances by their countries of origin, sometimes the formations of dance are marked on teaching repertoires and party dancelists. In Taiwan, there are only two main categories of dance formations—partner dancing and non-partner dancing. Non-partner dances include circle and line dances, and there is no special indication on dance repertoires, while a star-sign symbol (\*) is marked next to a partner dance. In Western dancers’ dancing occasions in the United States, however, I discovered a much more subtle labeling of dance formations. For example, when I took part in a dance party in Pasadena in 2015, the dance repertoire indicated “I” as individual dances, which were non-partner dances in which dancers did not connect with each other by hand. “L,” which meant line dances on that party repertoire, reminded dancers that those were non-partner dances with dancers connecting and forming a line or a circle. As the Folk Dance Federation of California indicates on its website written for dance teaching, “A ‘chain’ dance is a form in which dancers stand in a line, semi-circle, or circle and are joined by holding hands or belts with the person on either side.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Dick Oakes, ed., “Chain Dance Positions,” *The Folk Dance Federation of California, South, Inc.*, accessed July 18, 2018, [http://www.socalfolkdance.com/resources/chain\\_dance\\_positions.htm](http://www.socalfolkdance.com/resources/chain_dance_positions.htm)

The international folk dancers around the world together create a greater, worldwide community by using the same lexicons. For example, “LOD” indicates line of direction, meaning counter clockwise.<sup>25</sup> “T” is an abbreviation for T-shape connection in non-partner dances, implying that the dancer’s arm “[extend] out to side, firmly (but not strongly) grasping shoulder of next dancer in line.”<sup>26</sup> (See Figure 1) Other similar examples include the Yemenite step in Israeli dances, the Csárdás position in Hungarian partner dances (See Figure 2), and a W-shape connection in Eastern European<sup>27</sup> non-partner dances (See Figure 3). On the dance floor, many friendly, advanced dancers “read” the steps for people who are less familiar with those dances while dancing simultaneously. Therefore, I never have concerns about not knowing dances on a party repertoire when visiting a new dance group. It also feels amazing when I successfully complete a dance I have never learned before by listening to music and verbal instructions from the dancer next to me at the same time.

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<sup>25</sup> Physical Education Section, Curriculum Development Institute, Education Bureau, *Dance Teaching Materials Serious: Western Folk Dance* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Education City Limited, 2009), 12.

<sup>26</sup> Dick Oakes, ed., “Chain Dance Positions.” *The Folk Dance Federation of California, South, Inc.*, accessed July 18, 2018, [http://www.socalfolkdance.com/resources/chain\\_dance\\_positions.htm](http://www.socalfolkdance.com/resources/chain_dance_positions.htm)

<sup>27</sup> Many folk dances from Bulgaria, Serbia, and Macedonia perform with the W-shape position. I am aware of the inclusiveness using the term Eastern European, but I would be remiss not to include as many countries with the feature as possible.



Figure 1: T-shape connection<sup>28</sup>



Figure 2: Csárdás position<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Maya Chen, T-shape connection, August 18, 2018. Private Collection.

<sup>29</sup> Maya Chen, Csárdás position, August 18, 2018. Private Collection.



Figure 3: W-shape connection<sup>30</sup>

Needless to say, music plays an essential role in the practice of international folk dancing. The oldest record I personally have seen so far is a vinyl record that belongs to the Michael Herman Series from 1950, with only one Greek song recorded on it. One of my interviewees, CY, acquired the record a long time ago, and he generously presented it to me when I conducted the interview in his apartment. I almost burst into tears when I saw this vinyl record that is almost forty years older than I am, as it seems to have paved the entire international folk dancing history in Taiwan. In later decades, each vinyl record could hold more songs, though it was still difficult for me to imagine how many albums the dancers needed to bring to parties if they were playing one hundred songs a day. HD, my interviewee who is now almost seventy, told me how much equipment they had to carry for each regular gathering when he was an undergraduate student. As student-based

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<sup>30</sup> Maya Chen, W-shape connection, August 18, 2018. Private Collection.

clubs basically had no money, "...we put together the sound system by ourselves, specifically by club members who majored in electronic engineering. The equipment was very heavy, and we had to moved it to and from someone's dorm every time before and after the gathering. It was hard."<sup>31</sup> Moving through the times using tape recorders, compact discs became the majority for playing the music starting from the 2000's. However, because many songs were transferred from tapes to CDs, the speed of music would slightly increase. This fact might seem tiny and not worth mentioning, but I maintain that this observation is an important hint to the nature of international folk dancing development in earlier Taiwan.

I was extremely surprised and delighted to know that there was a live band when I first attended an international folk dancing party in California. After several visits to sporadic dance parties—mostly anniversary or celebrations—in Southern and Northern California, I was fascinated by the fact that almost all of these occasions had live band sessions, meaning that in specific time slots, the live band(s) would play international folk dancing music for dancers to dance to. These bands are usually assembled with one or two violins, a cello, a keyboard, and sometimes an accordion. Some musicians in their bands play special instruments, some can even master over twenty string instruments. For instance, multi-instrumentalist Bill Cope played with the band *My Men and Yours* in the 2017 Stockton Folk Dance Camp, and he claimed that he could play about sixty different instruments.<sup>32</sup> Within this seven-day folk dance camp, he played common ones like the

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<sup>31</sup> H.D. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. June 6, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> "Featured Guests," *Stockton Folk Dance Camp*, accessed July 10, 2018, <http://www.folkdancecamp.org/featuredguests/>

guitar and the keyboard, as well as those rarely seen, such as gaida, lute, and tambura. The accordionist of this band, Michael Lawson, also arranged the singing class at the Stockton Folk Dance Camp. I took the class with him for five days, and the chorus was able to sing for the other camp participants while they were dancing at the end of the camp.

The presentation of international folk dancing music seems to have a lot more possibilities in California than in Taiwan. Fortunately, the international folk dancing community in Taiwan now has its own music band. The Big Noise debuted in the 60<sup>th</sup> Asia Folk Dance Camp in 2018 in Taiwan. The band members, all of whom are Taiwanese international folk dancers, can play violin, saxophone, Middle Eastern tabla, tambourine, accordion, oboe, ukulele, and more. The founder of the band shared with the participants at the camp that it was his dream to see the Taiwanese international folk dancing community have its own music band, because he enjoyed dancing with live bands at overseas dance parties.<sup>33</sup> The founding of Big Noise not only demonstrates Taiwanese international folk dancers' commitment to this dance form as a versatile practice, but also indicates that international folk dancers in Taiwan still try to follow the paths of Western international folk dancing communities in how this practice is performed.

The Taiwanese Martial Law was lifted in 1987, due to the fact that the Cold War almost came to its end in the late 1980's, and the severe tension between Taiwan and China had also slightly eased. After Martial Law was lifted, international folk dancing

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<sup>33</sup> Field notes. February 2018. Taichung, Taiwan.

was divided into two paths: the “housewives folk dancing community” and the “semi-professional folk dancing community.” The latter term is the concept I create for this dissertation to refer to the current dance group that strives to bequeath the idea and practice of international folk dancing since the 1950’s. Meanwhile, the problematic term “housewives folk dancing” is translated from the existing phrase in Taiwan, and it was influenced by the social norm that demanded that men go to work while women stay home to take care of children. After their children grew up, the housewives started practicing folk dances in order to leave their households and do something for themselves. The separated path between the two communities was caused mainly because the National Government no longer supported international folk dancing as the promoted dance activity after Martial Law. Some previous international folk dancing instructors had stopped receiving new teaching materials and at the same time could not make livings by teaching the dance practice anymore.<sup>34</sup> In other words, as international folk dancing was not popularized by the government anymore, it took personal efforts to improve one’s teaching by collecting teaching materials and attending camps and workshops on one’s own. Nonetheless, there are still people who sought “folk dancing” as their way to exercise and to meet up with others, though many younger people had turned to other dance styles, such as breaking and belly dancing. Some of those previous international folk dancing instructors then altered their teaching contents to dances choreographed to trendy music of the times by themselves. As one of my interviewees,

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<sup>34</sup> L.K. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. July 30, 2016.

VH,<sup>35</sup> said, the emergence of housewives' folk dancing community is a good example of market mechanism. "[The idea of folk dancing in the housewives' folk dancing community] is limited, but it works when you promote to specific groups of people with things they are interested in," he said. Practitioners in the housewives' folk dancing community dance for the purposes of exercising and making friends, and do not pay much attention to the cultural background of the dances they practice. In fact, most of the dances practiced in this community are recently choreographed line dances and non-partner salsa or non-partner cha-cha.

While dancers from the housewives' folk dancing community usually hold classes that take place in public venues such as school playgrounds and parks, the semi-professional folk dancing group mostly gather at indoor venues such as community centers and dance studios. Because of the high visibility of the participants in the "housewives" community, most people who are not familiar with history and development of international folk dancing now assume housewives' folk dancing is the only type of "folk dancing." The fact that these two sub-groups still share the same Chinese term, *tu-feng-wu*, causes confusion as to the differences between the two; often, younger generations do not recognize the distinction between the two styles, and refuse right away to get to know "semi-professional folk dancing" because they consider "housewives' folk dancing" not interesting. Moreover, *tu-feng-wu* neither emphasizes the idea of international nor directly mentions phrases like "world," "ethnic," or "folk," and

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<sup>35</sup> VH is an international folk dancing instructor who has been dancing for over thirty years. He also makes efforts in cultural exchanges by holding dance camps and overseas visiting tours for years. My detailed conversations with him will be presented in the future chapters.

so the appropriation of this term by the housewives dance community seems natural to the public. Because the challenges of even translating the words “international folk dancing” are significant to this research, I will discuss related questions later in the Introduction. Still, issues in the Chinese translation as well as the visibility of the housewives’ folk dancing community have resulted in many Taiwanese people equating folk dancing with only the housewives dance community. Most Taiwanese are unaware that the semi-professional folk dancing community, which practices international folk dances with an emphasis on cultural knowledge and understanding, has a closer heritage to the historical dance practices of the Martial Law Period.

As a member of the semi-professional community, I constantly receive apologies from friends and family members regarding their prior misconceptions of international folk dancing after attending my performances where they realized that there are various features and techniques for the respective genres of regional folk dances. Though both semi-professional and housewives’ dancing communities’ engagement in folk dancing are valid expressions within Taiwanese society, the misconceptions about folk dancing as a means for only exercising and socializing for “housewives” has led to a decline in the overall folk dancing population. In this dissertation, I will be discussing specifically the semi-professional folk dancing community not only because I am a member of this group, but also because folk dances from around the world are so culturally specific that international folk dancing problematizes notions of international, folk, national identities, and other essential topics. Even so, the class and gender dynamics in the housewives

dancing community and its possible connection with the semi-professional community are worth investigating, being a possible avenue for my future research.

## **0.2 “Folk” and “International”: Inside and Outside the Taiwanese Context**

Dance history and practice in Taiwan have been highly affected by Japanese and American (mainly the United States) lineages, due to the fact that Taiwan was colonized by Japan between 1895 and 1945, and was a military base for the United States for a few decades in the post-World War II era.<sup>36</sup> But this does not mean that there were no original studies from Taiwanese scholars in folk dance related topics. Choreographers and scholars such as Tienmin Li, Feng-Xue Liu, and Li-Hua Tsai have conducted research on Taiwanese indigenous groups, undertaking fieldwork and documenting Taiwanese indigenous dance and music. However, these dance anthropological studies and ethnographic works are largely related to notations of movements and music, or cultural introductions limited to each single indigenous tribe, without cross-cultural comparisons. For instance, in the Chinese publication *Dancing With Nature: Taiwanese Indigenous Dances*, Liu investigates relationships between dancing and rituals of many Taiwanese indigenous cultures, with Labanotations of the dance steps.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> For example, Taiwanese contemporary dance pioneers Tsai Jui-Yue and Lee Tsai-Er went to Japan to directly learn from Baku Ishii, who was usually seen as the creator of Japanese modern dance. Please refer to “Dancers of the Empire” by Faye Yuan Kleeman in *In Transit: the Formation of the Colonial East Asia Cultural Sphere*.

<sup>37</sup> Feng-Xue Liu, *Dancing With Nature: Taiwanese Indigenous Dances* (Taiwan: National Center for Traditional Arts, 2000). For more information related to Taiwanese indigenous studies, please refer to Tienmin Lee, *Taiwanese Indigenous Dance Collections* (Taiwan: Council of Indigenous Peoples, 1996), Li-Guo Ming, *Taiwanese Indigenous Rituals* (Taipei: Taiyuan, 1989), Zhe-I Tien, *Songs and Dances of Taiwanese Indigenous People* (Taiwan: Woolin, 2002), and other publications.

More studies related to dance and cultural anthropology in Taiwan emerged in the 1990's. Scholars such as Hong-Fu Lee, Wen-De Chen, and Da-Chuan Sun have also devoted research to cultural studies of individual villages in different indigenous ethnicities. Dance anthropologist Lee focuses on cultural and religious meanings in dance movements and ritual practices of specific indigenous ethnicities. Taiwanese ethnomusicologist Li-Guo Ming cooperated with the National Performing Arts Center<sup>38</sup> and conducted the Taiwanese Indigenous Music And Dance Performance Series. Negotiating and cooperating with villages from different Taiwanese aboriginal ethnicities, Ming led this project and brought aboriginal cultures, including songs, dances, and some rituals, onto the stage. Taiwanese anthropologist Tai-Li Hu's previous studies in Taiwanese rural communities, continued more recently with cultural anthropology in different Taiwanese indigenous groups, have also inspired me to contemplate what "folk" means in the performing arts to a cultural anthropologist. Hu emphasizes active participation and interactions as deeper ways to understand a community than traditional fieldwork, which she suggests is academic-oriented and is more subjective. However, she further argues that anthropologists who intend to participate in a community need to acknowledge the community's "cultural reality," meaning its taboos and social regulations.<sup>39</sup> I consider Hu's anthropological investigation on cultural performances an embrace of "folk;" in other words, "folk" is neither a theoretical term nor a research method for her, but a combination that enables her to

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<sup>38</sup> When Professor Li-Guo Ming was invited to join the project in 1985, this governmental sector was called the preparatory office of the National Theater and Concert Hall. Currently, the Theater and Concert Hall belongs to the National Performing Arts Center.

<sup>39</sup> Tai-Li Hu, *Social Performances and Taiwanese Indigenous People*. (Taipei: Linking Books, 2003), x.

contribute back to the society, since cultural studies and social anthropology are sciences that benefit from the society.<sup>40</sup>

Hu's studies, along with those of other Taiwanese scholars, maintain a definition of folk that is closer to U.S.-based dance scholar Anthony Shay's argument.<sup>41</sup> Shay defines folk as an abstract symbol that demonstrates one's "authentic culture" and distinguishes "us" from others.<sup>42</sup> As Shay associates regional folk dances with immigrants in the United States from their respective countries, he is emphasizing the importance of origin and authenticity within the idea of "folk." This understanding of folk makes interrogations of international folk dancing more intriguing, because the practice challenges shifting definitions of "folk" in different temporal and geographical settings. Daniel Walkowitz suggests that the notion of folk is locally rooted in a society or community "with its own political resonance," instead of something that is "ancient" or "peasantry."<sup>43</sup> Dance scholar Anthea Kraut acknowledges that "folk" is easily connoted with pure, natural, primitive, and authentic.<sup>44</sup> She uses African American artist Zora Neale Hurston's theatrical productions, which were representations of blackness, to argue that Hurston's work was viewed as spontaneous and unpremeditated, and these points of view were "jeopardizing recognition of her artistry."<sup>45</sup> Kraut's argument inspires me to consider the racialized hierarchizations within, and the commodification of, international

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. iii.

<sup>41</sup> Anthony Shay, *Choreographing Identities: Folk Dance, Ethnicity and Festival in the United States and Canada* (NC: McFarland, 2006).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Daniel Walkowitz, *City Folk: English Country Dance and the Politics of the Folk in Modern America* (NY: New York University Press. 2010), 4.

<sup>44</sup> Anthea Kraut, *Choreographing the Folk: The Dance Stagings of Zora Neale Hurston* (MN: University of Minnesota Press. 2008).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 52.

folk dancing under global and local settings, and I will discuss these issues in the following chapters. Walkowitz's definition of folk is applicable to my project because I consider the practice of international folk dance as a "folk" and communal activity for Taiwanese practitioners. Not only was international folk dancing the only permitted group activity during the Taiwanese Martial Law Period, but the Taiwanese-American practitioners currently use it as a way to connect with each other.

International folk dancers in Taiwan sometimes describe dances they are practicing as "world dance," because "international" and "world" are somewhat synonymous in Chinese in this linguistic context. As a result, writing about international folk dancing in the Taiwanese context is even more challenging, because English-language scholars in the humanities are interested in notions such as "world," and "international," and often see them problematic in the cultural context. For example, U.S.-based dance scholar Susan Foster considers the use of "world dance" problematic because it seemingly inscribes a domain where all dance forms are equally important, while at the same time giving priority to ballet and modern dance; excluding these Western dance genres marks the "world dance" as Other.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, in *Worlding Dance*, Marta Savigliano<sup>47</sup> argues that "world dance" classifies a genre that is opposite to Western dance forms. As maintained by these two scholars, "world dance" is an umbrella term that views all non-Western dances as one other dance genre, and does not really belong to the Western dominated dance field.

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<sup>46</sup> Susan Leigh Foster, "Worlding Dance—an Introduction," in *Worlding Dance*, edited by Susan L. Foster, 1-13 (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>47</sup> Marta Savigliano, "Worlding Dance and Dancing Out There in the World," in *Worlding Dance*, edited by Susan L. Foster, 163-190 (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Similar to the term “world dance,” “international” seems to embrace a sense of globality. Yet it problematizes ideas of identity, trans/nationalism, and legitimation. For example, by investigating the Japanese-American artist Michio Ito and his career in modern dance, U.S.-based dance scholar Yutian Wong demonstrates how “international” is a label for non-white artists in American society. She argues that international is a convenient term to label “an individual who is simultaneously exotic in his/her worldliness and familiar in his/her exoticness.”<sup>48</sup> Her assertion echoes Foster’s and Savigliano’s, juxtaposing “international” and “world” as politicized and polarized terms under a Western-centric point of view. Interestingly, even though Wong and I both analyze the ideas of international, I argue that international folk dancing reifies the Taiwanese practitioners’ embrace of transnationality and Taiwanese-ness, meaning that “international” is not used to differentiate regional folk dances and ballet or contemporary dance. Unlike Wong’s examination of Ito, a Japanese-American artist who was separated from the labels of either “Japanese” or “American” in favor of “international,” international folk dancing does not segregate the Taiwanese practitioners from American society. Instead, the dance practice is a means of constructing international relationships and connecting these dancers with the globe for the Taiwanese practitioners. Overall, my discussions about “folk” and “international” in the context of international folk dancing suggest that even though various regional dances are taken into the scope of this dance practice, each form of the dance genre is unique within this inclusiveness. This approach to “folk” and “international” further complicates the issue of

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<sup>48</sup> Yutian Wong, “Artistic Utopia: Michio Ito and the Trope of the International,” in *Worlding Dance*, edited by Susan L. Foster, 144-162 (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 150.

cultural politics by challenging existing idea that “international” refers to outsiders (e.g. non-White or those outside the United States) and by viewing all dance forms as equals.

### **0.3 Theorizing Taiwanese-ness in Dance Studies**

Dance Studies in Taiwan is a relatively young subject in the field of humanities. The first masters program in dance was established in 1992 at the Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA), but it only focused on performance and choreography. It was not until 2005 that TNUA founded a graduate program in dance that focuses on dance theory.<sup>49</sup> Another major university of the arts, the National Taiwan University of Arts (NTUA), established the graduate program in performing arts in 2002, focusing on theoretical studies of music, dance and theater.<sup>50</sup> An MFA dance program in NTUA was only established in 2006.<sup>51</sup> As Dance Studies in Taiwan mainly concentrates on bodily practice and technique training, Dance Studies has not been acknowledged until recently.

Co-organized by Taiwanese dance scholars Ya-Ping Chen and Chi-Fang Chao, the conference *Dance Studies and Taiwan: the Prospect of a New Generation* that took place in 2000 was an important milestone in Dance Studies in Taiwan. Published in 2001, the conference proceedings are “...the first academic collection that highlights dance studies,”<sup>52</sup> and include articles that call attention to dance anthropology, Taiwanese

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<sup>49</sup> “Introduction,” *Department of Dance, Taipei National University of the Arts*, accessed July 16, 2018, [http://1www.tnua.edu.tw/~TNUA\\_DANCE/intro/super\\_pages.php?ID=intro1](http://1www.tnua.edu.tw/~TNUA_DANCE/intro/super_pages.php?ID=intro1)

<sup>50</sup> “Introduction,” *Graduate School of Performing Arts, National Taiwan University of Arts*, accessed July 16, 2018, [http://portal2.ntua.edu.tw/~gspa/introduced\\_01.html](http://portal2.ntua.edu.tw/~gspa/introduced_01.html)

<sup>51</sup> “Introduction and Evolution,” *Department of Dance, National Taiwan University of Arts*, accessed July 16, 2018, [http://www.ntua-dance.com/introduction\\_history.php](http://www.ntua-dance.com/introduction_history.php)

<sup>52</sup> “Content Information,” *Performing Arts Review*, accessed July 20, 2018, <http://par.npac-ntch.org/tw/publish/doc->

nationalism, post/colonialism, and other issues related to dance and cultural studies. The editors, Chao and Chen, argue that dance is not just for doing, but is also essential for thinking.<sup>53</sup> The proceedings include four articles about Taiwan's contemporary dance theater, with three of them using the Cloud Gate Dance Theatre<sup>54</sup> as their research example. Henceforward, examinations of Taiwanese identities in Dance Studies seem to mostly center on how modern/contemporary dance artists interpret Taiwanese-ness through choreographic strategies that combine Taiwanese dancing bodies, Taiwanese cultural themes,<sup>55</sup> Chinese dance training, and western contemporary dance techniques. This focus on Taiwanese contemporary dance, however, limits understanding of Taiwanese-ness to enactments created for onstage performances. It does not address the question of Taiwanese-ness from the perspective of amateur dancers and communal practices.

In *Dancing with Nostalgia in Taiwanese Contemporary "Traditional" Dance*, Taiwan-based dance scholar Szu-Ching Chang examines "Taiwanese contemporary choreographies that incorporate 'traditional materials'"<sup>56</sup> by looking at the productions of

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<sup>53</sup> Chi-Fang Chao and Ya-Ping Chen, eds. "Introduction," in *Dance Studies and Taiwan: the Prospect of a New Generation* in Taipei, Taiwan. Conference Proceedings (Taipei: National Chang Kai-Shek Cultural Center, R.O.C. 2001).

<sup>54</sup> The Cloud Gate Dance Theatre is one of the most famous contemporary dance companies from Taiwan, and is often seen as Taiwan's representation of dance. I refer to the Cloud Gate Dance Theatre as Cloud Gate in the rest of the prospectus.

<sup>55</sup> Taiwanese cultural themes include dance pieces inspired by Taiwanese folk stories, regional religions, and/or living styles. A lot of times, dancers use props and wear costumes designed with "Taiwanese styles or feelings" to strengthen the idea of Taiwanese-ness.

<sup>56</sup> Szu-Ching Chang, "Dancing with Nostalgia in Taiwanese Contemporary 'Traditional' Dance" (Ph.D. CA: University of California, Riverside. 2011), vii.

two female-led Taiwanese dance companies.<sup>57</sup> She argues that both choreographers use Taiwanese dancing bodies to challenge ideas of “traditional” and “modern” and to investigate different ways of putting local cultural and social elements on the global stage. Another Taiwanese dance scholar, Yu-Ling Chao, also discusses how Cloud Gate demonstrates Taiwanese nationalism through their dance productions.<sup>58</sup> She claims that Cloud Gate has created what she calls “Chinese mythological nationalism” by adapting its name from the Chinese epic of the same title and performing dance themes that are heavily grounded in the Chinese culture.<sup>59</sup> Huai-Min Lin, the company’s founder and current artistic director, aims to combine Chinese traditions with “techniques from the West,”<sup>60</sup> and to position his company as a “contemporary dance”<sup>61</sup> company. Through these approaches, Lin presents his idea of Taiwanese-ness that foregrounds Chinese history and Chinese cultural lineages, and his company has become a representation of Taiwan on the global dance stage. However, Chao argues that Lin’s intention to perform “Chinese mythological nationalism” as an equation to “Taiwanese-ness” cannot be achieved, because Taiwan is a diasporic society that had been colonized by different

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<sup>57</sup> The Taipei Folk Dance Theater (TFDT) established by Li-Hua Tsai, and Legend Lin Dance Theater (LLDT) created by Lee-Chen Lin.

<sup>58</sup> Yu-Ling Chao, “Dance, Culture and Nationalism: The Socio-cultural Significance of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre in Taiwanese Society” (Ph.D. UK: Laban Center. 2000).

<sup>59</sup> Some of Cloud Gate’s famous pieces include *Cursive*, a series inspired by calligraphy, *Nine Songs*, an important cycle of poems in Chinese literature, and *Moon Water*, a piece aiming to explore *Qi Kong* (a method of breathing).

<sup>60</sup> Chao quoted the interview from Paul Shackman (1985). “The Dance Writer” from *Business Travellers: the Taiwan Travel Magazine*. Aug. 1985.

<sup>61</sup> Chao argues that contemporary dance is a Western concept in dance. As Lin positions his company as a contemporary dance company, he reiterates the application of Western dance techniques on Taiwanese dancing bodies.

regimes. In other words, Cloud Gate only performs the “pan-Chinese”<sup>62</sup> cultural side of Taiwanese-ness and ignores other components in Taiwanese identity.

Staged productions like those performed by Cloud Gate connect with the places these dance pieces are choreographed in a way that the productions and the space construct, and are constructed by, collective identities of that society. Performance Studies scholar SanSan Kwan investigates Cloud Gate’s role as a cultural representation of Taiwan on the global stage and its negotiation of Chinese-ness within the space of Taipei, the hometown of the company, and she questions what Taiwanese national culture is if the island of Taiwan has been diplomatically nonrecognized.<sup>63</sup> Through her examinations of different Cloud Gate pieces and their evolution—*Legacy (1978)*, *Nine Songs (1993)*, and *Moon Water (1998)*—she proposes that Cloud Gate’s earliest productions articulated stories about Taiwan, while the company’s later performances “choreograph[ed]” Taiwan and the city of Taipei.<sup>64</sup> Kwan proposes different ways that dance participates and then produces the space and identity of Taipei; nonetheless, her investigation into how contemporary dance companies demonstrate Taiwanese-ness is similar to Chang’s and Chao’s, as these scholars interrogate staged choreographies and Taiwan’s positionality within the political and historical tension between Taiwan and China.

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<sup>62</sup> In the term I call “pan-Chinese,” I view the idea of “Chinese” referring to the cultures, histories, and languages that tie together all people with Chinese lineages. In other words, instead of referring to China, a specific country, “Chinese” here suggests the cultural aspect of Chinese lineages.

<sup>63</sup> Sansan Kwan, *Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

These existing studies have forwarded an understanding of dance as an art onstage, separating the performers from the audiences. However, interrogations of international folk dancing can be instrumental not only in reconsidering how the Taiwanese body presents national identity by embodying various genres of dance techniques, but also in highlighting the social dance form, which emphasizes the importance of community. My dance fellows' and my own experiences have motivated me to break the dichotomy of onstage dance performances (i.e. professional training) and social dance forms (i.e. amateur practice, or what I have categorized these dancers, semi-professional). I am also eager to contribute to a much-needed inquiry in social dance forms in Taiwan such as international folk dancing. Therefore, I again turn to the concept of *transnational embodiment* and emphasize the action of embodying because dance in my research is not merely an art form for watching but one in which people can participate. The experiences of a general population performing different cultures through dance rather than just watching are a part of Taiwanese-ness.

Additionally, my research resonates with many other dance scholars' projects in a way that these studies interrogate a sense of multi-cultural fusion in a country's nationalism. Besides the previous mentioned three scholars and their interrogations of Taiwanese-ness, Suki John's study of the Cuban contemporary dance form *Técnica Cubana* shows how a dance practice can produce and be produced by Cuban people under the nation's political, cultural, and social contexts. *Técnica Cubana* is also a transnational dance technique because it acquires influences from various dance genres including, but not limited to, ballet, French-Haitian dance, and African religious dances.

Both international folk dancing in Taiwan and *Técnica Cubana* demonstrate how national identities can be constructed through multi-cultural dance practices. In particular, different historical circumstances have led Taiwanese culture to be a form of amalgamation that merges Western and Chinese aesthetics. This amalgamated culture somehow becomes a way for many Taiwanese dance artists either to claim independence from a pan-Chinese cultural lineage and declare a Taiwanese identity, or to maintain a pan-Chinese identity through the amalgamation. Unlike these previous studies, however, I not only consider Taiwanese-ness as multi-cultural but also focus on Taiwanese-ness as multi-dimensional, which includes both spatial and temporal dimensions. On the one hand, this characteristic emphasizes the spatial extent of Taiwanese-ness, echoing my opinion that international folk dancing is a transnational practice. On the other hand, by embracing international through embodying various cultures in the world, the Taiwanese practitioners find their ways to claim their understanding of Taiwanese-ness, and possibly distinguish themselves from other Asian American immigrants in California.

Faye Yuan Kleeman's investigation of dance and Taiwanese nationalism is unique in that rather than analyzing pan-Chinese cultural influence, she bridges the Japanese colonial and post-colonial eras in Taiwanese history through an examination of Tsai Juiyueh's dance career.<sup>65</sup> Kleeman questions how this Taiwanese female artist negotiated different ideas of Taiwanese-ness in her artistic work as Tsai experienced two historical periods with distinct national ideologies. I find similarity in Kleeman's research framework and in mine, because the study of international folk dancing also reveals the

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<sup>65</sup> Faye Yuan Kleeman, "Dancers of the Empire," in *In Transit: The Formation of the Colonial East Asian Cultural Sphere* (HI: University of Hawai'i, 2014), 186-210.

instability of nationalism across different yet continuous historical periods—the Martial Law and post-Martial Law period. Moreover, as interpreted from my interview scripts, the dancing body functions as a means of transmitting the nation’s ideologies from one space to another, and from one generation to the next. In sum, my dissertation elucidates Taiwanese-ness as a flexible and dynamic notion, which is defined by different generations of Taiwanese dancers in varying historical and geographical contexts.

#### **0.4 Embodying Transnationalism: Identity and Bodily Practice Across the Pacific Ocean**

This research also seeks to contribute to Taiwanese American Studies and scholarship in transnationalism and the notion of transpacific. While transnationalism is a crucial idea that cannot be separated from immigration and diaspora, the notion of “transpacific” provides a useful framework for my interrogation of Taiwanese-American migration. In transpacific studies, U.S.-based scholars Viet Thanh Nguyen and Janet Hoskins argue that Asia, America, and the Pacific (including its geographic meaning and the idea that the Ocean separates the two big continents) have formed a complicated relationship, which can be investigated through various lenses.<sup>66</sup> My research on international folk dancing provides a lens to interrogate this triangular relationship, and to reconsider current European- and U.S.-based versions of Asian migration history.

Transpacific methodology also echoes Rhacel Parreñas and Lok Siu’s intention to break

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<sup>66</sup> Janet Hoskins and Viet T. Nguyen, “Introduction: Transpacific Studies, Critical Perspectives on an Emerging Field,” and “Passionate Attachments to Area Studies and Asian American Studies: Subjectivity and Diaspora in the Transpacific” in *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field* (HI: University of Hawai’i, 2014).

the binary of “homeland and place of residence.”<sup>67</sup> In my project, both the practice of international folk dance and immigration are continuous movements and constant negotiations between the Taiwanese bodies and the environments they exist in. Physical and emotional connections between Taiwan and California are highlighted through transpacific and cross-cultural identities.

My work is important to the field of Taiwanese-American Studies because current Taiwanese-American Studies mostly focus on economic, military and political aspects. Scholars in this field pay specific attention to political and economical relationships among Taiwan, China, and the United States; research that is related to the arts and cultures plays a much more minor role in this sphere of studies. Moreover, in many circumstances, immigrants from Taiwan are viewed as ethnically Chinese. For instance, in research regarding Chinatowns in America, the Taiwanese Americans are only one of the elements in Chinatowns’ development, making the Taiwanese identity indistinguishable from the pan-Chinese culture. Due to the fact that international folk dancing was a collective activity authorized by the National Government during Taiwanese Martial Law, my research provides a case that presents the uniqueness of Taiwanese-American identity and nationality.

My project also specifies the notion of transnationalism, in the way that it contours the triangular, transpacific relationships between Taiwan, America, and routes that connect the two places. Previous discussions of Asian-American immigrants often focused on immigration laws and how these non-white people in the United States have

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<sup>67</sup> Rhacel Parreñas and Lok Siu, *Asian Diasporas: New Formations, New Conceptions* (CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 3.

been discriminated against. In these studies, Asian Americans are viewed as a collective group. As mentioned previously, Taiwanese Americans are often not distinguished from Chinese Americans, due to the fact that immigrants from Taiwan and China share similar appearances, cultures and languages from a non-Chinese/Taiwanese person's viewpoint. However, international folk dancing carries special historical meanings in Taiwanese people's memories, a fact that can be considered as a national difference between Taiwanese and Chinese immigrants. Moreover, viewing Taiwanese Americans as different from other Asian Americans is crucial to exploring these people's national identities. Especially during and after the Martial Law Period, there have been distinctive ideas about whether Taiwanese-ness is a part of Chinese-ness, or if these are two parallel notions. This self-awareness and dilemma in identity have not only raised complicated conflicts and negotiations between different generations in Taiwan, but also caused political and social tensions between international folk dancers in Taiwan and in California.

I consider Taiwanese migration to the United States as a part of the Taiwanese diaspora.<sup>68</sup> Immigration is a constant negotiation between the homeland and country of destination, rather than a one-time movement. Therefore, in the following, I will explain

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<sup>68</sup> For studies related to Taiwanese migration, please see Eric Fong, Lan-Hung Nora Chiang, and Nancy Denton, eds, *Immigrant Adaptation in Multi-Ethnic Societies: Canada, Taiwan, and the United States* (UK: Routledge, 2013); Shu-mei Shih, *Against Diaspora: Discourses on Sinophone Studies* (Taipei: Linking Books, 2017); Pei Tsai, "The Diasporic Identities of Taiwanese Immigrants in Brisbane, Australia," *Journal of Population Studies* (Taipei: National Taiwan University, 2010), 91-155; The Taiwanese American Archives, *History of Taiwanese American*, last modified 2017, <http://taiwaneseamericanhistory.org/>; "Taiwanese American Historical Society: The Footsteps of Taiwanese Americans," *Taiwanese American Historical Society*, last modified August 2018, [www.tahistory.org](http://www.tahistory.org); Carol Hsu, *Stories of Overseas Taiwanese*, last modified May 2018, <http://overseas-tw.blogspot.com>.

how I use the notion of transnationalism—transpacific specifically—to investigate various forms of communication between the two countries and across the Pacific Ocean. Building on the notion of diaspora, it is crucial to note that, instead of “Taiwanese American,” every interviewee of mine who now resides in California claim him/herself as Taiwanese with a U.S. passport. Therefore, I will avoid the term “Taiwanese American” when referring to my interviewees. Nonetheless, using “Taiwanese American Studies” and related terms is a necessity for academic convenience, as a means of describing people who live in and move between Taiwan and the United States.

In Asian American Studies, many scholars have addressed how people construct communities and manage their sense of belonging in migration. Cultural anthropologist Nadine Naber demonstrates the second generation of Arab Americans’ mental and physical negotiations of belonging to the Arab community and living in the American society at the same time.<sup>69</sup> In *Memories of a Future Home*, U.S.-based anthropologist Lok Siu promotes the idea of “diasporic citizenship” to argue that citizenship does not exist in one nation-state with a single group of people and government; instead, citizenship is constructed “by transnational as well as national and local forces.”<sup>70</sup> In my research, the Taiwanese dancers in California employ concrete dance venues—such as churches, studios, and community centers—and abstract sentiments of dancing together (i.e., their communal feeling of gathering together) to construct their sense of an international folk dancing community in their second homeland. These dancers have transplanted their

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<sup>69</sup> Nadine Naber, *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism* (NY: New York University Press, 2012).

<sup>70</sup> Lok Siu, *Memories of a Future Home: Diasporic Citizenship of Chinese in Panama* (CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 8.

dancing memories and reestablished similar dancing environments in various locations in the United States, and I consider these reestablishments a means of performing their nostalgia for dancing in Taiwan through *transnational embodiment* of the dance practice. On the one hand, the practice of international folk dance is a transpacific cultural performance Taiwanese immigrants bring to California. These dancers have established international folk dance clubs and held regional or statewide dance parties, providing a semi-private social environment for the international folk dancers from Taiwan. On the other hand, convenience in transportation and technologies in the contemporary world enables the international folk dancers to construct a closer, more globalized dance community. Thus I suggest that traveling back and forth between Taiwan and the United States, communicating through emails, exchanging dance videos and music online, and other forms of action besides dancing can be seen as parts of the *transnational embodiment* of the international folk dancers.

My work also draws on Memory Studies, a relatively new approach to discussing people's choices of, and the meanings of, remembering and forgetting. Performance Studies scholars Diana Taylor, Joseph Roach, and many others consider the body as a site of memory; that is, the contents of memories not only can be written as texts but also are kept in the body with consciousness or unawareness. Taylor offers the term "repertoire," suggesting that embodied performances are as valuable as written forms of memory, because onstage and quotidian performances are ways of "knowing as well as storing and

transmitting cultural knowledge and identity.”<sup>71</sup> Roach’s investigation of different forms of embodied practices such as festivals, theatrical products, funerals, etc., is also pertinent to my research, as he presents his idea of “surrogacy,” which means an enactment of one culture, tradition, or person substituting another in performance.<sup>72</sup> By interrogating memories across cultures, Roach argues that new cultures were not discovered but invented. People within these new societies would not be able to perform their identities if they only focus on what they remember, as people have to acknowledge what parts of history have been erased in order to remember. Roach’s work is crucial to my own, because both of our studies interrogate specific identities with site-specific and time-sensitive embodied activities. In particular, the idea of “site-specific” as not limited to certain cities or dance venues, but also as inclusive of the process of moving and circulating between these sites is significant in notions of the circum-Atlantic<sup>73</sup> and of the transpacific that Roach and I draw attention to respectively.

I argue that the construction of the Taiwanese identity is dynamic and belongs to “the future as much as to the past.”<sup>74</sup> That is to say, national identity is built not only by countries of destination, but also by the homelands of these immigrants, making people’s past memories and future imaginations of life equally important in composing one’s identity. Inspired by Siu’s reiteration that the sense of “belonging” has always been a

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<sup>71</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 278.

<sup>72</sup> Joseph Roach, “Introduction: History, Memory, and Performance,” in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1-25.

<sup>73</sup> Roach uses the term “circum-Atlantic” to describe the cultural circulation and exchange from Northern Europe, Africa, and the Americas.

<sup>74</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity & Diaspora,” in *Colonial Discourse & Postcolonial theory*, edited by Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams (NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), 225.

constant practice for immigrants, I suggest that the practice of belonging is not limited to immigrants, but is highly related to all Taiwanese people because of Taiwan's complicated history as a colonized island, which has been a land for both emigration and immigration. Furthermore, political tensions between Taiwan and China have also caused various understandings of "being Taiwanese." As I will show in Chapters Two and Three, Taiwanese dancers of different generations conceive the idea of Taiwanese-ness dissimilarly, due to the fact that younger dancers are exposed to an environment with more globality. They are also able to learn from other non-folk dancing communities and apply different experiences to their own practice of international folk dancing.

I moreover acknowledge Roach's argument that collective memory is constructed through "the genealogies of performance," a term that includes patterned movements remembered by the body and physical actions inspired by people's respective cultures.<sup>75</sup> In their attempt at self-definition, Taiwanese dancers in California have been transplanting and reconstructing international folk dancing spaces with affects from their collective memories as well as their intentional and/or unconscious choices of remembering and forgetting. Therefore, the international folk dancing spaces are where self- and mass memories integrate, making the dance spaces in Taiwan and in California similar but always unique. Overall, my concept of *transnational embodiment* is essential in framing my examination of how Taiwanese-ness is formulated by practicing others' nationalisms. Not only does it indicate the transnational nature of international folk

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<sup>75</sup> Joseph Roach, "Introduction: History, Memory, and Performance," in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), 26.

dancing, this notion also highlights Taiwanese immigrants' transpacific migration and how they are physically and mentally connected with Taiwan.

### **0.5 Terms, Translations, and Their Appellations**

Here it is worth pausing to offer some explanations of some terms and translations in this dissertation, as the challenges of even translating the phrase “international folk dancing” are significant to my research. Translating terms between Mandarin Chinese and English is difficult mostly due to the inflection-based meaning of the Chinese language, so there is no way to recreate the tonal difference in writing. In Chinese, international folk dancing is translated as *tu-feng-wu* when the dance form was first introduced in Taiwan—*wu* meaning dance, *feng* roughly meaning style, and *tu* meaning land. Combining the two words, *tu-feng* is a literal way for saying “regional custom,” and it is thus easy to understand where the translation *tu-feng-wu* came from—dances of regional cultures. However, *tu* in contemporary Chinese can be an informal way of saying old-fashioned, which changes the translation to “old-fashioned style dance.” More interestingly and coincidentally, *feng*, which means style, has the same pronunciation as “crazy,” and then we get “old-fashioned crazy dance” from the translation, *tu-feng-wu*.

One of my interviewees, HY, is a young practitioner under twenty-five who supports this literal translation, which is usually not favored by young international folk dancers like her. She started practicing international folk dancing in her junior year at the university, and her Chinese Literature major has something to do with her conceptions of this translation. She explained this term with her proficiency in Chinese literature during

our interview, arguing that *tu-feng-wu* suitably describes the spirit of international folk dancing. It is not easy to trace back to the reasons why international folk dancing was translated as *tu-feng-wu* over fifty years ago. While none of my interviewees knew where this translation came from, I got a clue from a Chinese student who is currently pursuing her Ph.D. degree in performing arts in Taiwan. She shared with me that *tu-feng-wu* was an early term used in the 1940's in China to refer to folk dances from places outside the country.<sup>76</sup> It is then unsurprising that the National Government adapted this term as the Chinese translation of international folk dancing when this dance form was first introduced by the U.S. instructor Holden in the late 1950's, a few years after the Government lost the land of China from the last Chinese Communist Revolution<sup>77</sup> in 1949.

The changing habits in language usage and the coincidence in the translation have led to a trend for student-based international folk dancing clubs to change the names of their groups. These dance clubs mostly prefer the term *shi-jie-min-su-wu-dao*, which can literally be translated to “world folk dancing.” Other than *shi-jie-min-su* (world folk), some others replace *shi-jie* (world) with *guo-ji*, which means international. There are also some clubs that suggest more creative terms. For example, the National Taiwan University Folk Dance Club (NTUFDC) has changed its name from *tu-feng-wu* to *feng-ge-wu*. One of its members told me that *feng-ge* not only means “style” in Chinese, but also sounds like English pronunciation of “folk.” The members of the NTUFDC thus consider the name *feng-ge* suitable in replacing *tu-feng-wu* in both aspects of

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<sup>76</sup> Field notes. May 2018. New Taipei City, Taiwan.

<sup>77</sup> Also known as War of Liberation in current China.

pronunciation and explanation. The student members' intention to apply similar pronunciations of *feng-ge* and “folk” furthermore suggest a demand on centering the notion of folk. This intention also implies a sense of U.S. imperialism by presenting a hierarchy between English and Mandarin Chinese.

LK is a famous instructor in the semi-professional community who has been dancing for over thirty years. He argues that the translations of international folk dancing matter and are important for him as an instructor. When LK teaches in recreational centers, some students ask him which genre particular dances that are being taught belong to. The students are predictably in awe when he answers, “This is *tu-feng-wu*.” Obviously, LK says, his students' idea of *tu-feng-wu* is different from his, and he shares with me proudly that after taking his classes, more and more people who did not dance before no longer connect *tu-feng-wu* only with self-choreographed non-partner dances practiced by housewives and the elders in parks and school playgrounds. As mentioned in beginning sections of this chapter, self-choreographed dancing will be explored in later chapters. At the conclusion of our interview, still focused on issues of naming, LK emphasized that if dancers in the semi-professional community want to popularize the dance they are practicing, it is definitely necessary to reconsider which term (i.e. *tu-feng-wu* or other more contemporary names) to use. He then claimed, “international folk dancing literally means *shi-jie-min-su-wu-dao*.<sup>78</sup> We [dancers of the semi-professional

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<sup>78</sup> In fact, *shi-jie* means “world” while “international” is *guo-chi* in Mandarin Chinese. However, when the two words are used as adjectives in Chinese, they implies similar meanings. It was therefore understandable why LK said such during the interview.

community] just come back to its original spirit and meaning.”<sup>79</sup>

I want to address the complexity of the two terms, “ethnic (*min-zu*) dance” and “folk (*min-su*) dance.” The complex situation I have encountered when dealing with these two terms and the translation of international folk dancing comes from the fact that in dance academies in China, there are two sub-genres of Chinese dance—Chinese classical dancing and Chinese ethnic and folk dancing.<sup>80</sup> “Folk” here is the English translation for *min-jien*, which in Chinese means the general public or common lives. This reference already produces some confusion, because the “folk” in international folk dancing is translated as *min-su*. In other words, though “Chinese ethnic and folk dancing” and “international folk dancing” both contain “folk” in the dance title; the meaning of this word slightly changes in Mandarin Chinese under different contexts. Even more complicated, “Chinese *min-zu* [ethnic] dance” is actually a dance form that is considered by many scholars to be an invented tradition<sup>81</sup> created by the National Government during the Taiwanese Martial Law Period. I adopted the term, Chinese *min-zu* dance, from Chang because I agree with her argument of how *min-zu*’s meaning “ambiguously swings between the concept of ethnicity, the concept of nationality, and the concept of race

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<sup>79</sup> L.K. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. July 30, 2016.

<sup>80</sup> Schedule of the Master Classes 2018. *Pan America Chinese Dance Alliance*. Web; Dance scholar and choreographer Ting-Ting Chang also mentioned that the Han ethnicity in China “is the only ethnic group that has both folk dances and classical dances, while the dances of every other minority fall under ‘minority dances’” (Ph.D., University of California, Riverside, 2008, 21).

<sup>81</sup> After historian Eric Hobsbawm proposed the concept of the Invention of Tradition in 1983, many researchers have adapted it in their examinations of different dance forms. For example, Anthony Shay examined how famous choreographer, Igor Moiseyev, made Russian folk dances an invented tradition by creating new choreographies with folk movements and brought them onstage (2003). Cecily Morrison also applied this idea as she investigated Scottish dance and its relations with community and authenticity (2003).

according to different contexts.”<sup>82</sup> During the Cold War era, the National Government of Taiwan encouraged professional dancers to perform Chinese *min-zu* dance, propagating the dance form’s ideological beauty with Chinese traditions and ethics,<sup>83</sup> and furthermore claiming the Government’s political legitimacy of Mainland China and the Chinese national identity.

Due to the above possible reasons, many Taiwanese people who have experienced governmental propagation of Chinese *min-zu* dance consider “ethnic dances” as equating to Chinese dances, including Chinese classical dance and Chinese dances that belong to the fifty-six ethnic groups in China, such as Han, Dai, Miao, Mongolian, and Tibetan dances; meanwhile, the term “folk dances” possibly represents regional dances around the world. However, many Taiwanese, especially those who are unfamiliar with dance, interchange “ethnic” (*min-zu*) and “folk” (*min-su*). Younger generations who are not familiar with the ideas of *min-zu* and *min-su* would even equate *min-su* (folk) with folk acrobatics, such as lion dance and diabolo.<sup>84</sup> I have been aware of these complications caused by translation and generational differences since I started my research in international folk dancing, and thus I questioned my interviewees about their

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<sup>82</sup> Szu-Ching Chang, *Dancing with Nostalgia in the Twentieth Contemporary ‘Traditional’ Dance*, (Ph.D. CA: University of California, Riverside. 2011), 27.

<sup>83</sup> I intend to focus on the difficulties of translation, instead of dialogues about Chinese *min-zu* dance. Regarding examinations on this dance form, please refer to Szu-Ching Chang, *Dancing with Nostalgia in the Twentieth Contemporary ‘Traditional’ Dance* (Ph.D., University of California, Riverside, 2011); Ting-Ting Chang, *Choreographing the Peacock: Gender, Ethnicity, and National Identity in Chinese Ethnic Dance* (Ph.D., University of California, Riverside, 2008); Ya-Ping Chen, *Dance history and cultural politics : a study of contemporary dance in Taiwan, 1930s- 1997* (2003); Wei-Ying Hsu, “Lightly Floating and Swirling Like Snowflakes: the Reality You Do Not Know About Ancient Dances in Historical Dramas,” *Sociology at the Street Corner* (2018); Yatin Christina Lin, “Choreographing a flexible Taiwan: Cloud Gate Dance Theatre and Taiwan's changing identity, 1973—2003” (Ph.D., University of California, Riverside, 2004).

<sup>84</sup> J.C. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. December 15, 2016; Field notes. December 2016. Taipei, Taiwan.

understanding of “ethnic” (*min-zu*) and “folk” (*min-su*). Unfortunately, while most of my interviewees also consider ethnic (*min-zu*) dance as Chinese dance and folk (*min-su*) dance as regional dances around the world, none of them could tell me the reasons for their perceptions. For the purpose of this dissertation, I maintain to follow this unspoken linguistic rule, applying international folk dancing and its Chinese translations, *tu-feng-wu* and *shi-jie min-su wu-dao*, as the terms for the dance genre I am centering.

Finally, Romanizing Mandarin Chinese (i.e. writing Chinese with Latin alphabets) in Taiwan is difficult, due to the fact that there have been five different systems of spelling (*pin-yin*) throughout Taiwanese contemporary history, meaning that each system was approved as official in a different time period. Moreover, some systems are more suitable for Taiwanese, Hakka, and other dialects in Taiwan, so unifying one way to Romanize Mandarin Chinese in Taiwan does not make sense, either. For the purpose of this research, I use Hanyu Pinyin throughout the dissertation, as Hanyu Pinyin is the system used in Taiwan and China.<sup>85</sup> For works cited from Chinese literatures and all my interviews, I try to translate the titles and contents as accurately as possible from Mandarin Chinese to English. The lack of stability in meaning of these terms indicates that there is no consistent recognition of “folk,” “ethnic,” and even “international folk dancing,” as younger generations of dancers are eager to get rid of the term *tu-feng-wu*, at the same time cannot find a coherent translation within the dancing community. Similarly unsteady is the perception of Taiwanese-ness. The confusing terminology signals Taiwanese people’s question of what exactly is Taiwanese identity, or if there are

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<sup>85</sup> A few exceptions include the names of some historical figures that have become proper nouns, as well as the names of authors who have stated their Romanized Chinese names in their publications.

actually multiple forms of Taiwanese identities.

## **0.6 Research Methodologies**

Ethnographic research, oral history collection, and archival research serve as my main research methods for my work with Taiwanese international folk dancers in Taiwan and California. From July 2016 to February 2017, I conducted fieldwork mainly in Taipei and New Taipei City, Taiwan and participated in recurring gatherings of the Orodancers, the National Taiwan University Folk Dance Club (NTUFD), the Alumni Association of NTUFD Taiwan branch, and the Jin-An Folk Dance Group. I also attended two important annual events—the annual meeting of the Taiwan International Folk Dance Association (TIFA), and the 59<sup>th</sup> Asia Folk Dance Camp (AFDC). The AFDC is one of the most famous international folk dancing camps around the world. Every year, more than three hundred dancers from Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and the United States come to Taiwan for this festive dance event. From mid-February to September 2017, I resided in Northern California to work with the Taiwanese dancers in the Silicon Valley Folk Dance Club (SVFDC), the West Valley Folk Dance Club, and the Alumni Association of NTUFD Northern-California branch. Luckily, I was able to celebrate with the other members the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the SVFDC. Additionally, I attended the Stockton Folk Dance Camp, which celebrated its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2017. Even though the Camp is usually composed of Western dancers and has fewer Mandarin Chinese-speaking participants, it serves as the inspiration of the birth of the AFDC mentioned above. Attending the Stockton Camp thus was my acknowledgement of the connected pasts of

the two important camps and of Taiwan's and California's international folk dancing history.

My project is multi-sited, a common feature in contemporary anthropology. For instance, Ulf Hannerz<sup>86</sup> emphasizes the need to build translocal connections when an anthropologist is conducting multi-sited research, while George Marcus<sup>87</sup> declares that multi-sited methodology has broken the dichotomy of local and global. I am especially intrigued by Marcus's assertion that multi-sited ethnography is conducted with consideration of the researcher's self-consciousness and the theoretical diversities of interdisciplinary studies. His assertion served as a reminder not only when I worked in the two field sites, but also when I was thinking about the sense of abstract spaces, which I suggest that included the transpacific mobility of immigrants, the dancing atmosphere and dancers' emotions toward international folk dancing. With these impalpable elements, the California-based Taiwanese dancers have reframed their memories of dancing in Taiwan along with their individual position in the worldwide international folk dancing community.

I interviewed fifteen people at each site (i.e. Taiwan and California), most of whom are international folk dance practitioners, with a few who do not practice the dance form themselves, but have friends or family members who belong to this dance community. During interviews, I started with similar questions with instructors, student dancers, and

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<sup>86</sup> Ulf Hannerz, "Being there...and there...and there!: Reflections on Multi-site Ethnography," *Ethnography* 4, no.2 (2003): 201-216.

<sup>87</sup> George Marcus, "Ethnography In/Of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 95-117.

non-student participants about their perception of international folk dancing, and how they viewed the dance practice socially, culturally, and historically. Their various responses often easily led me to continue uncovering their different point of views on ideas of folk, international, and self-choreographed dancing, in relation to their varied backgrounds of occupations, living and dancing experiences. For Taiwanese practitioners in California, I asked additional questions to understand the reasons why they have chosen international folk dancing as a crucial way to connect with each other. As there are apparent differences in dance preferences between practitioners in Taiwan and in California, I usually started the interviews by asking them to share their memories dancing in Taiwan before they migrated to the United States. Sometimes this process of recalling took place in brunch places or coffee shops. Some other interviewees kindly invited me to their homes, and I can still remember their body gestures brewing coffee for me as they talked about their stories of international folk dancing. I realized my privilege being in the same dancing community with all my interviewees. My writing about international folk dancing and this community is built on their trust of me walking into their private households and telling me about their pasts. Apart from my interviewees, some people preferred to share their thoughts only in an informal setting. Instead of sitting down with a recorder and signing the HRRB form, they chose to tell me their stories and thoughts off the dance floor where they rested, because they felt uncomfortable being recorded or being too formal signing a document. Some of them

even humbly said that they were nobody and did not deserve to be interviewed.<sup>88</sup> These conversations are cited as field notes, with time and place indicated in my footnotes.

Interviews were urgent due to the increase in the average age of the international folk dancing population. This dance form is not only an overlooked dance practice, but it is also a unmentioned social activity that nonetheless continues to exist in Taiwanese people's collective memory. Historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues, "Any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process."<sup>89</sup> I noticed the extent of "the powerful silence" of Taiwanese practitioners through my work with them and through analyzing the stories they share; especially, some dancers who were extremely humble would shade away from my questions, saying that they knew nothing but to dance for happiness. A response like "I have never thought about it" during interviews is also a rejection of recalling that strongly indicates the power of fragile memory. These fieldwork experiences show that even practitioners themselves sometimes marginalize the importance of themselves, their practice, and what outsiders have seen as "silenced." Through interviews and casual conversations, I hope to reveal a parallel between outsiders' underestimation and insiders' diminishment, delineating a more complete picture of this dancing community with different forms of silence.

Dance scholar Judith Hamera analyzes what she calls "code[s] of behavior" and considers how non-dancing activities are as important as dance techniques in the

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<sup>88</sup> Field notes. September 2016. Taipei, Taiwan.

<sup>89</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 27.

formation of a dancing community.<sup>90</sup> Inspired by Hamera's idea, I view participant-observation as another essential research methodology in my research, as this method requires the skill of jotting field notes and subtle attention to the environment and the people. I took notes on the dancers' enthusiasm planning to attend cultural festivals or to purchase folk attire that was on sale. I sensed the change of energy in dancing spaces from Sunday afternoon to Sunday evening, with a few complaints about upcoming work tomorrow.

However, adjusting my positionality in the community was a challenge. On the one hand, I occasionally resisted the role of a participant to pay closer attention to observations of all forms of embodiment of international folk dancing as a scholar; on the other hand, I tried to hide my identity as a dance scholar to avoid creating distance between me and other dancers, specifically when people praised me as a doctor. I felt that I disappointed them because I could not answer some of their questions, and because I failed to dance like a professionally-trained dancer.

Critical Race Theory scholar Joshua Chambers-Letson's argues in *A Race So Different* that immigration laws can be seen as motives of performance that force Asian Americans to follow the scripts [laws], and these scripts eventually position these immigrants somewhere between "fully American" and "authentically Asian."<sup>91</sup> This assertion assisted me in reflecting on my own positionality that, according to my self-awareness, fell "somewhere in between" an insider and an outsider when I did my

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<sup>90</sup> Judith Hamera, *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference and Connection in the Global City* (UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

<sup>91</sup> Joshua Chambers-Letson, *A Race So Different: Performance and Law in Asian America* (NY: New York University Press, 2013).

fieldwork in California. On the one hand, I am not a Taiwanese immigrant like most of the California-based Taiwanese dancers I work with. On the other hand, as a Taiwanese student studying in the United States, I had missed my time being with dancers in Taiwan in the past five years, and the feeling of distance increased every time I returned. While I struggled to reconcile my position and identity in Taiwan's and California's international folk dancing communities, this feeling of being in the liminal space between the two regions strengthened my acknowledgement of embodying transnationality mentally and physically.

Archival research accompanied my fieldwork. Aside from assembling ephemera from my interviewees and other dance fellows to create my own archive, I also visited the National Central Library, the main libraries at the National Taiwan University and the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology. While the National Central Library keeps the dissertations from all Masters and Ph.D. students who have graduated from Taiwan's educational institutions, I also relied on National Bibliographic Information Network to decide which other libraries to visit. Many senior dancers also generously landed me their book collections, as many international folk dancing publications were printed in the 1960's and the 1970's and are already out of print.

Archival research was challenging because there had not been much prior research on international folk dancing. The dance practice has been viewed as recreational, even though it was the only government sanctioned dance activity during Taiwanese Martial Law. Considered an amateur practice, few studies focus on historical and political meanings of international folk dancing, as most publications are records of dance routines

categorized with different levels and styles,<sup>92</sup> while many others are about introductions of regional folk dances and cultures.<sup>93</sup> Other sources include event and recruiting advertisements, as well as teaching and party repertoires. Inspired by Performance Studies scholar Diana Taylor's argument that written archives and bodily records—the repertoire,<sup>94</sup> in her words—are both valuable documentations and memories, I used these varied sorts of archives as comparison and cross-reference with my field notes and interview transcripts. Adopting the dance-centered framework along with the assistance of ethnographic methodologies, this research proposes how Taiwanese people's practice of international folk dancing declares Taiwan's global political position during Martial Law, as well as amplifies Taiwanese immigrants' conception of national identity in California.

## **0.7 Chapter Overview**

Each chapter in this dissertation incorporates my own reflexivity and my interviewees' positionalities. Chapter One will survey the practice of international folk dancing during Martial Law and the post-Martial Law period in Taiwan. I suggest that after World War II, international folk dancing was used as a political tool to propagate Taiwan's alignment with the United States and its opposition to Communism;

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<sup>92</sup> Please refer to Chi Chen, *Folk Dance One, Two, Three* (Taiwan: Ping-Yuan, 1965), Ching-San Chang and Fang-Chich Chen, *The Road of Folk Dancing* (Taiwan: Xian-Ge, 1976), and other publications for related literatures.

<sup>93</sup> For related books and research, please refer to Chang-Xiong Yang, *Chinese Folk Dances For Everybody* (Cecily Lewis, trans. 1975), *Folk Culture of the Hungarians* (1997), Ishiyama Akira, *Polish Folk Costumes* (1977) and other publications.

<sup>94</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

meanwhile, because of limited access to information from outside of Taiwan during Martial Law, international folk dancing was a means of delineating a global picture and learning about the rest of the world for many young people. In the post-Martial Law period, international folk dancing has been facing the crisis of declined population because the dance form is no longer the only government-supported dance activity. Nonetheless, I argue, younger international folk dancers have turned this practice into a more flexible way to understand the idea of “Taiwanese-ness.” International folk dancing also serves as an entrance for many now-professional dancers due to the diverse styles it covers.

Chapter Two examines how international folk dancing functions as a means of connecting with each other for some Taiwanese immigrants in California. I argue that these Taiwanese practitioners in the United States maintain their connection with Taiwan by conducting the same dance practice as they did before their migration, even though currently there are slightly different routines and steps in some dance pieces. These possible differences between the two Taiwanese international folk dancing communities in Taiwan and California formulate the idea of “doubly transnational,” which underlines the process of Taiwanese migration with this dance practice as the immigrants’ embodied knowledge. Thus, the *transnational embodiment* fulfilled by the Taiwanese practitioners in California not only helps these immigrants stay connected with their homeland, but also is a means of enunciating their interpretation of Taiwanese-ness.

In Chapter Three, I turn my attention to notions of “folk” and “international” with the example of self-choreographed dancing, a sub-genre in the Taiwanese international

folk dancing community, followed by an interrogation of the issue of cross-cultural politics. These topics discussed in this final chapter are propelled by Taiwanese dancers in both Taiwan and California, and I reiterate that it is impossible to talk about international folk dancing focusing solely on its current status in one single venue. Those problems and debates I acknowledge now are rooted in the past, present, and even future of this dance practice, and thus it is crucial to discuss this dance form in varied chronological and geographical contexts as a whole.

In sum, this dissertation is an interdisciplinary project that scrutinizes what it means for Taiwanese international folk dancers to practice other nationalisms during Taiwanese Martial Law and in the post-Martial Law era. Through the lenses of Dance Studies, Taiwanese-American Studies, and through a theory of transnationalism, I pay attention to how international folk dancing animates the cultural, social, and political aspects of Martial Law-Taiwan, and how novel constructions of Taiwanese identity are engaged through this dance practice. International folk dancing is a valuable social dance form that documents Taiwanese contemporary history and maps out the transnational route of Taiwanese immigration. Its internationality and flexibility, moreover, continue to provide its practitioners with innovative ways of global exploration.

## Chapter One

### A Transnational Embodiment in Taiwan's Past and Present Landscape

Throughout 2017 and 2018, Taiwanese international folk dancers have been celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of international folk dancing in Taiwan.<sup>95</sup> There are dance parties, performances, and academic workshops. The Asia Folk Dance Camp<sup>96</sup> held in February 2018 attracted over four hundred participants from more than five countries to come and join this dance jubilee. It would seem that this dance form is seeing a renewed popularity. However, there were not many people under the age of thirty in attendance, indicating that the longevity of international folk dance in Taiwan may be limited.

As these celebrations go on, this community has been facing many difficulties due to the decline in the population of dancers since the 1990's. For example, in May 2013, a university-based international folk dancing club in Northern Taiwan hosted a dance party in a spacious, fancy activity center on campus, as a final event before the team was to disband. Founded in 1972, the team once included a hearty two hundred members. In 2013, however, there were only two. This student-based international folk dancing club was not alone in facing the crisis of declining membership. Within the past ten years, at

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<sup>95</sup> Rickey Holden, the first foreign international folk dancing instructor, visited Taiwan in December 1957. Even though there were international folk dancing classes in a couple of schools before 1957, most participants still view 2017 the 60-year anniversary.

<sup>96</sup> As mentioned in Introduction, Ching-San Chang founded the Asia Folk Dance Camp in 1981 with the inspiration from the Stockton Camp in California. The Asia Camp is now one of the most important international folk dancing camps around the world, attracting dancers from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, and the U.S. to join this annual gathering.

least five student-based dance groups in Taiwan have disbanded due to lack of participation.

Introduced previously, international folk dancing is a dance genre in which dancers, regardless of their own ethnic identities, practice dances from around the world, such as dances from Hungary, Turkey, Armenia, Mexico, Indonesia, to list a few. This feature makes international folk dancing essentially a *transnational embodiment*, which I explain below. Because of its global repertoire this dance practice complicates general assumptions that folk dancing is solely a way for people to present and pass down cultural traditions within their own ethnic communities. Even more strikingly, in Taiwan, international folk dancing was the government-sanctioned activity during the Taiwanese Martial Law Period, when this dance form was introduced by the United States.

This chapter traces the history and development of international folk dancing in Taiwan from 1957 to the present day. I first examine the significance of international folk dancing as a politically sanctioned activity during Martial Law. I suggest that international folk dancing shaped the dance landscape of this specific historical time in Taiwan, although few dance scholars have given attention to international folk dancing as a serious practice. Because of governmental support, international folk dancing was extremely popular during Martial Law, as Taiwanese residents did not possess much mobility due to government restrictions. This dance form, which covers regional cultures worldwide, thus became a means of understanding the world for many people, and it

offered additional constructions of identity beyond the more Chinese<sup>97</sup>-focused cultural activities accepted during the Martial Law Period. In post-Martial Law Taiwan, people are now able to experience mobility, culture, and the “outside world” more freely. In addition, younger generations identify this dance form as a practice of the elders, even though they might not directly associate international folk dancing with the Martial Law Period. As a result this dance form has fallen out of popularity.

As suggested above, I approach the practice of international folk dancing in Taiwan as a form of *transnational embodiment*. International folk dancing itself is a form of *transnational embodiment* because practitioners are encouraged to explore dances that have no direct relationship to their own cultures. Accordingly, Taiwanese people’s practice of international folk dancing, beginning in the Martial Law Period, presents the idea of transnationality. But how does this *transnational embodiment* come to function as a form of Taiwanese-ness? The United States introduced international folk dancing to Taiwan after World War II as a tactic of political alliance. This dance practice thus became a national activity and was the only dance form popularized by the National Government<sup>98</sup> during Taiwanese Martial Law. Moreover, when physical traveling became prohibited during this time, this practice became a means of understanding the outside world for many young Taiwanese people. In the post-Martial Law period, the dance,

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<sup>97</sup> I am using “Chinese-focused” instead of “Taiwan-focused” here, because Chang Kai-Shek considered the National Government the only legitimate regime of Taiwan and China. Hence, “Chinese” here also implies the Chinese culture of Chinese-speaking people in different countries and regions.

<sup>98</sup> I use this term to specifically refer to the Taiwanese government during Martial Law. The National Government has transformed into the Kuomintang (KMT, literally translated as “Chinese national party”), which is one of the major political parties in current Taiwan. After Martial Law was lifted, Taiwanese people have gained much freedom and have been able to establish other political parties as competitor of the KMT.

which was formerly used by the Taiwanese government to promote a sense of state-sanctioned collectiveness, turned into a social dance form. As a social dance, the international folk dance became solely recreational, seemingly divorced from nationalist politics.

While the idea that Taiwanese-ness can be constructed by a non-Taiwanese embodied practice appears counterintuitive, the historical occurrence described above suggests that this *transnational embodiment*, which was considered “American” by earlier Taiwanese practitioners, surprisingly was a means of performing Taiwanese-ness. With its transnational nature, international folk dancing also echoes the transnationality of Taiwanese history. In the past, Taiwan has been affected by various cultures as a colonized country<sup>99</sup> and by its geographical position.<sup>100</sup> Thus, I define Taiwanese culture as an amalgamation of Chinese and Taiwanese traditions, with influences from other Asian and Westerns cultures. In this context, international folk dancing could be a flexible embodiment that echoes a subtle sense of transnationality within the Taiwanese identity. The flexibility of this practice also continues to be an important element in showing practitioners’ varied approaches to international folk dancing and to their distinctive understanding of “folk” and “international.” This *transnational embodiment* could be an important method for, or a result of, Taiwanese people performing their appropriation of Taiwanese-ness.

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<sup>99</sup> Taiwan was once colonized by Spain and Holland in the 1600s, and by the Japanese between WWII. The indigenous cultures from more than 16 ethnicities around the island also contribute to the cultural hybridity.

<sup>100</sup> Taiwan is located about one hundred miles off the southeastern coast of China across the Taiwan Strait, with Japan and Korea in the north, and many southeastern countries in the south. Due to this fact, Taiwan has long been an important trading spot for the past hundreds of years, and many regimes fought to colonize the island.

This chapter interrogates international folk dancing within a Taiwanese historical context. By conducting archival research and working with Taiwanese dancers mainly in Taipei,<sup>101</sup> I argue that the notion of *transnational embodiment*, as performed by international folk dancers, carried dissimilar meanings for the National Government and for Taiwanese residents during the Martial Law Period. For the National Government, international folk dancing was cultural work that assisted it in proposing Taiwanese Nationalism, and to show Taiwan's alignment with the United States and its opposition to Communist China. For Taiwanese people, especially young people such as high school and university students, it was not as much about making connections with the United States specifically, but about building communication with the outside world. Even though international folk dancing is often viewed as a recreational activity in current Taiwan, I argue that this dance practice is not merely an activity for temporary pleasure. In the later part of this chapter, I will examine how and why international folk dancing is seen so differently today than it was under the Martial Law Period.

In the following, I first offer some historical context on the Taiwanese Martial Law Period and on how international folk dancing was first introduced to Taiwan by the United States. Next, I articulate the roles international folk dancing played during Martial Law, and how it served as a political tool for the National Government to claim its connection with the United States, yet possibly had different functions for its young practitioners. The later part investigates international folk dancing in Taiwan's

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<sup>101</sup> Located in Northern Taiwan, Taipei is the capital of Taiwan, and has more abundant international folk dancing activities than elsewhere in the country. However, in order to avoid being parochial, I also invited dancers who are not based in Taipei to join the conversation of my study.

contemporary dance landscape after Martial Law was lifted in 1987, and how this *transnational embodiment* is never merely a dance form even after its population declines, but has become a way of living for many practitioners.

Interviewing and archival research are the two main methods for this chapter's research. My interviews for this chapter were conducted between July 2016 and February 2017. I mainly conducted my research in Taipei, the capital city of Taiwan. Many international folk dancing activities happen in the capital, and dancers from other cities also come to Taipei for some dance events. In addition, a lot of people have moved to Taipei due to their occupations, so I was able to talk to dancers who once attended universities outside Taipei. My interviewees' ages range from early twenties to late seventies, and I include information and interviews from both people who experienced the Martial Law Period and who were born after that period. As for archival research, the National Central Library in Taipei keeps the theses and dissertations from all Masters and Ph.D. students who have graduated from Taiwan's educational institutions, and many published books and journal articles about Martial Law history are also accessible there. Nonetheless, some essential archives related to international folk dancing are either not officially published (i.e. without an ISBN number) or too old to be collected in the National Central Library. I was extremely lucky that many of my interviewees made these precious collections available to me by lending out those early publications or welcoming me to visit their homes to take pictures of those archives. In either case, my archival research was mainly conducted in Taipei as well.

## **1.1 Historical Context: The Taiwanese Martial Law Period and International Folk Dancing**

Before the end of World War II, the National Government led by General Chiang Kai-Shek was the only government of the land of China and Taiwan. While the National Government was fighting against the Axis powers during World War II, the Communist party led by Mao Zedong gained power and was secretly planning to occupy the land of China. Although the National Government successfully defeated the Axis powers, it lost control of the land of China to the Communist party after the last Chinese Communist Revolution<sup>102</sup> in 1949. The Communist victory forced Chiang Kai-Shek to lead those who did not support Communism to retreat to Taiwan, the place that Chiang considered a military base from which to fight back against Chinese Communists.

The Martial Law was launched on May 20, 1949, about seven months before the National Government retreated from China to Taiwan. The Law declared the situation between Taiwan and China an emergency and aimed to suppress Chinese Communists as well as independent activists inside of Taiwan. Under Martial Law, there was a series of regulations, including a ban on unlawful assembly, association, procession, and petition; censorship and close oversight that regulated newspapers, magazines and book publication; and strict rules for the punishment of rebellions.<sup>103</sup> Hui-Ling Hu, the author of *A Hundred Years of Pursuing*, mentioned that Taiwanese society at that time “had only one single perspective, which was the government’s point of view.”<sup>104</sup> Governmental

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<sup>102</sup> Also known as War of Liberation in current China.

<sup>103</sup> Hui-Ling Hu, *Hundreds Years of Pursue* (Taipei: Acropolis, 2013), 45.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 44.

regulation was wide reaching; free publications were prohibited. TV and radio content was censored before broadcasting; studying abroad was also strictly regulated.

Across the Taiwan Strait, which divides the island of Taiwan from Mainland China, Communist China had grown stronger and gained international recognition. In 1971, Taiwan left the United Nations because Chang Kai-Shek refused to stay in the United Nations with China's representative, and over twenty countries instead began to build official relationships with China, P.R.C. (People's Republic of China) instead of Taiwan, R.O.C. (Republic of China). China started claiming that Taiwan was a part of its regime, prohibiting other countries from considering Taiwan as an independent country. In most international competitions and occasions today, China does not allow Taiwanese representatives to use the national flag and forces teams to title themselves "Chinese-Taipei" instead of "Taiwan."

Among the limitations imposed by Martial Law was the prohibition of dancing.<sup>105</sup> A governmental announcement in 1949 stated that it was illegal to dance in the guise of dance classes or practices, because "it was against morals."<sup>106</sup> It is unclear what in particular about dancing was deemed "immoral." Yet, *Female Analects*<sup>107</sup> teaches women "...not to move the knees when sitting; not to wave your skirt when standing; not to laugh out loud when feeling happy, and not to shout when feeling angry." Accordingly, one can notice that being elegant and silent has long been considered ideal for a woman

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<sup>105</sup> Prohibitions in many aspects came together. For example, certain hairstyle and length applied to middle and high school students; dialects were not allowed in the public, and everyone had to speak Mandarin Chinese (Hui-Ling Hu, *Hundreds Years of Pursue*, Taipei: Acropolis, 2013).

<sup>106</sup> Police Force. *The Taiwanese Province Public Announcement*, 1949. Taiwan. 296.

<sup>107</sup> *Female Analects* (女訓, some translated as *Analects on Women*) is a Chinese classical literature from the Song dynasty. It was one of the four books used on women's education, propagating ideologies of being "a good woman" in the feudal Chinese society.

in Chinese culture.<sup>108</sup> It is then not surprising that older generations consider dancing an inappropriate activity. Moreover, authorities under Martial Law used this ethnic tradition and ethnic expectation as an excuse to provide a pretext for surveilling or arresting individuals of interest to the police. According to the Policing Regulation announced in February 1957, no dancing venues were allowed except "...for foreign visitors, military alliances, and Taiwanese aliens, as well as where international ports located."<sup>109</sup> These particular restrictions prohibited people from holding dance parties, especially practicing partner dances, which were considered sexual and immoral and the police could claim the dancers illegal.<sup>110</sup> However, international and domestic folk dances, as well as ballet, were exempted from this law.<sup>111</sup> One of my interviewees, CS,<sup>112</sup> is now almost eighty years old. He suggested that international folk dancing was allowed because it was "America-related."<sup>113</sup> "My first dancing experience was at a military base of Taiwanese and US Army in my hometown, because that base was beyond the government's censorship," CS shared. It is clear that multiple factors, but in particular U.S. influence, were involved in international folk dancing being the only social dance form broadly allowed at that time. This dance form was promoted by the National Government, and many young people would participate in international folk dancing parties held by the

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<sup>108</sup> The word "Chinese" in this paragraph and in the previous footnote both refer to the Chinese culture. This concept of Chinese relates to all the "Chinese" people who share similar historical lineages, philosophies and ideologies, even though these people speak different Chinese languages (e.g. Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, or other dialects) or were born in different places in East Asia.

<sup>109</sup> "Regulation of Dance Space in Taiwan During Martial Law," National Central Library Gazette Online (Taipei: National Central Library), last modified September 11, 2009,

<http://gaz.ncl.edu.tw/detail.jsp?sysid=E09B4884>

<sup>110</sup> "Not only 'Prohibited Under 18:' Things You Did Not Know During Martial Law," Mirror Media, last modified 7 July, 2017, <https://www.mirrormedia.mg/story/20170707pol006/>

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> I am using initials to refer to all my interviewees, in order to keep them anonymous.

<sup>113</sup> C.S. Interviewed by Hsu, Tung, and Wu. February 6, 2018.

government in national celebrations. In October of 1975 the news reported, "...young people attended many festive events celebrating this day [Taiwan's thirty-year Restoration from Japan], and these events included sailing, international folk dancing, horse riding..."<sup>114</sup> International folk dancing was even selected as one of the four "national activities"—along with tai-chi, wai-tan-kung (wai-tan martial arts), and aerobics—in 1979, under the specific program propagated mainly by the Executive Yuan.<sup>115</sup> In August of 1979, the National Government made an announcement to schools and educational organizations, asking each institution to make efforts in strengthening physical education in its responsible district. Along with this announcement, furthermore, "...each residential community should expand the level of its physical scale of its physical events...in order to fulfill the goal of improving physical health of the general public [Taiwanese residents]." <sup>116</sup> Later, a series entitled *Handbook of Sports For All* was published by the Administrative of Education around 1981, including *Selection of International Folk Dancing (1)* and *(2)*. My other interviewees, JL, stated that when she was in college around 1980, international folk dancing was the only dance that could be popularized on campus—other dance forms could not be practiced publicly. "In opposite to international folk dancing activities, [such as] when we went clubbing, we had to be careful. The police could come anytime," JL said.

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<sup>114</sup> "Celebrating Taiwan's Thirty-year Restoration from Japan," Digital Taiwan- Culture and Nature (Taipei: Academia Sinica), accessed April 30, 2018, <http://catalog.digitalarchives.tw/item/00/3a/1a/6a.html>

<sup>115</sup> Encyclopedia of Taiwan, s.v. "Tu-Feng-Wu," last modified September 9, 2009, <http://nrch.culture.tw/twpedia.aspx?id=14963>

<sup>116</sup> "Popularization of General Physical Education," National Central Library Gazette Online, (Taipei: National Central Library), last modified November 1, 2007, <http://gaz.ncl.edu.tw/detail.jsp?sysid=E0750481>

By the end of the 1940s, the eruption of Korean War and the rise of Communism in China and possibly in North Vietnam threatened the United States and many other countries. Taiwan's geographical position made it an important base militarily, so Taiwan and the United States maintained a close political relationship before the diplomatic crisis happened in the 1970s. When the Korean War began in 1950, the United States Seventh Fleet was patrolling the Taiwan Strait between the island of Taiwan and Mainland China, and the US Navy Club was established in Taiwan. Moreover, as a world leading country after World War II, the United States provided assistance to many Asian countries, including Taiwan. Due to the above reasons, Taiwan and the United States had a close relationship in the beginning phase of the Martial Law Period. By the end of the 1950's, there already were American agricultural research teams visiting Taiwan for information and technical exchanges. Throughout the 1950's, the United States sold many weapons and military equipment to Taiwan, as well as provided daily commodities, such as flour and milk, to Taiwan. In formal and informal conversations during my fieldwork, many people shared with me that their parents would use the material of flour bags with "U.S.A. product" printed on it to make clothing for them.<sup>117</sup>

The historical incidents, including the wars between the National Government, Chang Kai-Shek's retreat to Taiwan, and the Chinese Communists' occupation of Mainland China, have created a sense of ambiguity in the past and current political relationship between Taiwan and China, not only within Taiwan but also on the global stage. Previous generations of Taiwanese people viewed the Communist Party as an

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<sup>117</sup> W.H. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. November 9, 2016; W.L. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. April 10, 2017; Field notes. February 2016. Taipei, Taiwan.

illegitimate government, and the National Government as eventually fighting back to “free the mainland” some day. Younger generations have not taken up this mission of fighting back against China, and they now consider Taiwan an independent country. Even though Chiang Ching-Kuo, then the president of Taiwan and the son of Chiang Kai-Shek, lifted Martial Law in July 1987, these ambiguities in Taiwanese/Chinese identity remain up through the present day. China has continued to claim that Taiwan is a part of its regime; specifically during the 1980s and 1990s, it threatened to use military force against an independent Taiwan. This fact is worth noting because China’s threats from the 1970s since Taiwan left the United Nation to the 1990s were one of the causes of the wave of Taiwanese migration to the United States, an incident that I consider as the making of the “Taiwanese diaspora.”<sup>118</sup> Many investigations on the Martial Law Period fall into categories of Taiwanese history, studies of the Cold War, diplomatic relations of Taiwan and political tensions between Taiwan and China, as well as governmental policies and oppression of human rights during the historical period. Dance Studies have rarely been included within investigations of Martial Law, and my interrogation of international folk dancing serves as a means of adding Dance Studies to this historical examination.

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<sup>118</sup> This will be the subject of Chapter Two.

## International Folk Dancing: A Transnational Embodiment

International folk dancing was introduced to Taiwan from the United States in the 1950s. Arranged by the U.S.-based International Recreation Association (IRA)<sup>119</sup> and the American Institution in Taiwan (AIT), Rickey Holden<sup>120</sup> came to Taiwan in 1957 and shared thirty folk dances from around the world with 123 people, most of whom were elementary school teachers. Holden's visit was the first international folk dancing workshop taught by foreign instructors in Taiwan. Due to the National Government's support of two visits by Holden as well as the trips by the Kidd, Rosenbers, and Foster<sup>121</sup> to deliver international folk dancing workshops in Taiwan in the 1960s, the popularity of international folk dancing began to increase.

As political and military relationships between Taiwan and the United States got closer and closer throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the two nations also started artistic exchanges from this time period.<sup>122</sup> International folk dancing, the major recreational activity for many Taiwanese people, flourished as well. Furthermore, the National Government assigned the Department of Education the responsibility of popularizing international folk dancing throughout the entire country. For example, there were national

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<sup>119</sup> In 1973, it changed its name to WLRA (World Leisure and Recreation Association), and is now known as WLO (World Leisure Organization).

<sup>120</sup> An American square dancing and international folk dancing instructor, Holden was the first instructor to teach international folk dancing around the world, and he held workshops in more than eighty countries in Asia, Europe, and South America.

<sup>121</sup> Ji Chen, "Discussing the Inconsistency of Doing International Folk Dancing," 1965.

<sup>122</sup> For example, the Paul Taylor Company visited Taipei in March 1967. Two ballet companies from New York also performed in Taiwan in 1969. (China Times Organization. *Taiwan: Fifty Years of the Post-war*, 1995; "Ballet," *Art and Culture Database of ZSH*, accessed April 3, 2018.

[http://www.zsh2.gov.tapei/cht/index.php?act=metadata&code=list\\_s&main=3&sec=14](http://www.zsh2.gov.tapei/cht/index.php?act=metadata&code=list_s&main=3&sec=14)

workshops with pedagogical materials for training international folk dancing instructors printed by the YMCA or the International Folk Dancing Research Center.<sup>123</sup>

It is worth dwelling a bit on these pedagogical materials. Because these documents are so old and hard to find in libraries, many current international folk dancers do not have access to them. Through my interviews with some prestigious dancers and instructors, I was lucky enough to have a glance at some of these historical sources. These documents were printed with letterpress printing, and some of the covers were even drawn by hand. One handbook bound with three rusty binders caught my attention, as this handbook had lost its cover and its table of contents looked like it was hand-written. The table of contents shows the thirty-five folk dances from more than ten countries, including German, Hungary, Russia, Indonesia, and the United States. This handbook, like many of the other international folk dancing teaching materials, consists of notations and background information of some selected folk dances. These folk dances are often selected due to intentions of publication, such as dances for beginners or advanced dancers, or introductions to specific regional dances. It is crucial to note that these notations are not at all the same as Labanotations,<sup>124</sup> but are literal descriptions of folk dances. For instance, the first line of a dance note reads, “(Three counts) Face center of the circle, right foot steps front and bent the right knee (1); move the body weight to

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<sup>123</sup> Being active between 1957-1968, the International Folk Dancing Research Center was founded with the support the International House of Taipei and its executive director Mr. Ming-Hsin Tang. Dance workshops and parties were held in the International House of Taipei, and the committee members of the Research Center also published dance notes and teaching materials.

<sup>124</sup> Labanotation is a notation system for recording and analyzing human movements, originated by dance theorist Rudolf Laban. For more information about this notation system, please refer to “Labanotation” on *Encyclopedia Britannica* (<https://www.britannica.com/art/labnotation>).

the left (2); right foot steps next to the left (3).”<sup>125</sup> Therefore in my research, I hesitate to use “dance notations” to describe these materials, but would rather use the term “dance descriptions,” to avoid the confusion between folk dancing notes and the Laban Notation. Even though video recording is commonly used today in dance learning, a lot of international folk dancers maintain this habit of writing dance descriptions because many dance instructors firmly protect their right of portrait and refuse to be recorded, while writing one’s own dance description is also a good way to strengthen their memories of newly-taught dances.<sup>126</sup>

Aside from sponsoring workshops and supporting the publication of teaching materials, the National Government also established folk dancing committees to provide consultants for teaching folk dancing in each county in Taiwan.<sup>127</sup> These commitments to international folk dancing in Taiwan demonstrate the importance of this dance practice during this time period, and show how the government encouraged people to devote themselves to related activities.<sup>128</sup> According to my casual conversations with many Taiwanese practitioners, they were introduced to several international folk dances—such as a German dance called Siebenschritt (Seven Steps) and Mayim the Israeli circle dance—when they were in elementary schools in the 1960s.<sup>129</sup> These two dance examples

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<sup>125</sup> (Three counts) reminds the reader that he/she needs to finish the following movements within three counts. (1) means the first count of these three counts; This is the dance note of a Turkish dance called *Lacin*, meaning “love.” It is choreographed by the Turkish instructor Ahmet Luleci.

<sup>126</sup> C.C. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. August 4, 2016; Field note. July 2016. Taipei, Taiwan.

<sup>127</sup> These committee members were selected strictly. Each country had only two representatives, and the government compensated all expenses during the training, which often lasted for many days.

<sup>128</sup> In the international folk dancing community in Taiwan, young dancers often learn the dance practice’s history and knowledge from their dance instructors or senior dancers in the community. There seem to be few reliable sources to quote from.

<sup>129</sup> B.C. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. September 25, 2016; Field note. April 2017. San Francisco, CA; Field note. May 2017. San Jose, CA.

that they provided to me, unsurprisingly, were introduced by Rickey Holden during his first visit to Taiwan.

Strict prohibitions during Martial Law and an extremely conservative society during that time led to the emergence of a sub-category of international folk dancing—“self-choreographed dances.” In international folk dancing communities around the world, people often put national names next to dance titles, so that participants know where these dances originated even though the choreographers are unknown. For example, dancers would see “Jove Malaj Mome (Bulgaria)” on a party repertoire and understand that Jove Malaj Mome is a Bulgarian dance without the need of understanding Bulgarian. In Taiwan, there is a category called “self-choreographed dancing,”<sup>130</sup> and this term is put next to the title of the dance rather than the name of any nation. This category refers to dances choreographed by Taiwanese practitioners, inspired by certain nation-specific folk techniques, who combine these regional features with contemporary popular music to produce new dance pieces. In other words, these dances have not been passed down generation to generation, are not composed entirely of regional folk elements, and current practitioners often acknowledge their choreographers. Chapter Three will address questions such as whether international folk dancers have the right to choreograph, and address why people question the level of being traditional if this dance form is “international.” Here I intend to focus on the historical background and possible political functions of “self-choreographed dancing.”

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<sup>130</sup> According to my California-based interviewees and my own observation, this category seems to exist only in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and in the Taiwanese international folk dancing communities in California. As I investigate causes of this sub-category in Taiwan in my dissertation, I will expand my research on “self-choreographies” in other Asian countries in the future.

Looked at through a historical lens, this specific term, “self-choreographing,” can again be traced back to the early Martial Law Period. One of my interviewees, FC, has devoted herself to international folk dancing for over fifty years and is now over seventy years old. She suggested to me that, earlier in Taiwan, the dance instructors choreographed “because of the social environment, because the existing dances from abroad were not enough.”<sup>131</sup> Another interviewee, LK, started practicing international folk dancing in the mid-1980s as a college student. He also shared that “During the Martial Law period, there was a heavy need for new dances [because international folk dancing was the only permitted social dance form]. However, Taiwanese people at that time did not have much access to resources importing from other countries. Instructor Chang<sup>132</sup> and some other leading instructors started choreographing dances to teach at regular gathering and classes.” These instructors started choreographing to “international music”<sup>133</sup> in order to satisfy people’s eagerness and expectations of learning new dances at different camps, workshops, and parties. This sub-genre of “self-choreographed dancing” thus emerged and included a wide variety of styles. Among them, “Western ballroom dancing-inspired”<sup>134</sup> elements were very popular, because people had rarely seen these genres of dance.

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<sup>131</sup> F.C. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. February 3, 2017.

<sup>132</sup> Ching-San Chang was a prestigious international folk dancing instructor who passed away about thirty years ago on a trip teaching international folk dancing. Throughout his life, he translated and published a lot of folk dancing related books and teaching materials. He also choreographed for the community during the times when incoming dancing resources were scarce. He is considered “the father of international folk dancing” in Taiwan.

<sup>133</sup> This refers to music genres that are foreign to Taiwanese music, or more generally, Taiwanese culture.

<sup>134</sup> Ballroom dancing is a social dance form that can be practiced socially or competitively. I use this term to specifically refer to tango, waltz, cha-cha, salsa, and other partner dance forms practiced more internationally.

Another necessity for choreographing new dances during the Martial Law Period was the conservative social norms and their limitations. For example, even until the 1990s, some prestigious middle schools maintained boys and girls in separated classrooms. In earlier Taiwan, men and women were not allowed to dance in closed position<sup>135</sup> when doing couple dances, and were only permitted with handholding position (i.e. contact with the palms). Therefore, not only did the instructors have to alter the posture of many couple dances from outside of Taiwan, but they also had to apply the handholding position to the couple dances they choreographed, making these choreographies “specifically-designed” for the Taiwanese dancers during the Martial Law Period.

The third reason for self-choreographed dancing’s emergence was only mentioned by a few Taiwanese people I talked to, but I suggest that this reason is also an important one because it has brought up more complicated interpretations of what “international” and “folk” are. Due to the fact that international folk dancing was first introduced to Taiwan by instructors from the United States, it was associated with American culture. Many practitioners thus believed that only folk dances from the United States (or more broadly, from the West) were international folk dancing. Some Taiwanese dancers then started questioning this definition of international folk dancing, asking why Taiwanese and Chinese dances were not included if this dance genre claimed itself as “international”

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<sup>135</sup> Closed position is form of partner dancing position that uses body contact to support each other. If comfortable with each other, body contact is not limited to using their arms and can increase the level of connection.

and “folk.”<sup>136</sup> Therefore, some practitioners choreographed Chinese and Taiwanese folk dances based on their own knowledge. This action not only added new styles to the sub-genre of self-choreographing and complicated ideas of international and folk, but also created an overlap between international folk dancing and Chinese ethnic dancing, which is another specific dance form in Taiwan.<sup>137</sup>

Examining the phenomenon of “self-choreographing” through a contemporary lens, I suggest that there were different levels of choreographing. For instance, alternating a closed position in couple’s dances with a palm-holding gesture is partial self-choreographing, as this small change was applied to existing dances in order to fit social norms and restrictions. Choreographing new dances for a large population of practitioners was a complete self-choreographing because the instructors selected preferred music and dance steps to create new things that met the demand for a large quantity of dance pieces of the society at that time. Lastly, the government played along with the trend, using self-choreographed dances as a means of propagating its national ideologies (e.g. claiming its own legitimacy of both China and Taiwan, or advocating patriotism to Taiwanese people). I consider the need for choreographing new folk dances during Martial Law the resulting feature of a desire to represent Taiwanese-ness. In Chapter Three, I will explore how the practice of international folk dancing in Taiwan delivers the notion of Taiwanese-ness while complicating this dance form’s internationality. In the meantime, I

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<sup>136</sup> Field note. October 2016. Taipei, Taiwan.

<sup>137</sup> Please see next section of this chapter for discussions on Chinese ethnic dance. For more investigations of Chinese ethnic dance, please see Tu-Yu Yang, “The Relationship Between Dance Performing Art and the Contemporary Society in Taiwan (From 1930’s to 200)” (Ph.D. National Central University, 2003); Tien-Min Lee, *A History of Dance in Taiwan* (Da-Jiuan, 2005); Szu-Ching Chang, *Dancing with Nostalgia in Taiwanese Contemporary “Traditional” Dance* (Ph.D. University of California, Riverside, 2011).

emphasize that this sense of Taiwanese-ness can be seen through the different levels of self-choreographing mentioned above. Taking the handholding gesture for example, even though these couple's dances were mainly choreographed with Western ballroom dancing steps, these dances presented a local feature of Taiwan through the adjustment of handholding positions as a result of political reasons and social norms.

## **1.2 Dance Landscape During the Taiwanese Martial Law Period and Taiwanese Nationalism**

International folk dancing during Martial Law is worth investigating because, as I maintain, this dance form complicates conventional understandings of the ways that governments promote nationalism. National governments typically use the arts of their own culture or majority ethnic group as a means of promoting national unity and of creating a sense of sameness among their people. For example, *The Body of The People* by Jen Giersdorf investigates how the German Democratic Republic (GDR) utilized German folk dance as a tool for ruling East Germany. Giersdorf argues that German artists' choreographies can be viewed as a combination of folk vocabularies and the Soviet and German mass movements, with the final purpose of reinventing traditions.<sup>138</sup>

Dance scholar Rachmi Diyah Larasati also reiterates the “duplicated” Indonesian

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<sup>138</sup> Regarding issues of nationalism in dance, please see Marta Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (Westview Press, 1995); Yu-Ling Chao, *Dance, culture and nationalism: the Socio-cultural Significance of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre in Taiwanese Society* (Ph.D. City University, 2000); Szu-Ching Chang, *Dancing with Nostalgia in Taiwanese Contemporary “Traditional” Dance* (Ph.D. University of California, Riverside, 2011); Christina Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012); Prarthana Purkayastha, “Dancing Otherness: Nationalism, Transnationalism, and the Work of Uday Shankar” (*Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 44, Issue 01, Online, 2012); Jose Reynoso, “Choreographing Modern Mexico: Anna Pavlova in Mexico City (1919)” (Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

classical dance used as a tool for virtual dictatorship under the Suharto regime.<sup>139</sup> While many Indonesian court dancers and musicians were suspected as left-leaning and therefore vanished, selected new artists were trained by the Indonesian government to perform this traditional culture, which Larasati argues became "...a tool to mediate the needs of the nation-state and foreign institutional agendas in their cultural projects."<sup>140</sup> In contrast to these examples, the case of international folk dancing during the Taiwanese Martial Law Period was not typical, as the National Government did not use Taiwan's own cultural arts to promote its political ideologies and ideal citizenship. Instead, the Government adapted so-called "American culture"<sup>141</sup> to affirm Taiwan's international position and support.

It is important to define what "American culture" here refers to. CS, who is now over eighty, was one of the most prestigious dance instructors in Taiwan. As a leader of international folk dancing in Taiwan under Martial Law, he was also one of a few Taiwanese people who could travel to the United States to participate in some famous, international-level folk dancing camps. CS shared that the American pioneer in international folk dancing, Michael Herman, called this dance form "the American culture." From today's point of view, it is not hard to understand that international folk dancing might be one representation of the United States at that time, but definitely was not the only one that portrayed the culture of the United States. However, in times when Taiwanese people could hardly get in touch with the outside world, Herman's words

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<sup>139</sup> Rachmi Diyah Larasati, *The Dance That Makes You Vanish: Cultural Reconstruction in Post-Genocide Indonesia* (MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>141</sup> C.S. Interviewed by Hsu, Tung, and Wu. February 7, 2018.

became the truth that delineated an imagined picture of the origin of international folk dancing for the Taiwanese. In addition, even though the Taiwanese international folk dancers believed that this dance practice equaled the American culture, the Taiwanese people and the National Government both took advantage of this dance form for their own use. On the one hand, the National Government's understanding that international folk dancing was the representation of the United States convinced the Government to encourage Taiwanese people to pursue this embodiment to show the nation's connection with this Western, leading country. On the other hand, Taiwanese people's practice of international folk dancing echoed dance scholar Christina Ezrahi and her idea of resistance.<sup>142</sup> By investigating how Russian artists used classical ballet to push the boundaries of political restrictions set by the Soviet regime, she views "artistic repossession"<sup>143</sup> as a kind of subversion, "...because it embodies tactics that operate within the system but seek to use the system to promote goals foreign to it."<sup>144</sup> Similar to Ezrahi's examination, some Taiwanese dancers used international folk dancing as a strategic cover. For instance, some instructors choreographed dances inspired by prohibited couples' dancing such as the waltz, cha-cha, or tango, categorizing these self-choreographed dances as international folk dancing to tactically avoid governmental censorship, while still satisfying people's desire of learning up-to-date dance styles.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Christina Ezrahi, *Swan of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia* (PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 8.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>145</sup> E.C. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. June 12, 2017.

Indeed, some elders also told me that there were studios advertising for international folk dancing, but instead taught the illicit international standard dancing.<sup>146</sup>

Even though international folk dancing was flourishing during the Taiwanese Martial Law Period, few studies discussed this dance form. Regarding dance forms that served as a political tool in Taiwanese contemporary history, many scholars have investigated Taiwanese/Chinese identity and nationalism through their research on Chinese ethnic dance competitions during Martial Law and on the Cloud Gate Theatre<sup>147</sup> and its productions, and these investigations will be discussed in the following paragraphs. However, as dance scholar Judith Hamera argues, amateur dance practices should be valued as equally important bodily laboratories that negotiate issues of gender, sexuality, race, class, and culture in urban life.<sup>148</sup> Existing endeavors on Taiwanese dance mostly focus on onstage performances with professional dancers. Though international folk dancing, as a social dance form, is practiced by non-professionals in general, it too created a pathway to work through issues of identity and nationalism. As I will discuss in Chapter Three, international folk dancing and its Chinese translations problematize issues of folk, internationality, identity, and authenticity. In this section, I interrogate how the state used the body through international folk dancing during the Taiwanese Martial Law Period. Due to the fact that few Taiwanese historical studies talk about international folk dancing, I cite not only works written by scholars in Dance Studies and Taiwanese

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<sup>146</sup> Field note. August 2015. Taipei, Taiwan; Field note. September 2016. Taipei, Taiwan.

<sup>147</sup> I refer to the Cloud Gate Dance Theatre as Cloud Gate in the rest of the dissertation.

<sup>148</sup> Judith Hamera, *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference and Connection in the Global City* (UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

history, but also folk dancing-related publications in the 1970's and teaching repertoires of early dance camps in Taiwan.

As mentioned, many scholars who did research on the dance landscape during the Taiwanese Martial Law Period focused on the Chinese ethnic dance competition and Cloud Gate, which is Taiwan's now-famous contemporary dance company founded during Martial Law. Chinese ethnic dance<sup>149</sup> competition started in 1954 and was held by the Chinese Ethnic Dance Implementation Committee.<sup>150</sup> This competition was a major dance symbol of nationalism under the National Government's domination and was planned and publicized by the National Government. It aimed to promote Chinese cultures to the Taiwanese people and to ultimately convince the public that the Government, instead of the Communist China, owned the legitimacy of Mainland China.<sup>151</sup> The competition was somewhat of a forced activity in dance schools and collegiate-level dance departments in Taiwan, but it motivated (and continues to motivate) people within Taiwan's dance landscape because of the opportunity to win prizes and status.<sup>152</sup> Dance scholar Szu-Ching Chang examines the Chinese ethnic competition, but she uses the Chinese term "min-zu" instead of "ethnic" in her writing.

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<sup>149</sup> Mentioned in the Introduction, "ethnic (min-zu) dance" was an invented term for Taiwanese people to specifically refer to "Chinese dances," which includes Chinese folk dances and classical dances. This dance form and its competitions served as a means of legitimizing the National Government's claim to Mainland China and of promoting Taiwanese identity after Japan's colonization between WWI and WWII.

<sup>150</sup> In November 1952, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of National Defense, and the Ministry of the Interior together established the Chinese Ethnic Dance Implementation Committee, invited many Taiwanese artists and professionals in dance, music, and fine art, in order to promote Chinese ethnic dance to a national level.

<sup>151</sup> This "China" refers to the geographical China, while the "Communist China" refers to the political party that took over the land in late 1940's.

<sup>152</sup> Wei-Ying Hsu, "Investigating the Cloud Gate Theatre's Founding Mechanism Within the Dance Field in the 1970s Taiwan," The 6<sup>th</sup> Taiwanese Social Theory Conference. October 2, 2009. Tunghai University, Taichung, Taiwan. 11.

She argues that “min-zu” is ambiguous and “reveals the problematic construction of ‘Chineseness’ and its changing definitions in Taiwan.”<sup>153</sup> On the one hand, the “Chinese folk dances” within the “min-zu (ethnic) dance” include many minority groups in Mainland China; however, these folk dances were imagined and choreographed in Taiwan. On the other hand, the “Chinese classical dance,” which is another sub-category within the “min-zu (ethnic) dance,” was based on the 5000-year Chinese history and culture. Even though the Chinese ethnic dance competition experienced changes of its categories,<sup>154</sup> now with the four competing categories as Chinese classical dance, Chinese ethnic dance, Contemporary dance, and dancing for children, the notion of “the Chinese culture” continues to be emphasized. Chinese ethnic dance has functioned as a tool for the National Government to propagate the legitimacy of the Mainland and its Chineseness. Promotion of the ethnic dance competition during Martial Law Period within Taiwan also performed a sense of nostalgia for the lost Mainland China.<sup>155</sup>

Nationalism was not limited to the government’s promotion, but also occurred in the private dance companies that began to appear during the later years of the Martial Law Period. These companies offered performances of dance forms beyond those that had received government support. For example, Cloud Gate was also founded in the

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<sup>153</sup> Szu-Ching Chang, *Dancing With Nostalgia in Taiwanese Contemporary “Traditional” Dance* (Ph.D. University of California, Riverside, 2011), 48.

<sup>154</sup> In the 1970s, the categories of the Chinese ethnic dance competition had changed from war dance, labor dance, recreational dance, etiquette dance, and performance dance to the currently-used four categories; Wei-Ying Hsu, “Investigating the Cloud Gate Theatre’s Founding Mechanism Within the Dance Field in the 1970s Taiwan,” The 6<sup>th</sup> Taiwanese Social Theory Conference. October 2, 2009. Tunghai University, Taichung, Taiwan. 13.

<sup>155</sup> For complete dance history of Taiwan, please refer to Ministry of Culture, Taiwan, *Taiwanese Dance History Conference Proceedings (1945-1964)* (1995); Tien-Min Lee, *A History of Dance in Taiwan* (Da-Jiuan, 2005); Ya-Ping Chen, “Taiwan Historical Research in Dance (1995-2013): Retrospect and Prospect” (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2014); Wei-Yin Hsu, *Dance of Sunset: Stories and Breakthrough of Dance Pioneers in Taiwan* (Taipei: Linking Books, 2018).

1970s, when Taiwan was facing its political and diplomatic crisis. Its founder, Hwai-Min Lin, determined to establish a company with Chinese artists who choreographed and danced modern dance for the Chinese people using Chinese cultural influences.<sup>156</sup> Cloud Gate's invention and promotion of "Chinese contemporary dance"<sup>157</sup> has been examined by many dance scholars and proposed as another form of Taiwanese nationalism, which is dissimilar to the nationalism propagated by the National Government. While the National Government emphasized its legitimacy over Taiwan and Mainland China by propagating in many ways to its people, Lin and his choreographies combined Chinese history and literature with Western dance techniques, highlighting the possibility that Chinese and Taiwanese<sup>158</sup> people could seek innovative paths for the future of the nation and ethnicity.

I argue that the first significant way the state used international folk dancing and the Taiwanese body was by allowing people to conduct this *transnational embodiment*, thereby enabling Taiwan to form a connection with the United States. As mentioned previously, the rising Communist power in some Eastern countries forced the United States to value Taiwan's geographic advantage and to build military cooperation, in order to prevent the expansion of Communism. In 1954, the Republic of China (R.O.C.),

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<sup>156</sup> Many books and periodicals mention Lin's ideology of founding Cloud Gate. This quotation even appeared in the 2005 Assessment of Middle School Teachers of Performing Arts. However, in Lin's original statement, he did not specifically state that he was choreographing modern/contemporary dance.

<sup>157</sup> Wei-Ying Hsu, "Investigating the Cloud Gate Theatre's Founding Mechanism Within the Dance Field in the 1970s Taiwan," The 6<sup>th</sup> Taiwanese Social Theory Conference. October 2, 2009. Tunghai University, Taichung, Taiwan.

<sup>158</sup> Lin used the word "Chinese people" when he expressed his ideologies founding his dance company in the 1970s. Today, as social, cultural and political backgrounds in Taiwan have changed, I think it is more accurate to translate his words as "Taiwanese people." Thus I provide both terms here in my writing for readers to choose the one that fits their interpretations the best.

currently known as Taiwan) and the United States signed the *Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States of America and the Republic of China*, which prevented the island of Taiwan from being taken by China.<sup>159</sup> The United States not only sold missiles, jets and other military equipment but also provided financial aid to Taiwan beginning in the 1950s. This political connection ended in January 1979, when the United States started an official diplomatic relationship with China and broke kinship with Taiwan. When I interviewed FC, a Taiwanese dancer who is now over seventy years old, she seemed to appreciate the United States' involvement in Taiwanese society. She said, "...the United States helped some developing Asian countries and would provide us milk, flour, and some other things."<sup>160</sup> Though not a daily commodity, international folk dancing was imported in the same time period. Arranged by the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), Rickey Holden visited Taiwan twice—in 1957 and 1960. Holden's teaching materials were also printed by the AIT.<sup>161</sup> In this early stage of the introduction of international folk dancing to Taiwan, some other American instructors also visited the country, including Josephine Kidd, Dave Rosenbers, and Jean Foster.<sup>162</sup> From military cooperation to connections on cultural work, Taiwan was closely associated with the United States in many respects, and international folk dancing was an important channel of affiliation.

The second way the state used the Taiwanese body was by promoting nationalism in the name of international folk dancing. Even though Taiwanese people started

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<sup>159</sup> Wenjing Yuan, "Introduction," *Triangular Relationships between the U.S., Taiwan And China* (Taipei: Guoji Xianshi Zhoukan She, 1981).

<sup>160</sup> F.C. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. February 3, 2017.

<sup>161</sup> Ji Chen, *International Folk Dancing Collections* (Taiwan: Jong Wen Books, 1985).

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

practicing international folk dancing because of the United States' influence, the contents of international folk dancing were not fully duplicated from the repertoires taught by those instructors from the United States. The sub-genre known as self-choreographies, mentioned in the earlier paragraph, is a suitable example. I consider the emergence of "self-choreographed" dances to be a result of forced isolation between male and female dancers in the conservative Taiwanese society. The National Government also recognized the power of this sub-genre of international folk dancing and took advantage of it to promote nationalism.

According to my archival research in dance repertoires of Taiwanese international folk dancing communities in different places<sup>163</sup> and of different time periods,<sup>164</sup> there were many self-choreographed dances produced during the Martial Law Period that were choreographed to patriotic songs. Some of these songs told stories about how national heroes fought back against the Axis parties during World War II or simply promoted patriotic ideologies, such as *Peach and Plum Blossoms Everywhere*,<sup>165</sup> which was the theme song of the patriotic movie *A Teacher of Great Soldiers*. Some others, such as *Descendent of Tangshan*, reminded the audience that they carried the Chinese genealogy and culture in their blood.<sup>166</sup> Still others described cultural and geographical beauties of

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<sup>163</sup> I collected and analyzed repertoires of parties held in Taipei and Kaohsiung, Taiwan, as well as San Jose and Monterey Park, California.

<sup>164</sup> Some party organizers would specify the time periods of dances they chose for those parties, for example, "dances of the 70s" or "dances before 1987." By examining these dance lists, I can get a sense of the preferred dance styles of specific periods.

<sup>165</sup> This is a literal translation, which actually means "students everywhere." The phrase "peaches and plums" in Mandarin Chinese is a metaphor of students.

<sup>166</sup> These kinds of songs are understood by some Taiwanese people to say that Mainland China is their "ultimate homeland." However, the songs can also be viewed as a claim that Taiwanese and Chinese people are together as "a family." Either way, these songs were used as political promotions in earlier Taiwan.

Mainland China and Taiwan, implying that one day the National Government would take back the land of China. There were also songs that combined praises of the nation, the land, and the sovereignty of government. For example, *The Great Taiwan* song's lyrics read: "...Taiwan is the island of revival [to China]...our patriotic emotion is higher than the A-Li Mountain." While the lyrics played a crucial role in propagating patriotic ideologies, some movements of the dances choreographed to those songs also fulfilled this patriotic objective. For example, stepping in place with the knees lifting high was an imitation of a march of the army. Placing the right hand on the forehead was another obvious corporeal representation of military. International folk dancers in pre-1980s Taiwan relied heavily on two resources for learning new dances—either introductions from the United States or choreographies of local instructors. Whichever the case, under the censorship of the National Government, self-choreographed dancing became an efficient way to make international folk dancing an advertisement of Taiwanese nationalism patriotism. The slight patriotic twists of international folk dancing, a dance form originated in the United States, implies an idea of Taiwanese-ness that is unique among the international folk dancing bodies around the world. Moreover, this dance form has come to be seen as less exclusively American in Taiwan's dance landscape over time, due to the fact that self-choreographed dancing and other sub-genres have continued adding varieties and augmenting the proportion of local genres in the Taiwanese international folk dancing communities. The notion of Taiwanese-ness delineated by Taiwanese people's practice of international folk dancing will appear in the later chapters.

Nationalism has not only been shown in governmental policies, but can also appear inevitably in daily lives. In *How To Do Things With Dance*, Rebekah Kowal investigates the cultural history of postwar America through the lens of modern dance, claiming “...modern dances accomplished acts of social and cultural change by challenging normative distinctions between the symbolic and the actual.”<sup>167</sup> Her argument that dance can function as a reflection of people’s decision-makings and responses to social affairs echoes my perspectives on the influence of international folk dancing. I view international folk dancing as a “compensation” that the National Government gave to the Taiwanese people who suffered the lack of freedom during Martial Law. As I will emphasize in the last part of this chapter, international folk dancing is not merely a dance activity but a way of living, although it has fallen out of the mainstream in Taiwanese society. I reiterate here that this *transnational embodiment* created contradiction and a sense of compensating for its Taiwanese practitioners. This means that during the Martial Law Period, Taiwanese people suffered from the lack of physical freedom. Specifically, people were not allowed to travel abroad. CS, an interviewee who is now over eighty years old, mentioned how difficult it was for him to go to the United Kingdom to learn dancing even in the late 1970s, which was the last phase of Martial Law. Another interviewee, HD, who is about ten years younger than CS, moved to the United States to pursue his master’s degree in the early 1970’s. He appreciated acquiring the chance to study abroad with fellowships, saying that it was even harder for Taiwanese students to leave the country before the 1970’s. He noted, “Before my time, a student needed to go

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<sup>167</sup> Rebekah J. Kowal, *How To Do Things With Dance: Performing Change in Postwar America* (CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 195.

through scholarly exams, and there was regulation of how much foreign money one could hold. Basically, without scholarships provided by American institutions, it was impossible for a person to leave the country.”

“I have realized how big this world might be after I started practicing international folk dancing,” RH said. Our interview took place in a tea place close to the plaza where international folk dancing activities often occurred from the 1980s to 2000s. This fact seemed meaningful for RH, who is now over fifty and once served as president of his vocational school’s international folk dancing club. He made the strong statement above and told me how thankful he was being able to encounter this dance practice. His words also revealed Taiwan’s social environment in the early 1980’s. Not only did Martial Law prohibit Taiwanese people from leaving the country, but many Taiwanese families were not in good financial standing during the post-WW II era, and were unable to afford travel abroad. As RH reiterated, “[Some people]...did not even have enough money for higher education.”<sup>168</sup> These social conditions heavily contributed to international folk dancing’s function; the dance was a way for many Taiwanese people to “look outward” and to develop a more worldly point of view while being restricted physically.

In *Choreographic Politics*, Anthony Shay argues that “representation is a form of power: the power of describing others either verbally or choreographically.”

Interestingly, the above section demonstrates how the National Government used cultures of “others” and the body of its people to fulfill the state’s nationalism. I suggest that during Taiwanese Martial Law Period, international folk dancing was a way for the

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<sup>168</sup> R.H. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. July 14, 2016.

National Government to perpetuate its political ideals of the alignment with the United States, the resistance to Communism, and its subtle claim to Mainland China. From Taiwanese people's point of view, however, the dance practice provided a method by which young people at that time could gain a broader view of the global society. This section maintains that "folk" can construct identities in an indirect way; by embodying others' cultures, the Taiwanese practitioners construct Taiwanese-ness through their *transnational embodiment* of international folk dancing. In the following, I will suggest that international folk dancing is valuable not only because it contains various sub-genres of dance, but also because it is a social dance form that still serves its community in various flexible ways even after Martial Law was lifted.

### **1.3 International Folk Dancing in the Post-Martial Law Era**

The Taiwanese Martial Law was lifted in July 1987 by President Chiang Ching-Kuo. The termination of Martial Law meant more political and social freedom, as well as the introduction of other dance forms, such as competitive ballroom dancing and hip hop. Acceptance of these newly imported dances truly affected the progression of international folk dancing; the most significant impact was the two-group division of this dance form in current Taiwan. This section starts from the parting ways of these two sub-groups—"semi-professional dance community" and "housewives' dance community," focusing on the contemporary development of the prior in the post-Martial Law era. Following the threads, I will discuss how international folk dancing works in contemporary Taiwan, and how current practitioners still consider this *transnational embodiment* as a way of living

even after Martial Law was lifted and this community faced the crisis of declining participation.

In 1979, eight years before Taiwanese Martial Law was lifted, the United States built a diplomatic relationship with China, P.R.C., and claimed that from then on it would not have an official relationship with Taiwan, R.O.C. Since then, Taiwan's global position has been in crisis, and the Taiwanese people started seeking various channels and methods to express the Taiwanese identity. It was also the inspiration for the founding of Cloud Gate, which was established in 1973, when Taiwan lost its seat in the United Nations. This Taiwanese dance company soon became a significant representation of the Taiwanese identity and Taiwanese people's "...reflection and recreation on our own culture, as well as a new realm created by ourselves to show our dignity."<sup>169</sup> The fall-out between Taiwan and the United States, the welcoming of outside information—including dances other than international folk dancing—in the last phase of the Martial Law Period have made international folk dancing into a "residual practice."

I borrow the idea of "residual practice" from the cultural studies scholar Raymond Williams. According to Williams, the residual "...has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present."<sup>170</sup> In other words, residual means that old cultural practices are still consciously or unconsciously having an impact on contemporary societies; while those cultural elements are passed down and are still

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<sup>169</sup> Hsu, Wei-Ying. "Investigating the Cloud Gate Theatre's Founding Mechanism Within the Dance Field in the 1970s Taiwan." The 6<sup>th</sup> Taiwanese Social Theory Conference. October 2, 2009. Tunghai University, Taichung, Taiwan. 4.

<sup>170</sup> Williams, Raymond. "Dominant, Residual, and Emergent." In *Marxism and Literature* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1977), 122.

recognized, the meanings have changed or disappeared. International folk dancing demonstrates Williams's idea of residual practice, but gives a slight twist to it. Unlike Williams's argument that residual cultural elements constantly influence the society, this dance practice is now much less incorporated into the dominant culture. As it is sad to admit that international folk dancing has minor impact to the society, it is also worth asking, "What happens to this practice that was once a national form and is now no longer dominant?" Additionally, Williams asserts that residual practices are somewhat selected by the dominant, that "...the dominant culture cannot allow too much residual experience and practice outside itself, at least without risk."<sup>171</sup> Dissimilarly, international folk dancing was not chosen by current Taiwanese society. This dance form has survived and become a residual practice by itself, and it still has specific functions in contemporary Taiwan.

After Martial Law was lifted in 1987, other dance forms proliferated, making international folk dancing an old-fashioned one that became a symbol of specific generations that had experienced the past (i.e. Martial Law Period) for young people in Taiwan. As a residual dance form, whose explicit nationalistic functions are no longer needed, international folk dancing is still one of many embodiments on the Taiwanese landscape. It provides us a pathway for reconsidering, in a more nuanced manner, the functions of international folk dancing in modern Taiwanese society, especially in light of current global politics. This section that focuses on international folk dancing's development in the post-Martial Law era suggests that the importance of *transnational*

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 123.

*embodiment* within international folk dancing is now less significant. In other words, this dance form was a means of understanding the outside world even amidst serious restrictions on physical travel and on other forms of media communications, and now, Taiwan can be in the midst of global flow without the assistance of international folk dancing. Based on the accounts of my interviewees, I argue that the meanings and values of international folk dancing have shifted from carrying a nation's political significance to having effects on individual lives. Even though some particular functions of this transnational embodiment can recede once it becomes a residual practice, it is essential to acknowledge that Taiwan's connection and participation in the global flow can, in fact, positively assist international folk dancing in Taiwan to reach to another level of transnationality—related issues of folk and authenticity will be focused in Chapter Three.

As mentioned in the Introduction, two separate categories of folk dancers (i.e. the “semi-professional dance community” and the “housewives’ dance community”) emerged in the late 1980s. In the post-Martial Law era, dancers from the “semi-professional group” often have to deal with the misunderstanding that all folk dancers belong to the “housewives’ dance community,” which mostly practices line dances with popular music choreographed by each class’s instructor. In particular, a lot of young people today consider “folk dancing” old-fashioned and female-limited, because “housewives’ dance groups” usually practice in parks, plazas, and other public spaces in early mornings or after dinner. These stereotyped images have impeded the current development of the “semi-professional dance community,” especially in the recruitment of college and university dance clubs. HY, an international folk dancer who is now in her

mid-twenties, admitted in our interview that, "...when I thought of 'folk dancing' before joining the university folk dance club, I used to assume that it was for the elders."<sup>172</sup>

In addition, constant and fast-paced information exchange enables younger generations to experience new dance forms easily, leaving them with less patience to stick with international folk dancing, which looks not as fashionable and fancy as tap dancing, belly dancing, or even dances from music videos. My interviewee PT reported that when he was an undergraduate student in 2000, there were only four dance-related clubs<sup>173</sup> in the university he attended. Six or seven years later, new clubs such as Argentine Tango, aerobic dancing, Flamenco, and tap dancing had been founded. A lot of practitioners in the international folk dancing community who are in their fifties or sixties also refer to this dance form as something "we [referring to themselves] did when we were young," and see competitive ballroom dancing, or breaking as more suitable for younger people. In my own experiences in folk dance lessons, I have encountered on more than one occasion some senior class fellows telling me, "...it is so kind and patient of you to come dance with us old people."<sup>174</sup> Another folk dancer shared his experience with me about the misunderstanding of "folk dancing" when going to a doctor for his knee problems.<sup>175</sup> He said that this sixty-year-old doctor was very surprised that he did folk dancing, saying that "...isn't it now a housewives' activity," even though the doctor remembered himself doing self-choreographed dances within the category of international folk dancing when he was young. This doctor's response furthermore

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<sup>172</sup> H.Y. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. 29 June, 2016.

<sup>173</sup> Two out of these four clubs were international folk dancing related. Another one focused on modern and contemporary dance, and the other one is the ballroom dancing club.

<sup>174</sup> Field note. January 2018. New Taipei City, Taiwan.

<sup>175</sup> Field note. September 2016. Taipei, Taiwan.

indicates that although he was once a part of the practice of international folk dancing, he refuses to embrace this dance form now due to the misrepresentation of the form being female-specific.

Current stereotypes of international folk dancing's specificity in age and gender<sup>176</sup> have oversimplified the dance form's historical value in that it serves as a limited representation of a specific time period in Taiwanese history. Support from the National Government gave it a particularity in time and space, tying this embodiment to the construction of Taiwanese-ness. Its special meaning at the same time signifies its unpopularity with many people who now connect this activity with a historical background—meaning they find it old-fashioned. For instance, outsiders turn down opportunities to even learn about this dance practice because of existing stereotypes. Additionally, experienced dancers sometimes impose expectations of club and company maintenance and continuation on junior dancers by implementing strict seniority structures in which junior dancers are socially subservient. For instance, seniors in the student-based club I joined in undergrad often verbally remonstrated younger dancers who the older dancers believed were not fully committing sufficient time and dedication to the group. This behavior caused the junior dancers to leave the group at the first available opportunity. With fewer students joining international folk dancing groups in universities, the entire community suffers because international folk dancers are often

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<sup>176</sup> In Introduction, I have introduced the two sub-groups of international folk dancing in current Taiwan—the “semi-professional folk dancing community” and the “housewives’ folk dancing community.” In those paragraphs, I talked about why the general public now associates international folk dancing with female dancers, particularly women who stay at home. Subjects in gender are an important topic in the investigation of the Taiwanese dance landscape, and I am aware of gender issues in the practice of international folk dancing. However, I am focusing mostly on historical topics in my dissertation due to limited time and contexts available.

first introduced to this dance genre by joining student-based clubs in their colleges or universities.

I have pointed out the general public's over-simplified conceptions of international folk dancing. For many in this community today, they would want to explain and correct others' misunderstanding of this dance practice as solely intended for elders and females. I asked TS, who is now thirty and got her Ph.D. in Michigan a couple of years ago, "Would you choose Taiwan-related themes when you performed in Michigan?" "Yes," she said, "but it was [not just about the dances' Taiwanese elements, but] for breaking those Taiwanese students' stereotype of international folk dancing [that this dance form is only an activity for the elders]." In the introduction to her performances, and whenever the audience asked her about her dance experiences, she would repeatedly emphasize that international folk dancing stands for a wide variety of traditional and contemporary folk dances around the world, as well as self-choreographed dances composed with popular elements, instead of an old-fashioned dance form limited to elder generations.<sup>177</sup> TS's ultimate purpose for performing those dances onstage was to call people's attention to international folk dancing, and choosing Taiwan-related dances was her strategy because those pieces would specifically attract Taiwanese students studying abroad. This fact complicates what I was arguing above, that present-day younger Taiwanese people are somewhat distancing themselves from international folk dancing. TS chose to embrace this *transnational embodiment*, which is historical-specific and Taiwanese-related, and successfully replace negative impressions of international folk dancing in many

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<sup>177</sup> T.S. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. March 4, 2017.

Taiwanese young people's minds. I suggest that TS's strategy creates a contemporary form of Taiwanese nationalism. This new nationalism is uniquely shown in overseas Taiwanese communities and can break the generational boundaries of how Taiwanese young people normally view international folk dancing, due to the fact that the feeling of nostalgia delivers stronger effects than a person trying to distance oneself from this dance practice. In Chapter Two, I will more fully explore the diasporic experiences of Taiwanese practitioners in California.

### Transnational Embodiment And the Flexible Body

In her article "Choreographing A Flexible Taiwan," Yatin Lin claims that Taiwanese identity participates in *cultural flexibility*, due to the colonized history that makes Taiwanese people able to adopt different identities for various political, social and cultural conditions.<sup>178</sup> Examining Cloud Gate and its Taiwanese dancers' bodies, Lin argues that Taiwanese cultural flexibility is performed through the unique aesthetics "based on the long-term hybrid training of ballet, Western modern dance techniques, Chinese martial arts and Hsiung's brand of *taichi daoyin*."<sup>179</sup> Even though most of the international folk dancers view themselves as amateur dancers without professional trainings, I argue that "cultural flexibility" proposed by Lin is relevant to my idea of *transnational embodiment*. Lin suggests that the Taiwanese identity is presented in a flexible sense because it can be seen as an amalgamation of Taiwanese, Japanese, and

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<sup>178</sup> Yatin Lin, "Choreographing A Flexible Taiwan: Cloud Gate Dance Theatre and Taiwan's Changing Identity," *Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, edited by Carter, Alexandra, O'Shea, Janet (NY: Routledge, 2010), 252.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

Chinese cultures, with American influences during the Cold War. In this regard, Taiwan's national identity is already a transnational one. While there are diverse ways for Taiwanese people to embrace their own versions of Taiwanese identity, international folk dancing is a distinct approach that should not be ignored. On the one hand, Cloud Gate declares the Taiwanese identity by combining Western contemporary dance choreographing with Chinese cultures and Taiwanese dancing bodies. On the other hand, the Taiwanese international folk dancers maintain this sense of Taiwanese-ness, which is the national identity with amalgamated nature, regardless of the fact that they practice various kinds of folk dancing. Especially in the United States, the Taiwanese national identity is affirmed by some Taiwanese immigrants' flexible ways of interpreting "international" through their practice of international folk dancing. In addition, I suggest that mental and physical flexibilities continue to be feature of this practice and continue to be of value to its practitioners. Same as transnationality, flexibility is a meaning that has not disappeared from past to present, from the time when international folk dancing was a national activity to its current status as a residual practice. The transnationality and flexibility of this *transnational embodiment* enable each practitioner to find what he/she prefers and is comfortable with, making this dance form and its community valuable and unique from many other dance genres that require intense techniques and years of training.

The following experiences shared by some of my interviewees reiterate that international folk dancers in Taiwan not only concentrate on learning steps and routines, but also make efforts to understand historical, geographical backgrounds and cultural

elements of different dances and styles. It is important to stress the dancers' desire to use various ways to approach international folk dancing, as these endeavors suggest this embodiment's flexibility and diverse possibilities to pursue authenticity of regional dances and cultures. For instance, some dancers form study groups and find a tutor to teach them specific languages that few people are learning in Taiwan. Some others learn to play the tabla, the gaida, or other regional instruments, in order to gain better understanding to music of different locality. Even though these endeavors are not directly related to dance techniques, I view these dancers achievements in those fields a flexible way to achieve their own ideas of "international" and "folk."

In previous sections, I demonstrated how international folk dancing functioned as a way for people to look outward and gain a broader view of the global society. This function was extremely significant during the Taiwanese Martial Law Period. However, it is not limited to this specific time and region. For example, though travel out of Taiwan isn't restricted any longer, it is still nearly impossible to visit the hundreds of countries that one might want to in order to have a wide understanding of culture. Moreover, when one travels to a specific country, it is almost unachievable to visit every region and learn about each local culture. LK is a very experienced dance instructor and is especially attractive and beneficial to inexperienced dancers. He is humorous and funny, and uses different approaches to describe and demonstrate the same steps, enabling students to choose the most understandable way for themselves. He shared in our interview, "I intend to use dance and music to travel around the world with my students." Teaching has become a motivation for LK to revisit existing materials and to search for new ones on

various regional music and dance. He continued, “Even though they [LK’s students] may not have that many chances to travel abroad, they can learn and experience customs and cultures of different locality.”<sup>180</sup>

Even further, many dancers talked about international folk dancing’s usefulness for viewing other countries culturally and historically, rather than touristically, when they travel. HT started dancing in her sophomore year of university around 1983, stopped about five years later due to work and family issues, got a chance to return to this community around 2010 and has continued dancing since then. She shared that when she visited the Czech Republic with her family, they ran into some groups of people dancing in a park. Her involvement in international folk dancing enabled her to join those dancers and start conversations with them. As HT explained, “I think ‘dancing together happily’ is a crucial concept in international folk dancing.” She continued, “when I saw those movements that I was really familiar with [in that dance event in the Czech Republic], I knew that I could dance happily with them.” For HT, international folk dancing and travelling complement each other, as they are both built on the base of cultural learning.<sup>181</sup>

Some international folk dancers choose to pay more attention to attending cultural festivals than to dancing itself for many reasons, such as their own health or recent relocation. My interviewee, SL, moved to the United States to pursue her Ph.D. in Public Health in the mid-2000s. She preferred attending Greek festivals and similar events more than joining an international folk dancing club after her current relocation in California,

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<sup>180</sup> L.K. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. July 30, 2016.

<sup>181</sup> H.T. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. October 5, 2016.

because she is not a fan of driving, and thus it would be hard for her to devote herself to a dance club and participate its weekly gatherings. SL told me that “...going to cultural festivals has been a process of finding my own position in international folk dancing.”<sup>182</sup> Because of her international folk dancing experiences, she got interested in those cultural festivals and started searching for those events by herself. This fact that SL attended those dance events in a foreign country by herself actually creates a contradiction with those dancing parties held within the international folk dancing community, as these gatherings feature communal togetherness, while SL’s personal trip to festivals foreground the idea of her being solitary. She said, “...it is a form and a practice of enjoying oneself,” and this is what she meant by finding her own position in this community. CC, a Taiwan-based dancer, also had the experience of introducing Filipino dancing and the country’s colonized history to her husband when they saw a Filipino dance performance by accident at a cultural festival. She shared with me how she appreciated international folk dancing at that specific moment, feeling that she was not just a dancer but could also make some contributions to others because of international folk dancing. Even though these two interviewees were not talking about actual, physical practice, they have found their flexible ways to participate in this embodiment and gain fulfillment from international folk dancing.

More important than the flexible methods of interpreting the idea of international for folk dancers is the flexible body. The notion of “flexible dancing bodies” has been discussed by many scholars, including Yatin Lin, whose work has been discussed in

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<sup>182</sup> S.L. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. July 17, 2017.

previous section, as well as Aiwha Ong<sup>183</sup> and Karen Shimakawa.<sup>184</sup> Responding to these researchers, dance scholar Anusha Kedhar argues that studying these flexible dancing bodies reveals “...a bodily tactic used to navigate the contradictions of late capitalism.”<sup>185</sup> While these flexible bodies investigated by previous scholars are used as a means of gaining access to the international market, acquiring power as immigrants, or claiming their identities, the flexibility presented in the practice of international folk dancing differs from this function-oriented point of view. As international folk dancing is essentially a *transnational embodiment*, this dance form requires its dancers to be extremely flexible both physically and mentally because they need to adapt dissimilar textures quickly when performing different folk dances in parties or onstage. That is to say, flexibility is not a strategy intentionally imposed by its practitioners, but is a premise of this embodiment.

The necessity of being flexible comes from international folk dancing’s transnationality. For instance, Indonesian folk dance in general emphasizes a lot of subtle arm gestures that are synched with movements of the dancer’s head and torso, while many dances from Bulgaria feature fast and complex footwork, relaxing knees and less upper body movements. When these dances that are distinctly different are put in line with one another, only dancers who are flexible enough and have the ability to quickly change their body and mental status can manage to perform each folk dance with its

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<sup>183</sup> Aiwha Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logic of Transnationality* (NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>184</sup> Karen Shimakawa, *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage* (NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>185</sup> Anusha Kedhar, *On the Move: Transnational South Asian Dancers and the ‘Flexible’ Dancing Body* (Ph.D. University of California, Riverside, 2011), 15.

respective style and feature. A Chinese ethnic dance instructor once shared her experiences working with different backgrounds of adult students with me. She has been teaching for about ten years in more than three different studios, and most of her students are people who start dancing after eighteen. She said, “People who come from the international folk dancing community are honestly more flexible in the ways they use their bodies.”<sup>186</sup> She was talking about those choreographing and rehearsing experiences she has when working in studios. When she teaches different Chinese ethnic dances and Chinese classical dance, students who also practice international folk dancing often adjust their bodies for respective techniques and styles of different regions more quickly and properly.

This section demonstrates that, similar to Cloud Gate and other Taiwanese professional dance companies that continue performing Taiwanese-ness onstage, international folk dancing also delivers the ideas of mental and physical flexibilities within Taiwanese-ness. Even though when those foreign instructors first came to Taiwan in late 1950s, international folk dancing was seen mainly as an American import, over time this *transnational embodiment* has become a wider mix of numerous nations and ethnicities. In spite of this change, international folk dancing’s essential feature of being transnational echoes Taiwan’s colonized history, a history that has made Taiwanese culture an amalgamation of Chinese and Taiwanese traditions, with influences from other Asian countries and Westerns cultures. Those historical incidents also make the Taiwanese body and mind a flexible one, which resonates with international folk

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<sup>186</sup> Field note. February 7, 2018.

dancing's inclusiveness of so many sub-genres and its varied means of engaging in this transnational practice.

### Transnational Embodiment as a Way of Living

This chapter has shown how international folk dancing has served several functions for both the National Government and many Taiwanese people during the Martial Law Period and since. Inspired by many conversations with my interviewees, I reiterate in this section one of the most essential reasons that some Taiwanese people continue practicing international folk dancing even after Martial Law: international folk dancing is a way of living for these practitioners. I did not set out to draw attention to this idea, but most of my interviewees kept mentioning the notion of “dancing as a way of living” directly or indirectly. By applying this notion, I am focusing on how the *transnationality* of this embodied practice becomes a component that fits different desires of individuals.

By investigating the words of my interviewees, I examine international folk dancing components—including palpable elements, such as techniques and dance equipment, and abstract elements, such as dancers' relationships and dancing environments—in order to understand how and why international folk dancers in Taiwan together view this activity as a way of living. I aim to delineate how this *transnational embodiment* works to affect its practitioners' life styles and personalities, which are based on both community formation and personal fulfillment. In the following section, readers may note the subjective nature of this research due to my involvement in this community. However, I consider this subjectivity to be one of the most important aspects of my approach,

because it allows close interactions within this community and shows my positionality both in the community and in my research. My interviewees and I together shared our love and passion toward international folk dancing, and dealt with concerns and conflicts on ideologies and the future development of international folk dancing.

JL is now in her fifties. She was introduced to international folk dancing by following her older sister to some dance events when in middle school, started dancing herself after entering a university in Taipei, and she became the second female president of her university folk dancing club.<sup>187</sup> She described international folk dancing as an “ingredient” of her life, as the dancing led her to her second job. Because of JL’s proficiency in occupational therapy and international folk dancing, a prestigious hospital invited her to conduct dance therapy in the hospital. “The job was very attractive because I could combine my job, my interests, and help others at the same time,” she shared with me in our interview. “I also held international folk dancing classes for my co-workers at that hospital. Those classes were very popular and had become a place for people to exercise and to make new friends. Some of my co-workers even met their significant others there.”<sup>188</sup> From one point of view, one might think that any genre of dancing could lead to JL’s job. However, Martial Law still posed restrictions on Taiwanese people’s daily lives in many aspects when JL was an undergraduate student. For her, international folk dancing provided a pathway for her to combine her proficiency and interests in the times when opportunities were limited. Moreover in her career, this dance form was not

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<sup>187</sup> J.L. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. March 15, 2017. JL was the 10<sup>th</sup> president of her university dance club. In the previous ten years, there was only one female president, who was her older sister.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

only a meaningful ingredient in her own life, but also led her to connect with and positively change the lives of others.

In Taiwanese society, one's educational background and occupation are often used to judge one's success. Earning a bachelor's degree and finding a good job is the standard expectation put on everyone. As a person who did not attend universities, RH was surprised when he was praised for dancing. He said, "...dancing was the first thing I was praised for throughout my life...I realized that maybe there is really a thing that I can manage and be good at." As demonstrated by RH's sense that international folk dancing led him to find confidence in his life, international folk dancing has created a space which allows its practitioners to escape from pressures in their lives. RH's sharing also indicates that the emotional aspect is an important part that international folk dancing contributes to its practitioners. HT said sentimentally during the interview, "...when you grow older and older, you forget what happiness is. International folk dancing reminds me of the feeling of being happy." She went on to explain that she not only could exercise and enjoy the dance and music at the same time, but also could find satisfaction in the atmosphere dancing with the others.<sup>189</sup> While HT gains enjoyment from communal events, some others like international folk dancing because of the possibilities to perform onstage. HY was attracted by her sister's international folk dancing performances and decided to join this community in her sophomore year about four years ago. She said, "I do many things to acquire people's recognition, so I like to perform. I do not feel that much satisfaction attending parties." I compared the interview scripts and intriguingly

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<sup>189</sup> H.T. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. October 5, 2016.

found out that both HT and HY noted in their sentences that they loved “dancing itself,” however, the conversations afterwards went in totally opposite directions. While HT enjoys international folk dancing as a communal activity, HY is fond of the chances to perform onstage provided by this practice. This coincidence during my interview process again demonstrates that international folk dancing is flexible and fulfills multiple desires as participants’ varied ways of living. Instead of single target-oriented practices, such as academic training, competing, or socializing, international folk dancing is a dance form with many possibilities and is suitable for participants with various backgrounds, interests, and personalities.

Other than affecting one’s personality or serving as an essential elements in some people’s lives, international folk dancing can also become a way of living, leading some dancers from dancing as amateurs to their professional careers. Julie Malnig, the editor of *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake*, argues that social dance should be distinguished from folk dance, because folk dance is often delivered by homogeneous, preexisting communities of people preserving specific heritages and traditions,<sup>190</sup> while social dancing communities are the result of the dance. I do not fully agree with this separation of folk and social dance, as international folk dancing challenges the general assumption that folk dance is only the preservation of cultures and traditions. Furthermore, similar to Malnig’s claim that social dancing “may certainly rise to a level of sophistication, style, and skill often equal to that of professionals,”<sup>191</sup> international folk dancing also breaks the

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<sup>190</sup> Julie Malnig, “Introduction,” in *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake: A Social and Popular Dance Reader* (IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

boundary between amateur and professional. Many international folk dancers push themselves to have higher standards in technique and stylistic interpretations, even in off-stage activities and parties. These dancers' commitment to expertise again indicates the flexibility of this dance form, and that this bodily practice is a way of living. That is, there are many people who start with international folk dancing, but later turn their attention to other dancing communities that focus specifically on one form of dance, such as Chinese ethnic dance, Argentine Tango, Bharatanatyam, Hula 'auana, to list only a few.

The process of international folk dancers turning into professional dancers or dance instructors indicates that even though international folk dancing is a way of living, it is a way with limitations. The margin of this limitation appears when a dancer decides to pursue dancing as his/her career. For instance, many dance instructors introduce themselves by saying that "I practiced international folk dancing at the very beginning," or "I first started international folk dancing as an undergraduate student."<sup>192</sup> These words signify international folk dancing's welcoming and flexible nature, and that this dance form is an entry point for many, regardless the ages they first started dancing. However, the result of this occurrence is that there are few people who have reached professional levels that stay in this community. International folk dancing thus continues to be considered as a recreational and communal practice. I do not intend to continue here on this problem that relates to the future of this practice in Taiwan. Nonetheless, a dancer's choice between remaining an amateur or becoming a dance professional by concentrating

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<sup>192</sup> Field note. February 2018. Taipei, Taiwan.

on specific dance styles suggests that international folk dancing is not only a recreational pleasure, but also an activity that contributes to individual developments.

HD is an international folk dancing practitioner who was introduced to this dance form during the Martial Law Period. He now lives in California, but travels back and forth between Taiwan and the United States for personal reasons. Therefore, he has the privilege of practicing international folk dancing in both places. Because he is so experienced in international folk dancing (time- and place-wise), I was extremely curious to learn what international folk dancing means to him. He agreed with my assumption that international folk dancing allowed him to look outward. Nonetheless, this “looking outward” is more than escaping from the restrictions during Martial Law, but includes the expansion of HD’s life-long vision since high school.<sup>193</sup> He shared during our interview, “...international folk dancing teaches me to be open-minded to new things...it has eventually become a remedy, either mentally or physically.”<sup>194</sup> HD’s idea that this dance form functions as a remedy will be focused on later in Chapter Two through my analysis on how international folk dancing serves multiple functions for the Taiwanese immigrants in California. Yet, through my conversations with my interviewees presented in this chapter, it is already clear that international folk dancing has the ability to serve different purposes when people engage with different levels of participation, e.g. dancing for different reasons, in different time periods, and in different places.

This chapter has examined the various roles international folk dancing played during and after the Martial Law Period in Taiwan. The idea of *transnational*

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<sup>193</sup> H.D. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. 6 Jun. 2017.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

*embodiment*, which guides my argument, is presented as a means of producing a tacit Taiwanese-ness, which was once aligned with the United States politically. Today, international folk dancing no longer plays the only and unique role of assisting Taiwanese people to gain a more worldly point of view. This fact indicates that this embodied nationalism is not stable and might even disappear over time. This *transnational embodiment* thus becomes a residual practice that carries traces of those past constructions and now takes on new meanings demonstrated by my interviewees' intriguing narratives. These life-changing stories presented in this section are only a few examples from some of my interviewees, and there are definitely more from other dancers in this community. International folk dancing is a multi-functional *transnational embodiment*. Even though as a residual practice, some specific functions within its transnationality have been on the wane in the post-Martial Law era, international folk dancing's flexibility and sociability nonetheless continue to be significant. I view international folk dancing as a type of social dancing, but it does not solely focus on socializing. Its practitioners' positive emotions and feedback not only come from hanging out with people who have the same interests, but also arise from self-satisfaction from an activity outside of their work and families. In addition, I argue that the flexibility of international folk dancing makes this dance form even more unique. Many people choose international folk dancing, instead of other recreational activities, because it is flexible in the way that there are so many sub-genres within this dance form. Each of its practitioners can also find a balance between amateur and professional, deciding the level of time and effort that he/she wants to devote to it. By examining the multiple purposes

of people practicing international folk dancing, I argue that international folk dancing occupies a complicated position in the contemporary dance landscape in Taiwan. At the same time, the Taiwanese international folk dancers can also find their own positionality within this embodiment.

## Chapter Two

### Practicing Memories: Doubly Transnationality in California's Taiwanese International Folk Dancing Communities

I finally learned the self-choreographed<sup>195</sup> dance *All My Life To You*<sup>196</sup> after I came to the United States to dance with Taiwanese immigrants. This dance is considered classic in Taiwan's international folk dancing community; every interviewee of mine who started dancing during the Martial Law Period mentioned this piece as one of the first dances they learned. As previously discussed, the Taiwanese Martial Law Period was a time when self-choreographed dances were favored, since "authentic" folk dances were difficult for dancers to learn, as Martial Law put Taiwan in an isolated condition. Due to the fact that these first-generation immigrants all experienced this historical time period as high school or university students, they now favor self-choreographed dancing when practicing international folk dances in the United States, especially dances they were introduced to as students a few decades ago.

This chapter starts with Taiwanese people's migration to the United States in the 1970s, when the Martial Law Period was approaching its end. It was also the time when American immigration laws were reformed. Among these immigrants, many sought to

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<sup>195</sup> As mentioned in Chapter One, self-choreographed dancing is a sub-category in the international folk dancing communities mainly in Asia (e.g. Taiwan and Hong Kong). This dance genre emerged during the Taiwanese Martial Law Period due to political and social conditions at that time, and has become one of the main differences between international folk dancing groups in California composed of Taiwanese practitioners as compared to those made up of Western practitioners.

<sup>196</sup> The dance was choreographed to a Japanese song with waltz movements, making this piece a good representation of "self-choreographed dance," a sub-category in international folk dancing. Issues emerged from this dance form, such as notions of folk and authenticity, will be addressed in chapter three.

continue practicing international folk dancing after they settled in a new country. For those who participated in already established American international folk dancing clubs operated by non-Taiwanese immigrants,<sup>197</sup> those Taiwanese dancers found that the idea of “international folk dancing” in the United States was dissimilar from what it was in Taiwan. Because of this, some Taiwanese immigrants chose to establish their own international folk dancing groups in order to continue the dance practice as a shared experience among them. Presently in California, many Taiwanese people’s practice of international folk dancing contains an even stronger sense of *transnational embodiment* than the dance community in Taiwan.

I argue that there is an additional layer to the “transnational” in the United States. As explored in chapter one, the first layer is the transnationalism embodied by the Taiwan-based dancers through their practice of international folk dancing. Taiwanese people’s actual migration has added a second layer to this *transnational embodiment*, meaning that the first layer of *transnational embodiment* is metaphorical, and the second layer is literal and physical. These Taiwanese immigrants’ practice of others’ folk dancing outside of Taiwan is “doubly transnational.” On one hand, these dancers are separated by time (i.e., their youth practicing international folk dancing) and space (i.e., the Pacific Ocean), but their *transnational embodiment* enables them to crisscross both actual and imaginary time and space by physically traveling back and forth between the two countries, as well as recalling their dance memories with their dance fellows in the

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<sup>197</sup> I use the term “American international folk dancing club” because these clubs were mostly run by people who consider themselves Americans. These dancers are the second- or third- generations of immigrants from European or Asian countries with few or no connections with places their parents/ancestors came from.

United States. On the other hand, this *transnational embodiment* as it happened in California refers once again to the practice of international folk dancing, but includes interaction among Taiwanese dancers who reside in Taiwan and California, as well as dancers' use of old and new archives, such as old dance notations and music CDs, and contemporary dance videos and online materials.

In making this argument, I enter into conversation with the many scholars who have contributed to Asian American Studies by interrogating the contents and meanings of various bodily practices of Asian immigrants in American society. For example, focusing on different generations of Indian-American female dancers and their practice of Bharata Natyam, Priya Srinivasan argues that this Indian classical dance form has become a means of balancing American citizenship and the ideal Indian womanhood for these women. Similarly, Asian American Studies scholar Lucy Burns investigates the Filipino/a bodies in American theater in *Puro Arte*. Her book pays attention to Filipino/a-American performing bodies within the frames of their communities and the nation, highlighting “the imbrication of Filipino/a racialization with histories of colonialism and imperialism.”<sup>198</sup> Burns strategically entitles the book *Puro Arte* [pure art] to challenge the dismissal of performances as merely entertaining, too obvious, or even inappropriate; at the same time, she situates performing bodies as labor. Thus, Burns echoes Srinivasan's assertion that the Bharata Natyam dancing body is a laboring body that allows younger

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<sup>198</sup> Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns, *Puro Arte: Filipinos on the Stages of Empire* (NY: New York University Press, 2013), 3.

generations of Indian Americans to potentially assimilate to mainstream society.<sup>199</sup> Both Srinivasan's and Burns's studies parallel Sansan Kwan's research in establishing a sense of Asian American nationalism. These scholars indicate that Asian bodies could be too visible onstage, providing a feeling of exoticism to satisfy the White gaze; at the same, these non-White performing bodies were erased in certain aspects in the U.S. society, because their acceptance is only temporary. As Kwan argues, the Asian American dancing bodies in those "Chinese-y"<sup>200</sup> clubs in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century were segregated and assimilated at the same time, and with these performers' "Orientalness highlighted for white audiences, [they] ironically gained notice while assuring their own isolation as the Asiatic other."<sup>201</sup>

Kwan, Burns, and Srinivasan all contribute to arguments regarding how Asian performing bodies in the United States helped form the nation, and how the shaping of communities relates to power dynamics within that space. I am probing Asian American performance studies to add another layer of relationships between race and space. Unlike many immigrant communities, the Taiwanese international folk dancers in the United States do not conduct bodily practices that explicitly signify their Asian/Taiwanese lineage. These Taiwanese people do not question if their physical or artistic efforts are erased. In fact, they practice international folk dancing mainly to delineate a communal space that belongs to themselves, instead of showing off their ethnic and cultural lineages or finding a path to affirmation by the White society. Focusing on these practices of

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<sup>199</sup> Priya Srinivasan, *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* (PA: Temple University Press, 2012).

<sup>200</sup> Sansan Kwan, "Performing a Geography of Asian America: The Chop Suey Circuit," *The Drama Review* 55, no.1, (2011): 120-136.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

international folk dancing helps provide a fuller and more complex picture of what might be considered “Asian-American dance” and “Asian-American dancing bodies.” Precisely, international folk dancing can be seen as an embodied knowledge that contributes to this invisible distinction.

This chapter investigates the purposes international folk dancing serves for some Taiwanese immigrants in the United States, and argues that the *transnational embodiment* created by the practice of international folk dancing in the United States is both about distancing and about bridging distance. By working with Taiwanese people living specifically in California, I will suggest that international folk dancing is a means of “curing” the nostalgic feelings for these Taiwanese who are away from their homeland. Echoing chapter one, I will again demonstrate that international folk dancing is not just a recreation for temporary pleasure. Instead, it is a way of life for people; practicing the dance is practicing a memory. Specifically in the United States, this memory can be amplified and become a way for Taiwanese immigrants to connect with people who have similar cultural backgrounds. Yet at the same time, the social and dancing space of Taiwanese international folk dancing is a place where differences are recognized and forged. On one hand, these California-based Taiwanese dancers acknowledge differences between their own dancing community and the current one in Taiwan, because these immigrants are still practicing many dances passed down from the Martial Law Period. On the other hand, they also differentiate themselves from other Chinese Americans in California with this dance practice, which can be seen as a cultural symbol of Taiwanese Martial Law.

To clarify, when using the term “Taiwanese dancing groups,” I am referring to those clubs that are formed mostly (if not all) by Taiwanese immigrants, and in which Mandarin Chinese is the primary language for communication. I will try to avoid using “Taiwanese Americans” to refer to these immigrants, because none of them identified themselves as Taiwanese Americans during interviews. Instead, they claimed themselves as “Taiwanese with American passport/citizenship.”<sup>202</sup> There are many Taiwanese people’s international folk dancing groups on the North American continent, including in many California cities, as well as in Seattle, Dallas, Washington D.C., and even Vancouver, Canada. I only learned of these clubs through word of mouth, speaking with Taiwanese international folk dancers in both Taiwan and California who talked about the clubs and their friends from these cities. It is less effective to use online searches for Taiwanese international folk dancing groups, mainly because many first-generation immigrants do not rely much on Internet resources. For instance, many Taiwanese groups in California do not have official websites. Plenty of my interviewees do not use social media, either.

Aside from these Chinese-speaking dance groups, there are many English-speaking dancing clubs in California run by dancers with European lineages, and I will use the term “Western” when referring to these clubs and dancers. It is essential to note that even though these international folk dancing groups use English for instruction, some of them may prioritize specific regional folk dances when a large part of their members have the

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<sup>202</sup> W.L. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. April 10, 2017; P.L. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. May 21, 2017; Y.G. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. August 5, 2017; I am using initials to refer to all my interviewees to keep them anonymous.

same specific cultural lineages, such as Poland, Bulgaria, or Greece. Some Taiwanese practitioners in the United States also participate in those English-speaking groups. I acknowledge the problematic inclusiveness the term “Western” implies; however, because many of my interviewees used this umbrella term to distinguish the Taiwanese dancing communities from others, I take up the word throughout my dissertation.

In the following, I first offer some historical context on the waves of Taiwanese migration to the United States after the 1970’s. Next, I articulate the stories of three Taiwanese people who now reside in California and are active practitioners of international folk dancing. Following their stories, I illustrate how Taiwanese immigrants’ practice of international folk dancing serves as a form of transnational embodiment, which simultaneously enacts and bridges difference. I divide this chapter into small sections that address various issues that emerge in the Taiwanese practice of international folk dancing in the United States.

My interviews for this chapter were conducted between March and September 2017. I mainly conducted my research in Northern California because the Taiwanese international folk dancing club I worked with there has a longer history than those Southern California-based clubs. Nonetheless, I conducted a couple of interviews with dancers from Los Angeles and Irvine, as they constantly engage in international folk dancing, witnessing the growth and decline of this dancing community.

## 2.1 Taiwanese Migration: A Historical Context

There are many impetuses for people to leave their homelands and resettle in new places, from seeking escape from wars to seeking occupations and education, to family reunification. These migrations create many issues, such as tensions around national identities, citizenship rights, and cross-ethnic and cross-class difficulties. Many historical trends of immigration happened throughout the history of the United States. For example, the National Immigration Act of 1924 included Asian exclusion policies that limited the annual number of immigrants. However, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 “...created a 7-category preferences system, which gave priority to...professionals and other individuals with specialized skills.”<sup>203</sup> Orchowski asserted that this law was the one that “changed the face of America,”<sup>204</sup> as it was “the most liberal immigration law in the world.”<sup>205</sup> This assertion was affirmed by WH during our conversation. WH said, “At that time, almost everyone [Taiwanese students who went to graduate schools in America] could stay after receiving the degree if he or she wanted to.” In fact, a series of immigration laws over the course of American history not only heavily impacted immigrants from Asian countries, but also created power dynamics among people of different Asian countries. For example, Srinivasan mentions that the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act created immigration opportunities for non-Chinese Asian people “as

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<sup>203</sup> Fong et al, *Immigrant Adaptation in Multi-Ethnic Societies: Canada, Taiwan, and the United States* (UK: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>204</sup> Margaret Sands Orchowski, *The Law That Changed the Face of America: the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965* (UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

substitutes or competition for the Chinese laborers already in the country,”<sup>206</sup> enabling Indian dancers to enter the United States and shaping a new cultural landscape in the new country. Srinivasan also talks about the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which is mentioned above, and recounts how the law allowed many Indian male professionals to relocate to the United States; at the same time, it benefited many Taiwanese professionals, including many of my interviewees.<sup>207</sup>

Starting from the 1970s, a trend of immigration from Taiwan to the United States emerged, not only because immigrants responded to a loosening of regulations in the United States governing people’s ability to relocate, but also because America was considered a pioneer in many academic fields, such as biology, computer science, and medical science. One of my interviewees, WH, came to the United States for his master’s degree around 1975. He explained that Taiwanese students in the fields of science and engineering felt the need to come to America to learn advanced knowledge and techniques. WL, another interviewee, who is about five years younger than WH, told me that Taiwanese people considered studying abroad in America one of the most successful paths for college graduates in the 1970s and 1980s. During the same time period in Taiwan, even though Martial Law prohibited people from traveling, restrictions were also loosened as the Martial Law Period was approaching its end. “Attend NTU and go to America”<sup>208</sup> became a common saying during the 1970s in Taiwan. Some people with whom I had conversations throughout my fieldwork mentioned this expression, reporting

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<sup>206</sup> Priya Srinivasan, *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* (PA: Temple University Press, 2012), 15.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> NTU is the abbreviation of the National Taiwan University, a highly-ranked university of the country.

that this aspiration was the reason they decided to study abroad.<sup>209</sup> In fact, I became familiar with the saying in the early 1990s when I was a little child. To a great extent, at that time Taiwanese people thought it was best to hold American citizenship.<sup>210</sup> Another of my interviewees, AT, moved to the United States with her older sister and younger brother when in middle school around 1990. She recalled, “If you ask my parents why they sent us to the United States, I do not think they could tell you exact reasons. The social atmosphere at that time considered immigrating to the United States as ideal, because Taiwan was not a good place.”

What AT stated in her interview might relate to other Taiwanese social realms at that time, besides educational motivations. As mentioned in Chapter One, in 1971, Taiwan was encountering the diplomatic crisis of leaving the United Nations, due to the fact that the Communist regime in Mainland China (i.e. People’s Republic of China, P.R.C.) had grown more and more powerful. Many countries, including the United States, sought military and political support from the P.R.C.,<sup>211</sup> and therefore accepted the Communist China as “the Chinese regime.” After Taiwan left the United Nations, many countries turned to China, P.R.C. (People’s Republic of China) for official diplomatic relations and stopped acknowledging Taiwan, R.O.C. (Republic of China) as a country.<sup>212</sup> Official diplomatic relations between Taiwan and the United States also ended on

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<sup>209</sup> H.D. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. 6 Jun. 2017.

<sup>210</sup> W.L. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. April 10, 2017.

<sup>211</sup> One of the main reasons that the U.S. turned from Taiwan (the Republic of China, R.O.C.) to P.R.C. was because the U.S. was bogged down in the Vietnam War. Moreover, the U.S. was also in need of a powerful partner to fight against the Soviet Union.

<sup>212</sup> Even until today, Taiwan is not allowed to use its national flag in most international competitions and global summits because of China’s warnings and threats. For example, in the Olympics, sports teams from Taiwan are labeled Chinese Taipei instead of Taiwan.

January 1, 1979. As Hui-Ling Hu<sup>213</sup> wrote, “From the day Taiwan left the United Nations, Taiwan had broken off diplomatic relationships with more than twenty countries within the next twenty years. Taiwan had become an ‘international orphan,’ and the trend of immigration emerged.”<sup>214</sup>

Since Mainland China was occupied by the Communists in 1949, the Chinese governmental authority has claimed Taiwan as a province of China.<sup>215</sup> While both regimes in Taiwan and Mainland China considered themselves as “the real Chinese,”<sup>216</sup> political relations between Taiwan and China grew more and more tense from the Cold War period until now. Many Taiwanese people were afraid that China would use military force to overtake Taiwan, and this fact contributed to another immigration tide to the United States in the 1970s and 1980s. Reconsidering Hu’s quote from above and my examination of international folk dancing during the Martial Law Period in chapter one, this study points out an intriguing contradiction: while Taiwan has been seen as an “international orphan,” the Taiwanese people were embodying a transnational practice under a social and political setting relatively closed to the outside world. In this chapter, I aim to investigate how Taiwanese identity might be revealed through Taiwanese immigrants’ practice of international folk dancing in California. Equally important, I

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<sup>213</sup> Hu is a Taiwanese author and expert of “the Taiwanese White Terror,” which refers to the inhumane dictatorship during the Martial Law Period.

<sup>214</sup> Hui-Ling Hu, *A Hundred Years of Pursuing*, volume 3 (Taipei: Acropolis, 2013), 17.

<sup>215</sup> See Introduction for more information on related Taiwanese history.

<sup>216</sup> The term “Chinese” here refers to the regime of the country, as well as lineage and kinship of Chinese culture, history, and heritage. The complication of the term, Chinese, remains, because currently Taiwanese people and Chinese people still share the Chinese historical and cultural lineages. However, the separated sovereignties have politically divided these Mandarin Chinese-speaking people into Taiwanese and Chinese.

carefully consider how Taiwanese dancers living in the United States use this dance form as a means of connecting with their home country.

In *Asian Diasporas: New Formations, New Conceptions*, Parreñas and Siu suggest that diaspora, transnationalism and globalization are three ideas that cannot be separated.<sup>217</sup> Currently, I hesitate to define Taiwanese people's migration to the United States as a form of "diaspora," because this term indicates a type of forced displacement that does not completely apply in the case of Taiwan. Many Taiwanese people's resettlement in America was voluntary, rather than an experience of forced migration such as the African or Jewish diaspora. For instance, many chose to stay in the United States after earning their masters or doctoral degrees. Although some others left Taiwan due to political tensions between China and Taiwan, the situation was not the same as being war refugees. Taiwanese Dance scholar Yu-Ling Chao also argues that because Taiwanese people's emigration was not completely involuntary, their migration should be viewed as "semi-diaspora."<sup>218</sup> I am definitely not proposing that Taiwanese people always had the privilege of freely choosing where to locate and relocate, and it is definitely not true that all stories of Taiwanese migration were happy and positive. Rather, I want to deemphasize, in this project, the tragic emotions often presented in studies discussing war refugees in the United States.

Nonetheless, Nguyen and Hoskin, in *Transpacific Studies: Framing An Emerging Field*, argue that diaspora relates more to people's movements across borders, carrying

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<sup>217</sup> Rhacel Parreñas and Lok Siu, *Asian Diasporas: New Formations, New Conceptions* (CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

<sup>218</sup> Yu-Ling Chao, "Dance, Culture and Nationalism: The Socio-cultural Significance of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre in Taiwanese Society" (Ph.D. UK: Laban Center, 2000).

the baggage of emotional memories, whether these memories were imagined or not.<sup>219</sup>

Focusing on immigrants' movements not only across borders, but also movements that each individual uses to communicate, I emphasize the term *transnational embodiment* to reframe the "... 'mobilities' perspective or paradigm that examines how social life gains expressions through the movement of people, things, ideas, and institutions across places and nations."<sup>220</sup>

## 2.2 Three Dancers' Stories

I intend to start with three Taiwanese international folk dancers' personal stories to pave the way for the rest of this chapter, mainly because I consider international folk dancing as not merely a dance form, but as a practice of personal and communal story and memory. The three interviewees stood out to me within their respective age groups<sup>221</sup> after finishing all my interviews, and I mine their stories to identify how similarities and differences in their experiences overlapped in the practice of international folk dancing.

HD is considered an important figure in his current dance club in Northern California, and was the first president of the student-based college folk dancing group that I joined as an undergraduate student in Taiwan. Even though he is seen as an essential person in the entire dancing community in both Taiwan and California, he is such a humble person even in front of me, who is younger than his own kids. We met at a

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<sup>219</sup> Janet Hoskins and Viet T. Nguyen, "Introduction: Transpacific Studies, Critical Perspectives on an Emerging Field," and "Passionate Attachments to Area Studies and Asian American Studies: Subjectivity and Diaspora in the Transpacific" in *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field* (HI: University of Hawai'i, 2014).

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>221</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction, the four age groups in my research are: below 35 years old; 35 to 50 years old; 50 to 65 years old; and over 65.

coffee shop close to his place and I noticed that he was so well prepared for the interview. He did not waste any time thinking about or hesitating with details, and he would say “we will talk about this later” to indicate that he had planned for those related issues. I was fortunate to successfully make an interview appointment with him, and felt honored that I acquired a chance to get familiar with him after the interview.

HD is a Taiwanese immigrant who has been living in the United States since around 1975. He was introduced to international folk dancing as a middle school student in Taiwan, but “...started practicing seriously from high school, mainly because a guy would be admired by those high school girls if he danced well.”<sup>222</sup> As Taiwan’s social environment was extremely conservative during Martial Law, and international folk dancing was the only permitted dance form, being good at the dance practice seemed to be the best way to show off in front of the opposite gender of peers. With great talent in organization skills and passion in international folk dancing, HD was one of the most important members of his high school dance group, as well as the first president of his university dance club.<sup>223</sup> When encountering life intersections, such as paths after graduating from university, some people know what they want to do while others fulfill society’s general expectations. “I was the kind of student who drifted along and went to the same directions others were heading for,” HD said. So he came to the United States like many of his peers, and “...the time I live in America is longer than that in Taiwan,” he concluded. Many Taiwanese, along with other Asian immigrants, chose the Bay

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<sup>222</sup> H.D. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. June 6, 2017.

<sup>223</sup> HD refused to take credits on being the founder of international folk dancing clubs in the high school and the university he attended. He said that because he was the younger one, some senior dancers asked him to serve as the president when the university dance team was created.

Area—particularly the South Bay known as the Silicon Valley—as their destination of migration, not only because many of them have backgrounds in the STEM fields, but also because some consider California being more friendly to immigrants, and thus more ideal for their children. HD and many of my other interviewees have thus settled in the Bay Area, even though they attended graduate schools in other cities in the United States.

YG is another Taiwanese immigrant who stayed in America after earning his masters degree in computer science. I was introduced to him by other interviewees because he was described as one of those “who experienced ‘new international folk dancing.’”<sup>224</sup> Being about ten years younger than HD, YG had experienced a transformation of international folk dancing in Taiwan around 1980 as an undergraduate of a university in middle-Taiwan. This transformation started specifically because Ching-San Chang,<sup>225</sup> one of the leading instructors in Taiwan at that time, was inspired to work on “traditional folk dances” after being invited to the Stockton Camp<sup>226</sup> to deliver workshops.<sup>227</sup> Mr. Chang founded the Asia Folk Dance Camp in 1981, inviting folk dance instructors from different countries to teach in this annual event. This was the first time that the Taiwanese dancers were able to learn regional folk dances directly from instructors of the corresponding regions on a regular basis. Moreover, with the Martial Law Period approaching its end, Taiwanese people were able to build different forms of

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<sup>224</sup> Field notes. May 2016. San Jose, CA.

<sup>225</sup> Introduced in chapter one, Chang not only was one of the leading instructors at that time, but also is still considered Taiwan’s “father of international folk dancing.”

<sup>226</sup> Founded in 1948 by Lawton Harris, the Stockton Folk Dance Camp has taken place in the University of Pacific in Stockton, California, for seventy years. According to its website, “Stockton Folk Dance Camp has been a major promoter of international folk dance, and has presented over 5,800 traditional dances with the help of more than 210 teachers and thousands of students” (<http://www.folkdancecamp.org/about/>).

<sup>227</sup> Y.G. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. August 5, 2017.

communication with the outside world. Thus people of YG's generation, who are now approximately sixty years old or younger, stick less with self-choreographed dances and are in general more aware of questions of authenticity than dancers of their previous generations do. In addition, YG established his own dance class on the East Coast before he moved to Southern California for his career. The different generational exposure and understanding, as well as his abundant teaching experiences, enable him to illustrate a unique story of relationships among immigration, international folk dancing, and memories with his deliberate concerns of this dance form.

TS is one of the youngest dancers I currently know in the California-based Taiwanese international folk dancing community. Her experience demonstrates that age difference contributes to participants experiencing different benefits from practicing international folk dancing, as well as adopting dissimilar objects for their nostalgic feelings. TS is turning thirty, having come to America for her Ph.D. degree in biomedical engineering around 2005 and stayed here since then. In fact, she and I were dancing cohorts in our college folk dance club in Taiwan. While she was very delighted to be my interviewee, the interviewing process was also an intimate and meaningful experience for both of us. Due to our long-lasting friendship, we not only discussed issues related to my research, but also were not afraid of challenging each other throughout the conversation. Our discussion focused a lot on dissimilar attitudes among Taiwanese dancers in America towards international folk dancing. "I feel people [of a specific dance club in Northern California] here come [to the club's weekly gathering] just to do those dances, instead of helping more people to be familiar with the dances," TS shared. I take her feeling not as a

complaint, but an awareness that her approach to this dance form differs from these club members. Due to different generational experiences, memories, and attitudes toward the dance form, I argue that there are at least two approaches at work in the Taiwanese international folk dancing community in California. One carries more of a genealogical dimension associated with a person's club lineage that he/she originally belonged to in Taiwan (i.e., an emotional and sentimental aspect), and the emphasis in dance is on practicing those learned in the past. The other leans more toward a physical and social practice focused on continuous learning and practicing of dance pieces; these dances include those the dancers learned when they were young, and new dances released by instructors from around the world in different teaching occasions today. These three dancers cannot speak for all of my interviewees, not to mention for the entire international folk dancing community. Nonetheless, their stories delineate how international folk dancing is conceived of by participants of different ages. In the following section, I continue telling their stories and quoting from my interviews of them, as well as those of their fellow dancers, in order to examine how memories of practicing this dance form are generation-specific. This means that these dancers are reproducing international folk dancing in the United States, yet this reproduction forges sameness and difference of this dancing community across the Pacific Ocean. By examining how the dancers approach these Taiwanese dancing spaces in their second homeland, I argue that international folk dancing holds various positionalities among different populations of Taiwanese immigrants. The common thread is that this dance form enables Taiwanese people to construct identities through a practice of *transnational embodiment*.

### 2.3 Doubly Transnational: Bridging Spatial and Temporal Differences

Mentioned in Introduction, “diasporic citizenship” is a term proposed by anthropologist Siu, as she suggests that the idea of citizenship is not limited within one nation-state nor in one political regime, but is constructed “by transnational as well as national and local forces.”<sup>228</sup> This term, I argue, echoes *transnational embodiment* in that “diasporic citizenship” is a result of immigrants’ experiencing and negotiating their sense of belonging to the country in which they have settled,<sup>229</sup> while *transnational embodiment* is a method to reach these articulations of identity (i.e. diasporic citizenship). Creating international folk dancing groups in America<sup>230</sup> is one of these articulations, because the process of remembering and imagining together not only comes with the practice of a dance form, but is also a negotiation with their senses of past and present, and with others who shared similar memories.

The discourse of connecting with a dancer’s past, younger self is enabled through the creation of different Taiwanese dancing clubs, though the initial motivation of establishment was not the same for each group. HD reconnected to international folk dancing when he sent his children to a Mandarin Chinese school in Northern California. The Chinese classes took place on Friday evenings, allowing parents to bring their children to school, or even to accompany their kids in class.<sup>231</sup> Some parents at the school

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<sup>228</sup> Lok Siu, *Memories of a Future Home: Diasporic Citizenship of Chinese in Panama* (CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 8.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> By saying “in America,” I am consciously including Taiwanese international folk dancing clubs in both the U.S. and Canada.

<sup>231</sup> I once had a conversation with a Taiwanese dancer, who also sent his daughter to this Chinese school. He and his wife started dancing because their daughter did not want the parents to be in the classroom with her, making the parents to find their own things to do. (Field notes. November 2016. San Jose, CA)

were looking for recreational activities for themselves to spend time during their children's Chinese classes, so the international folk dancing class was created. HD spoke as if there was not much effort involved in establishing the class. "We simply rented a few more classrooms for these adult activities [on the campus where the Chinese school took place]," said HD. While the members of this international folk dancing club are now grandparents, the club has grown and expanded into an independent one outside the Chinese school with its own dance venue.

To me, it sounded so spontaneous for HD and the other parents to establish an international folk dancing class, so I asked him why this dance practice would be a choice for them. "Someone just suggested it," HD replied. "I guess it was because people had international folk dancing experiences in Taiwan before, considering it a good way to exercise and to get together." What HD did not mention directly was that because many Taiwanese people at that time had international folk dancing experiences, it was also not too challenging to find a person or two to lead and teach the class. These volunteered instructors could also correct or remind each other any of them forgot a specific step or dance piece.<sup>232</sup> In HD's generation, Mandarin Chinese schools served as a crucial bonding for Taiwanese immigrants. He explained, "Our school was entirely comprised of Taiwanese students, and the school size was huge. People said that the parents needed to register to be on the waiting list at the moment their children were born." The fact that Chinese people were not allowed to leave China at that time also reinforces HD's statement that the Mandarin Chinese school was "purely Taiwanese," because there were

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<sup>232</sup> K.R. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. August 20, 2017; H.D. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. June 6, 2017; S.S. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. May 16, 2017.

few Chinese people in America at that time in general.<sup>233</sup> This difference in Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese immigration histories likewise suggests dissimilar memories of migration among immigrants from the two places.

HD's experiences demonstrate the relationship between international folk dancing and communal bonding with Taiwanese immigrants. Precisely because international folk dancing was a common memory to many Taiwanese people of a specific generation, the Taiwanese community to which HD belongs chose this dance form as a means of connecting with each other, even though this dance practice was attached to a more specific connection—the education of their children in this case—at the beginning.

HC is another interviewee of mine. She attended the same student-based club as HD when they attended college in Taiwan, and they remained connected after graduation because of international folk dancing. Even though they have relocated to different cities in California, HD provided distant assistance to HC when HC began teaching in a newly formed Taiwanese international folk dancing group. HC recalled, “When I left Taiwan, I was not expected to teach international folk dancing in the United States. So I mostly relied on his [HD's] help, acquiring music and other resources from him because his club was founded about ten years earlier than mine.” In order to cross-reference the steps and routines, HC also asked her family members in Taiwan to mail the resources she had kept from her university life. Even though international folk dances are mostly choreographed, having identical lexicons in each dance form<sup>234</sup> and the same routines of each dance with

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<sup>233</sup> H.D. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. June 6, 2017.

<sup>234</sup> Shared lexicon is one of the features in the international folk dancing community. For example, (right) Yemenite step in Israeli dance means the completion of the following three steps: 1) Start with one's right

its respected music, dancers would have their personal ways of interpreting each step. Dealing with more complicated dances, such as Chinese dances that often have a lot of arm and hand gestures, dancers would even draw on their notes. Therefore, I completely understand how crucial it was to acquire one's own dance notations. She did not fly across the Pacific Ocean to make physical connections with the international folk dancing community in Taiwan, but approached the sense of transnationality through a conceptual method. The dance groups that HD and HC respectively belong to furthermore illustrate a constant circulation and exchange of information, instead of just a linear, one-way relation between the two venues.

Organizing international folk dancing clubs, in a broader sense, is a means of reconstructing "home." For example, YG's assertion that similar dance repertoires can build familiarity between dancers theoretically brought up the notion of "home," which I consider important when teasing out *transnational embodiment*. In other words, one of the most important reasons why people started embodying international folk dancing was because they wanted to find a place like home. As Parreñas and Siu argue, the nostalgic feeling "...serves as a source of anxiety."<sup>235</sup> While the anxiety might be caused by encounters with racism, it could also derive from financial difficulties, social and family relations, and sexism. For instance, WL told me that she did not join meet-ups in the first several years after moving to the United States because "it was too expensive eating out. I

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foot and step to the right; 2) Left foot steps to the left; 3) Right foot makes a step crossing the left. When an instructor is teaching, s/he would use Yemenite step to refer to this three-step movement.

<sup>235</sup> Rhacel Parreñas and Lok Siu, *Asian Diasporas: New Formations, New Conceptions* (CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 15.

am fine with it [joining meet-ups to make friends] now.”<sup>236</sup> Another interviewee, AT, also recalled that her mother took her and her two siblings to the East Coast round 1990, while her father stayed in Taiwan to earn a living. The children could only talk to their father on Sunday evenings because it was the least expensive time of the week to make a long-distance telephone call. Even so, AT’s family spent over five hundred dollars on their monthly phone bill. Despite the weekly phone calls, the kids suffered from their father’s absence growing up in the United States.

The immigrants’ nostalgia forces them to seek ways to establish a space—whether a palpable one or not—that meets their imagination or “standard” of “home.” This kind of “homey space” can be established through various ways. Taiwanese people’s transnational migration produced a more complicated picture of the country among those immigrating. They endured unfamiliar cultures, foreign surroundings, and hardship when Taiwan was left behind. There are physical and emotional linkages between these two sites (both actual and imagined) that relates to cross-national and cross-cultural identities. International folk dancing has thus become a way for them to recreate a “homey space” to release their anxieties throughout their transnational relocation.

The previous sections focuses on the club-setting groups in the international folk dancing community, demonstrating Taiwanese dancers’ determination in founding dance clubs in the United States, regardless of how difficult it could be with the lack of convenient technology and communication that we currently have today. By saying “club-setting,” I am referring to the dance-focused groups that have regular meetings

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<sup>236</sup> W.L. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. April 10, 2017.

every week or every month, with scheduled teaching plans or even quarterly syllabi. Members of these groups often have to pay a membership fee on a regular basis, and some of the groups are registered as regional or national organizations. The process of creating new clubs can be seen as reconstruction of home, or a homey dancing space that fits the dancers' memories of the past. Moreover, the constant negotiation in participants' identities, dance repertoires, and interactions among local clubs echo the instability of living and working in the second homeland.

Other than club-setting dance groups, there is another type of association that assists some Taiwanese immigrants to create connections through international folk dancing. PL is interested in many forms of dance and has high expectations of her own dancing, and she takes ballet classes and practices Chinese dancing and other dance forms at home. Despite her involvement in studio classes, she still maintains close connection with other Taiwanese folk dancers, even though the practice of international folk dancing is seen as communal and is less about bodily training. PL and these Taiwanese dancers all belonged to the same student-based university folk dance team during the different time periods they were undergraduates in Taiwan. Even though this group of people who now meet in Northern California are of different ages, they all intend to maintain a close connection due to sharing the same "dance lineage." When she talked about the alumni association of her university folk dancing club and its bi-monthly gathering, she said, "I enjoy international folk dancing mainly because of these people who I dance together." Dances practiced in those gatherings are usually very simple. The senior alumni often forget the steps of dances and people spend a lot of time reviewing

routines of the same dances. Even so, “I have a feeling of wholeheartedness being with those people,” PL said.

What PL is suggesting is an abstract connection with Taiwan and with people of similar backgrounds. As she said, “we [people of the alumni association] attend the gatherings for bonding, not dancing.” If these alumni usually practice the same fifteen to thirty dances repeatedly during each gathering, why do they insist on doing these same dances over and over rather than seeking alternative activities? In *Dissonant Divas in Chicana Music*, Deborah Vargas argues that music serves as “the mechanism for counterhistorical narratives, self-representation, and cultural empowerment,”<sup>237</sup> meaning that those female musicians she worked with helped people understand how music can be a place of imagination and memory. In both Vargas’s and my research, music and dance function as abstract spaces in which people are able to “understand, relate, and connect to notions of belonging, history, place, and cultural sensibilities.”<sup>238</sup> In these kinds of folk dancing groups, which are based on university dance teams and thus contain multiple generations of the same club lineage, there is a deeper sense of belonging coming from the practice of international folk dancing. Simply physically being together does not fulfill the sense of belonging; only dancing together engages each participant’s memories of the past and imaginings of present dancing space in Taiwan. TS, whose story was presented earlier in this chapter, helped me strengthen this claim, pointing out that she very much wanted to practice those pieces she did before when in Taiwan. “I do not

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<sup>237</sup> Deborah Vargas, *Dissonant Divas in Chicana Music : The Limits of La Onda* (MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), x.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

really feel homesick here. What I miss are the people who I danced with, like you.” Her assertion seems to reiterate that only when space, dance, and dancers are all brought together can the nostalgic feeling be cured.

At the end of the interview, TS concluded by providing a broader response to the meaning of international folk dancing. “I think it is because everyone [here in America] is away from home...and the senses of nostalgia and loneliness are intensified,” she said. The dance form became the only memory in common among these Taiwanese people, creating a limited feeling of similarity that definitely contributed to more intimate connections established through shared embodied knowledge. After all, “...it is not as easy as in Taiwan to meet people who came from the same student-based folk dancing club in the United States,” TS concluded. As indicated above, some dancers in California go back to Taiwan specifically for international folk dance workshops or camps. For instance, the Asia Folk Dance Camp<sup>239</sup> in Taiwan is celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2018. Because there are so many Taiwanese dancers from the United States and Canada who want to go back to Taiwan to attend the event, the hosting association has been forced to place a registration limit on visitors from North America. Moreover, dancers from California asked me not to put this California-based club as my affiliation on my registration form, so that there would be room for one more person from the United States to go back for the camp.<sup>240</sup> The dancers’ relationships between California and

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<sup>239</sup> Founded in February 1981, Asia Folk Dance Camp is now one of the most important international folk dancing events around the world. Every year, more than 300 attendees from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, and even the U.S. join the camp for three to four days, learning regional folk dances directly from foreign instructors invited by the camp committees.

<sup>240</sup> Field notes. August 2017. San Jose, CA

Taiwan not only are connected emotionally because of their memories practicing the dance form, but also are made physical through their travel.

In the previous section, I demonstrated that there are at least two types of social groups Taiwanese immigrants have formed, one using international folk dancing as a means of making connections through dance practices and the other expressing their nostalgic feelings about dancing in the past. While some people pursue emotional ties built upon their dance team lineages (i.e., membership in alumni associations), some others pay more attention to interacting through actual dance practices (i.e., Taiwanese international folk dancing clubs in various cities in the United States). Either way, international folk dancing functions as a strategy for bringing these people closer to their homeland despite being away from Taiwan. As Parreñas and Siu claim that immigrants have to try to break the binary of place of origin and their destinations of migration,<sup>241</sup> the Taiwanese international folk dancers are putting this argument in motion.

In addition, the Taiwanese people's international folk dancing communities challenge the issue of equality in cross-national relationships. When thinking of migration, often times there seems to be the stereotype that immigrants' destinations are better than their home countries. But as Siu argues, depending on various forms of cooperation and relations, there is not necessarily a hierarchy between the home country and the destination of migration.<sup>242</sup> In my project, the international folk dancing community in Taiwan is actually considered in a higher order than the dance

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<sup>241</sup> Rhacel Parreñas and Lok Siu, *Asian Diasporas: New Formations, New Conceptions* (CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>242</sup> Lok Siu, *Memories of a Future Home: Diasporic Citizenship of Chinese in Panama* (CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), xv.

communities in California, despite a hierarchical characterization from many Asian people that America is a better place to live in (i.e. education, career developments, and future opportunities). Dance resources from Taiwan are essential to dancing communities in both places, and the Taiwanese dancers in California have the desire to catch up what the community in Taiwan is currently practicing. In Asian Studies scholar Nadine Naber's research, *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism*, she describes how the Arab first generation immigrants consider themselves as authentic and "real Arabs" while viewing their children potentially impure and inauthentic.<sup>243</sup> In this sense, the dancing community in Taiwan has become the place to return to for Californian Taiwanese seeking a sense of authenticity. As I will discuss the issues of authenticity and folk in chapter three, what I intend to emphasize here is the tight connection between the two sites these dancers are making through international folk dancing.

"It is true that our club do not have younger/new people joining in. In this case, the club will definitely not survive in the long run. But I think it is fine. Our mission is not to run a club of a century's standing." HD shared these thoughts with me during the interview. I was fairly surprised that an experienced and prestigious dancer like him would seem so blasé regarding the continuity of a group that he has devoted so much time to. I later received a similar message from another California-based Taiwanese practitioner, who suggested that these Taiwanese people practice international folk dancing for the sake of friendship. What they intend to keep is their relationships with

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<sup>243</sup> Nadine Naber, *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism* (NY: New York University Press, 2012).

one another, not the club itself.<sup>244</sup> For these Taiwanese dancers in California, it is perhaps more important to keep everyone happy dancing together, rather than struggling with recruitment, such as introducing international folk dancing to the next generation of Taiwanese, or designing beginners' classes to attract new comers.

“Do you feel that you have gained anything from international folk dancing?” At the very beginning of my research, I intended to use this question as the wrap up question of the interviews. Soon after conducting a few interviews, I realized that this question opened up another conversation about what this dance form means to different people. HD responded to my question in a sentimental way, saying that “... international folk dancing [for these Taiwanese practitioners in California] becomes a remedy, and it can be either mental or physical remedy.” The observations and dialogue shown in this section not only reinforce the communal ties that are so important to its members, but also emphasize international folk dancing being a unique memory for these Taiwanese immigrants, facilitating connections with their youth and constructing sociality with others who have similar cultural backgrounds.

#### **2.4 Doubly Transnational: Acknowledgement of Differences**

In the previous section, I highlighted the fact that the practice of international folk dancing serves as a means of bridging generational, geographical, and temporal differences for its Taiwanese practitioners in California. In this section, I will propose that these Taiwanese dancers also acknowledge and maintain various forms of difference

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<sup>244</sup> Field notes. September 2015. San Jose, CA.

through this dance practice. While these immigrants in some ways attempt to reproduce the dancing space they knew in Taiwan, it cannot be fully identical to international folks dancing current Taiwan. Nevertheless, their international folk dancing allows them to differentiate themselves from Western practitioners and from other Chinese Americans. In this sense, the notion of *transnational embodiment* includes more than international folk dancing itself, but also covers interaction among dancers from the two places, as well as the actions they take to renew the old archives and to create new archives.

#### A Mediated Reproduction

Investigating Taiwanese people's reconnection with their homeland and with each other in the United States through international folk dancing is intriguing because this dance form, combined with folk dances of various cultures, does not have direct cultural lineages with Taiwanese identity. The fact that some Taiwanese immigrants consider this dance practice as a means of connecting with each other emphasizes emotional dimensions of this dance genre. Through my interviews, it is not hard to realize how determined these Taiwanese dancers were in trying to reconstruct a dancing space similar to the one they had in Taiwan. The dancers' desire is to reproduce a prior enactment; however, the duplication has proved to be non-identical to its referent, even though these Taiwanese dancers cite their memories—from teaching repertoires, dress code, to club administration—as the basis for their reproduction.

In California, members of the Taiwanese international folk dancing community emphasize both the emotional connections with each other, as well as concrete

connections through familiar dances they learned in the past. As indicated previously, some Taiwanese dancers started their own clubs and designed their initial teaching repertoires based on what they learned in Taiwan years ago. Investigating the creation of these Taiwanese dance groups, I argue that these Taiwanese dancers are challenging the text-body dualism, complicating Performance Studies scholar Diana Taylor's terms "archive," "repertoire," and "scenario."<sup>245</sup> In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Taylor proposes two terms: the archives (i.e. written documents) and the repertoires (i.e. embodied performances). She suggests that these two kinds of references should be valued equally in memory keeping and performing, because bodily practices are ways of understanding, keeping, and passing down knowledge and identity of a culture.<sup>246</sup> She then suggests the term "scenario," which I view as a mode between repertoire and archive. According to Taylor, scenario is a form of cultural approach because to recall or to recreate a scenario, one needs to picture a space and exhibit behaviors based on social elements within that space.

The Taiwanese dancers in California are producing this idea of scenario through their own *transnational embodiment*. However, instead of applying scenario—a transition from archive to repertoire—to examine Taiwanese people's practice of international folk dancing, I suggest that the dancers depict a coalescence of archive and repertoire. This means that dance gatherings and activities they design are based on "historical archives," which are their dance notes from dance classes going back decades. These memos from

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<sup>245</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

youth were significant because most of Taiwanese who experienced the Martial Law Period were introduced to international folk dancing when they were high school or university students.<sup>247</sup> In this regard, these dancers are not simply connecting with Taiwan, but with a particular period of their homeland, and with a specific adaptation of their own youth. I was able to notice each interviewee's own version of his/her past-self, as most of them kept starting off with "When I was an undergrad..." or "...we did this in my college dance team..." The Taiwanese dancing community in California has become a marker that identifies specific cultural and social messages, and the contents of dances they practice are less important than the community itself.

Besides examining the ways international folk dancing is reproduced in California, Taylor's metaphor, DNA,<sup>248</sup> also suggests the compositions that are reproduced. She proposes that DNA informs a concept of "code," an act of replicating and building upon prior information.<sup>249</sup> In this regard, the Taiwanese practitioners' undertaking of international folk dancing is a marker that identifies specific cultural and social messages. Furthermore, DNA represents an essential feature in blood. I am aware of the problematic aspect to view a dance form being in one's blood because dance is learned and should not be seen as natural, I suggest here that the memory of international folk dancing is a component in these dancers' blood. In other words, a particular version of "home" is produced by the Taiwanese folk dancers in both Taiwan and California. Through various

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<sup>247</sup> See chapter one for the historical of international folk dancing and the Youth Corp, as well as relationships between Taiwan and the U.S. built upon this dance form.

<sup>248</sup> Diana Taylor, "Acts of Transfer," in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

forms of circulation—from the dancers’ physical bodies to dance notes and videos—the international folk dancing DNA is shared and passed down.

I questioned my interviewees how they could remember dance steps and routines that they learned before they came to the United States around the 1970s. “In fact, the dances were not practiced correctly at first [when HD and his fellows started the dance club in California],” HD admitted to me. It was a time without the Internet, not to mention YouTube or other forms of access to online dance resources. When these dancers were introduced to hundreds of folk dances in Taiwan, the only way for them to memorize these dances was to take notes after each learning occasion, from student-based dance clubs they joined, to national and international workshops and camps. In addition, when these Taiwanese immigrants settled down in the United States, they had long since graduated from college, the time they engaged the most in international folk dancing. HD shared the dancers’ awareness that the movements could be mistaken: “People wrote down the routines and steps of each dance, but it was very common that we could not understand our own notes from decades ago. Possibly, each person’s version of the same dance piece was not exactly the same.” With more examples to follow, I will demonstrate the intention and discourse that make these Taiwanese immigrants’ embodiments transnational. What I intend to reiterate here is that these reproductions echo Baubock and Faist’s<sup>250</sup> idea of transnational/ism, because the practice of international folk dancing and recreation of the dancing space are mediated by both temporal and spatial distance among Taiwan, California, and the Pacific Ocean—the

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<sup>250</sup> Rainer Baubock, and Thomas Faist, *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods* (Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

circulation of transpacific. The two authors refer to all kinds of transnational movements as “processes that transcend international borders and therefore appear to describe more abstract phenomena in a social science language.”<sup>251</sup> This quotation reminds us of the idea of “doubly transnational,” which is the greatest dissimilarity between the *transnational embodiment* enacted in Taiwan and in California. On one hand, dancers in Taiwan perform transnationality in international folk dancing because they are practicing dances from various cultures and nations that are different from their own. On the other hand, the Taiwanese dancers’ work in California involved a more complex transnationality, as they rely on their transnational archives and memories to rebuild a dancing environment that seems similar to their past experiences.

Even though Taylor argues that we should equally value archive and repertoire, in my case, written documents were favored by participants at the very beginning of community formation. The only way for them to reconstruct the international folk dancing space was to rely on the previously documented set steps and routines of each piece. Nonetheless, body memories (i.e. repertoire, in Taylor’s terminology) became significant afterward because dance notes were not always reliable, especially when dancers’ notes had conflicts with one another. As described previously with respect to HC’s notes, there might be personal interpretations of identical movements, making the qualities and textures of the same movements different from each dancer. Some dancers might use drawing, instead of written descriptions, to depict complicated movements. Some others apply lyrics in their notes to help themselves memorize the steps and

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid, 13.

routines. Thus, many international folk dancing pieces practiced in California are constantly changing "...because we might make mistakes when we were trying to recall the dances," as HD said. In order to be more accurate in their dance practices, these Taiwanese practitioners in the United States would seek opportunities to confirm with dancers in Taiwan. Recent technological improvements also allow dancers from the two regions to exchange materials online, making it much easier to build this transpacific communication. In addition, many dancers visit dance groups in Taiwan during their stay for Christmas or Chinese New Year. SS shared that she made a special trip to the venue where an international folk dancing club held its regular gathering, hoping to make more connections with dancers in Taiwan. Knowing that SS is a shy woman who does not like to mingle with people she is not familiar with, I am impressed that she would do this because of international folk dancing. To emphasize once again, the notions of archive and repertoire overlap with each other, especially when Taiwanese immigrants travel back and forth between Taiwan and the United States. This fact provides even more layers to the notion of *transnational embodiment*; that is, the Taiwanese dancers in California are separated by space and time, but also crisscross back and forth physically between the two spaces. They evoke the past while rooted in the present, and reproduce a dance space that cannot be completely identical in their second homeland.

#### Underscoring Taiwanese-ness

For immigrants who have left their home countries, there are various ways to reconstruct their homelands. This could be one of the reasons why in Asian American

Studies, Chinatowns, Chinese schools and traditional festivals have long been popular objects of research. In these instances, Asian Americans are able to act like Americans or to be a part of America, and at the same time to maintain their national identities in the public. However, the Taiwanese international folk dancers in the United States do not intend to express their identities publicly through this type of dance practice. Rather than introducing this “cultural activity” or trying to pass it down to future generations, these first generation immigrants use international folk dancing as an element to construct closer bonding with each other. That is to say, the *transnational embodiment* of these Taiwanese immigrants is not akin to many other immigrating groups—in Naber’s<sup>252</sup> or Srinivasan’s<sup>253</sup> works, for example—in which the immigrants try to teach their children to conduct cultural performances so that younger generations would be considered as “good diasporic citizens.”<sup>254</sup> It is neither for my research objects to perform Taiwanese-ness to gain recognition and a sense of belonging in American society (e.g. the Chop Suey Circuit in Kwan’s research).<sup>255</sup> Additionally, international folk dancing enables these Taiwanese immigrants to distinguish themselves from the Chinese in California, although these immigrants mostly speak the same language, share similar cultural and historical backgrounds, and are often categorized as “Chinese Americans.”

Having experienced the transformation of international folk dancing in Taiwan that he called the movement of “heading for traditional,” YG became interested in all forms

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<sup>252</sup> Nadine Naber, *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism* (NY: New York University Press, 2012).

<sup>253</sup> Priya Srinivasan, *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* (PA: Temple University Press, 2012).

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Sansan Kwan, “Performing a Geography of Asian America: The Chop Suey Circuit.” *The Drama Review* 55, no.1 (2011): 120-136.

of folk dancing. He believed that “International folk dancers find places to dance wherever they go,”<sup>256</sup> so he paid attention to classified ads on newspapers and attended different dance clubs on both east and west coasts of the United States as he moved around the country first for school and then for jobs. These explorations among different groups, including those run by the Taiwanese immigrants or by people with European lineages, allowed YG to realize that “international folk dancing” was performed differently in Taiwan and in the United States. In Chapter Three, I will explain in detail the different notions of “international” presented in the two countries’ dancing communities; it is important to note here that YG founded his own dance class at an overseas-Taiwanese community center on the East Coast in 2012. Becoming the instructor himself, YG designed teaching repertoires that were closer to what dancers in Taiwan were contemporarily practicing. I consider the founding of his dance class significant. On the one hand, he presents a slightly different content of international folk dancing from that of American international folk dancing clubs by teaching his students Israeli folk dances and self-choreographed dances from Taiwan. On the other hand, his teaching repertoires contain dances that are currently practiced in Taiwan, instead of dances that were passed down from the Martial Law Period and are now performed by many first-generation Taiwanese immigrants in the United States. YG suggested, “Even if you do not know the people dancing together, the categories and contents we dance to create the familiarity.” Among YG’s students, two-thirds were from Taiwan (the rest were from China). Moreover, students who continued to attend the dance class

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

throughout the years were mostly Taiwanese, unlike those from China, who mostly came because of their curiosity about international folk dancing, and who often did not continue participating. He proposed that Taiwanese people's previous dance experiences might be the reason why they are more willing to stay and continue. After all, it is not easy for middle-aged people to start a new activity that not only requires body strength, but also a good memory because the steps and routines of each dance piece are set. As mentioned, YG's story is essential because he has established a model that is neither the same as international folk dancing groups run by non-Taiwanese immigrants, nor identical with many Taiwanese international folk dancing clubs in the United States.

RT, who is slightly older than fifty,<sup>257</sup> attended a women's college located in the middle region of Taiwan. As many of my interviewees went to college in Taipei, I invited her to join the conversation of this research to provide a broader geographical picture on Taiwan's international folk dancing movement. Even though RT's dance experiences were constructed by local dance activities in middle Taiwan and thus were different from many of my other interviewees', her sharing supported the concept that international folk dancing is a common memory for specific generations of Taiwanese. Specifically, RT said that certain generations of Taiwanese people understand what international folk dancing is, because "...the Youth Corp<sup>258</sup> popularized this dance form in early Taiwan.

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<sup>257</sup> This means that she can also be seen as the same generation as YG, having experienced the transformation from "self-choreographing" to "traditional" in Taiwan's international folk dancing community.

<sup>258</sup> Mentioned in Introduction, the Youth Corp was founded by Chiang Kai-Shek, the Taiwanese president at that time, in 1952. The purpose of its establishment was to gather the Taiwanese youth to fight back to Mainland China, which was taken by the Communist in around 1949. Thus the Youth Corp was a department that propagated political ideologies of the Taiwanese government to young people during the Cold War.

The dance form was also included in the PE class syllabus of almost all schools.<sup>259</sup>”

Although she did not emigrate to the United States until around 2012, she has had abundant experiences participating in international folk dancing activities held by both Taiwanese and non-Taiwanese people in the United States. “Many Taiwanese people I have met here practiced international folk dancing when they were kids, whether they are currently involved in related activities. I think this dancing experience is what Chinese Americans lack,” RT shared.

As RT’s remark indicates, international folk dancing, having emerged during the Taiwanese Martial Law Period, can be seen as a means of distinguishing Taiwanese immigrants from the umbrella term of “Chinese-Americans.” On the surface, one might think that shared language (i.e. Mandarin Chinese), similar appearances and lifestyles would easily connect immigrants from Taiwan and China. However, there are essential differences that are not necessarily visible. I propose that embodied knowledge of international folk dancing is one of these invisible distinctions. That is, memories of practicing international folk dancing distinguish Taiwanese people from the larger group of “Chinese.” The contrasting reasons for Taiwanese and Chinese people to practice international folk dancing again reiterate one of the key spirits of my research—I care about why these people practice international folk dancing at least as much as the actual techniques and performance contents of the dance form. In YG’s international folk dancing class on the East Coast, for example, two-thirds of his students were from

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<sup>259</sup> According to many of my interviewees, only girls’ classes of their elementary and middle schools had international folk dancing in their curricula. I am aware of this gender bias, and will examine this issue in future research.

Taiwan while the rest were Chinese.<sup>260</sup> Moreover, students who stayed throughout the years were mostly Taiwanese, instead of those from China.<sup>261</sup> He suggests that Taiwanese people's previous dance experiences might be the reason why they are more willing to stay and continue. After all, it is not easy for middle-aged people to start a new activity that not only requires body strength and musicality, but also a good memory because the steps and routines of each dance piece are set. Another interviewee, SS, also said, "Our club has not had people from China. We do not need to recruit new people publicly." Rather than delivering a sense of racial exclusion, SS's comments demonstrate pride in the fact their community club was able to retain enough membership and be composed entirely of members with Taiwanese lineage.

In this chapter, I have focused on California-based international folk dancing activities operated by the first generation immigrants from Taiwan, and I argue that this dance form is an important social activity for these Taiwanese practitioners. First, this *transnational embodiment* is a way to construct Taiwanese diasporic citizenship, meaning that these immigrants use international folk dancing to bridge temporal and spatial differences with their youth and with contemporary Taiwan's international folk dancing community. Second, this embodiment in California is mediated because it can never be identical with the one in Taiwan, even though these migrating practitioners mostly refer back to archives and memories originated from Taiwan when they try to duplicate a similar dance space. Last but not least, international folk dancing allows the Taiwanese

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<sup>260</sup> Therefore, the classes were/are operated in Mandarin Chinese. Occasionally, there would be visitors who did not speak Chinese and participants on those days would use English to communicate.

<sup>261</sup> Y.G. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. August 5, 2017.

immigrants to differentiate themselves from Western international folk dancers and other Chinese Americans in the United States. These Taiwanese participants in California are constantly performing emotional and physical exchanges across the Pacific Ocean and delineating their own migrating history in a lively, diversified way.

### Chapter Three

#### **Dancing Transnationality: Challenges in Embodying the International, the Folk, and the Cultural**

When I attended international folk dancing gatherings in California, I realized that I said these words a lot: "...as for this dance, people in Taiwan do it like this..." I demonstrated slight differences in steps or hand gestures. For instance, Taiwanese dancers in California sometimes do not hold hands when practicing Israeli circle dances, while dancers in Taiwan always do. In a few dances, Taiwanese dancers connect their hands with the two dancers next to themselves. In California, alternating dancers connect with one another, so the third dancer connects with the first and the fifth dancer in the formation while the fourth connects with the second and the sixth and so on. All the dancers form a connection that creates x-shapes in front of the dancers' bodies. One more example for regional differences is the dance *Club Broken Heart*,<sup>262</sup> which is a song that is a partner dance in California but is a non-partner dance in Taiwan. Even though Taiwanese dancers in the two regions practice many dances that overlap with each other, people who are familiar with these dances can often find slight differences in styles or even steps and routines. Taiwanese immigrants' establishment of dance groups builds on their experiences in Taiwan with similar dancelists for parties and teaching repertoires, which indicates the lineage of international folk dancing from Taiwan to the United States. Yet, while dances were brought across the Pacific Ocean with practitioners'

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<sup>262</sup> This is a Chinese pop song by Grasshopper, a famous boys' group from Hong Kong in the 1990's. The song also has the Cantonese, English and Thai versions.

bodily memories, missing steps and fragmented pieces are unavoidable, and Taiwanese dancers in Taiwan and California sometimes consider these dissimilarities in steps and routines wrong and want to fix them. Nonetheless, I argue that the divergences in the Taiwanese international folk dancing communities are a means of showing the diasporic adaptation of Taiwanese immigrants' dancing community in their second homeland.

Regardless of some differences in the dancing communities in the two regions, Taiwanese dancers in Taiwan and California still have much that they share. In the previous two chapters, I have already scrutinized international folk dancing in Taiwanese and Californian contexts. Given those observations, I maintain that the communal alliance of dancers from the two regions now extends beyond local dance rooms to advance transnational connections. Thus the Taiwanese practitioners in both areas share similar questions, and that the practice of international folk dancing also means wrestling with the discourse that accompanies the embodiment. During participant-observation, I also noticed that some dancers deliberated and compared contemporary situations in Taiwan's and California's dancing communities, as well as their past memories and current experiences practicing international folk dancing. These dancers share the same awareness that embodying this dance form raises certain questions, such as what it means when they are doing particular movements, or how their ideas about national identity are reflected in their actions.

This chapter turns its attention to the notions of "international" and "folk" that circulate in and around the practice of international folk dance. Before moving onto sections that separately discuss these notions, I want to provide my own definitions of

these terms. As written in the Introduction, many scholars in dance and cultural studies have challenged the ideas of international and folk. For example, Anthony Shay suggests that folk means the representation of the regional cultures from which it originated and is handed down generation by generation. In contrast, Anthea Kraut pays attention to how “folk” is viewed as pure, natural, primitive, and authentic, echoing Daniel Walkowitz’s argument that folk does not equate to “ancient” or “peasantry.” Walkowitz furthermore argues that folk is locally rooted in a community with its political and social features. My research complicates these scholars’ different ideas of folk, as I am talking about folk as a concept that is dynamic and can change from time to time and space to space. Folk, in my research example, can be defined by each dancer, meaning that this notion is subjective all the time.

As for the notion of international, Yutian Wong takes the Japanese-American artist Michio Ito as an example to demonstrate how “international” is used as a label for non-white artists in the United States. Wong’s interpretation of internationality highlights the racialized body, while echoing dance scholars Susan Foster’s and Marta Savigliano’s examinations of the labels of “world” and “ethnic.” Although Wong and I both investigate the idea of international, I will demonstrate in this chapter that “international” is not used to differentiate the Taiwanese body from American society, and furthermore emphasize the instability of “international” that shifts due to various political and social circumstances. In California, Taiwanese peoples’ participation in international folk dancing multiplies the transnational nature of their practice, emphasizing the fact that the notion of international is practiced in a transnational setting with connections between

two groups of Taiwanese practitioners across the Pacific Ocean. Particularly, the Taiwanese immigrants are embodying more dance genres—such as self-choreographed dancing and Chinese classical dance—in the Taiwanese dancers’ communities than in the Western dancers’ international folk dancing communities. This means that within international folk dancing communities of different regions, there are different teaching repertoires and party dancelists that are either more or less wide-ranging in terms of what is included under the label of “international.” According to my own experiences dancing in Taiwan and in California, along with conversations with some interviewees, I discovered that Taiwanese international folk dancing communities are more diverse with regard to dance styles represented. For instance, a ten-year (2007-2016) statistical analysis conducted by a Taiwanese international folk dancing forum lists the top 200 popular dances from the 846 dance parties held in Taiwan—89,039 dances in total. Among the 200 dances, there are more than fifty self-choreographed dances and Israeli dances respectively, around twenty dances from Eastern European countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, as well as dances from Armenia, Greece, Spain, Russia, the United States (including non-mainland areas such as Hawaii and Guam), Indonesia, and India.<sup>263</sup>

Accordingly, dances from the East and the West are more equally distributed in Taiwan’s international folk dancing communities than those in the United States, where a large amount of Asian dances are not practiced. It is important to mention here that the East and the West are usually defined by longitude. However, in the international folk

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<sup>263</sup> James Liao, “National Ranking of Popular Dances (2006-2017),” 2017.

dancing community, “East” represents geographical areas roughly between longitude 30 degrees to 180 degrees, which includes Continental Asia and Oceania. Dances from the West thus indicate those from Continental Europe, Africa, and America.<sup>264</sup> I will moreover address the definition of “international” and its relationship with dances from the East and the West in later chapters, as different distributions of dances matters to the question of what constitutes the notion of “international.”

Alongside exploring these complications around the terms folk and international, interrogating international folk dancing in Taiwan and California allows scholars to reconsider the problem of cultural awareness. For example, sociologist Deborah Vargas investigates Mexican American musicians’ self-stylization.<sup>265</sup> She argues that the contents of those songs were not the most important, but “...the power that singing had for imagining other places and emotions.”<sup>266</sup> In the case of Taiwanese people’s practice of international folk dancing, the issue of cultural awareness is raised as they perform other people’s national dances. Vargas’s claim makes me question how Taiwanese folk dancers self-stylize themselves in order to present their cultural awareness when practicing folk dances from various regions. In daily conversation at dance gatherings and events, dancers currently in the community acknowledge questions of authenticity, appropriation, and other issues related to cultural awareness. These problems often come up as something that international folk dancers are debating and evaluating amongst

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<sup>264</sup> Russian dances are the exception among the distributions, due to the fact that Russia spans the entirety of Northern Asia and a part of Eastern Europe. Since a majority of its population live in the European side of the country, Russian folk dances are considered “Western” in international folk dancing.

<sup>265</sup> Deborah R. Vargas, *Dissonant Divas in Chicana Music: The Limits of La Onda* (MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 39.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

themselves. I suggest that by analyzing meanings and politics carried out by issues of cultural awareness, both insiders and outsiders of the dancing community can reconsider performing other nationalisms in other ways.

This chapter investigates some significant issues regarding international folk dancing and its communities in Taiwan and California. In the first part, I unpack the notions of folk and internationality. Understanding how people in this community conceive these concepts is crucial. Even though these interviewees are all practitioners of the same dance form, they have dissimilar educational backgrounds, dancing, and living experiences as well as differences in age and occupation. Therefore, they approach international folk dancing through different lenses. Debates I examine in this chapter also show that not only do practitioners and non-practitioners have different understandings of international folk dance, but even among practitioners, there is disagreement about interpretations of folk, international, and cultural authenticity. Building on the crucial topics of folk and international, I then revisit self-choreographed dancing in Taiwanese people's international folk dancing communities. This unique sub-genre is worth paying attention to because it is the main feature that differentiates Taiwanese international folk dancing communities from Western<sup>267</sup> ones. Given that international folk dancing in the United States mainly refers to European descendants' folk dances, the existence of self-choreographed dancing shapes different levels of inclusiveness in the ideas of international and folk in dancing communities. In addition, I argue that this specific term,

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<sup>267</sup> By using the term "Western dancers," I am referring to American dancers with the Anglo-Saxon lineage. Some of my interviewees used the phrase "foreign dancers" to indicate those practitioners' non-Taiwanese background. To minimize the confusion, however, I continue using "Western dancers" throughout the writing.

international folk dancing, already presents complex layers of ideas. That is, “international” could conflict with “folk,” when international indicates a sense that doesn’t require specificity to a region, while folk suggests specificity to a region. However, Taiwanese people’s practice of international folk dancing, along with the addition of self-choreographed dancing, offers researchers novel ways to unpack the notions of folk and international in relation to issues of cultural awareness and others’ nationalisms.

The interviews from which I quote in the chapter were conducted both in Taiwan and California, and the fieldwork period lasted from June 2016 to August 2017. Compared to the previous two chapters, Chapter Three relies more on interviews and my field notes, and less on archival research, mainly because there have been few publications regarding international folk dancing, its communities, histories, cultures, and its debates and crises. It is also essential to note again that when international folk dancing was first introduced to Taiwan, it was viewed as an element of American culture. In addition, because of distinctions in definitions of the two terms, *min-zu* (ethnic dance, specifically refers to classical dances and folk dances from China) and *min-su* (folk dance), a lot of practitioners considered that international folk dancing included only folk dances from outside of Taiwan and China.<sup>268</sup>

In the following section, I start with discussions of the notion of international. I suggest that even though “international folk dancing” is a specific dance genre and a term

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<sup>268</sup> See Introduction and Chapter One for differences of ethnic (*min-zu*) dancing and folk (*min-su*) dancing, and how the use of these two terms in Mandarin Chinese complicates definition of international folk dancing.

used by its practitioners in the United States, there are different levels of internationality among dance groups of different backgrounds. “International,” in my research, does not refer to non-White dancing bodies like Wong argues in her research. Instead, the notion of international represents an ideology that strives for inclusiveness, as Taiwanese dancers in both Taiwan and California make efforts to learn dancers from the East and the West, as well as from the Global North to the Global South.

### 3.1 Redefining “International”

One of the reasons why international folk dancing in Taiwan can be perceived as problematic is because of its inaccurate translation. The Chinese term, *tu-feng-wu*, was actually a term from early China around the 1940’s.<sup>269</sup> It is then understandable that the National Government had continued applying this term after it retreated from China to Taiwan in 1949. Nonetheless, *tu-feng-wu* refers neither to “international” nor “folk,” but only points out the idea of “dance of regional cultures.”<sup>270</sup> Moreover, the “self-choreographed dancing” mentioned in the previous chapters complicates the meaning of international, as I view the invention of self-choreographed dancing an act of “Taiwanized international folk dancing.” This sub-genre is not seen in Western dancers’ international folk dancing practices, and thus becomes the most distinct difference between Taiwanese and Western dancers’ communities in California. This is also one of the important reasons why some Taiwanese dancers decided to establish their own dance

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<sup>269</sup> Field notes. May 2018. New Taipei City, Taiwan; Field notes. February 2018. Taipei, Taiwan.

<sup>270</sup> See Introduction for the history and explanations of international folk dancing and its translation, *tu-feng-wu*.

clubs in the United States. Due to the fact that the naming of international folk dancing in Chinese does not literally indicate “international,” the complication of internationality is rarely articulated in Taiwan. However, this does not mean the problem does not exist. In other sections, I will propose that the more transnational experiences Taiwanese dancers encounter, the more they have awareness of issues surrounding the folk and internationality that are both related to questions of internationality.

I posit that defining “international” is equally as complex as defining “ethnic” or “world,” as Foster and Savigliano discuss in *Worlding Dance*. Foster points out that “world dance” is viewed as separate from Western dance genres, such as ballet and modern; this, then, positions “world dance” as the other. Savigliano<sup>271</sup> also argues that “world dance” is perceived as more traditional while Western-influenced dance is perceived as more modern.<sup>272</sup> Both “world” and “international” exclude and prioritize Western dances (i.e. ballet and modern dance) and intend to encompass many other dance genres, but it is also an important finding of my research that, according to my interviews with Taiwanese dancers in California, Taiwanese dancers’ practice is “more international” than Western dancers’ practice. This Taiwanized practice of international folk dancing not only includes dances from around the world, but also has the so-called self-choreographed dancing from Taiwan. Some immigrants attended Western dancers’ groups when they first moved to the United States because of their love of international folk dancing; nonetheless, they realized the lack of inclusiveness in these groups,

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<sup>271</sup> Marta Savigliano, “Worlding Dance and Dancing Out There in the World,” in *Worlding Dance*, edited by Susan L. Foster (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 163-190.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

compared to those they attended back in Taiwan. I argue that the Taiwanese dancers' experiences with international folk dancing in the United States expose the difference in inclusivity in Taiwanese and Western dancing communities and also challenge the notion of "international."

"I claim that Taiwanese international folk dancing clubs are the most interesting, because various types of dance are covered," SS said during her interview. As an early immigrant to California (i.e. spending a longer lifetime dancing in the United States than in Taiwan), SS did not realize the variance in the meaning of "international" until she went back to Taiwan in the 1990's. She said, "I have been to many cultural festivals in California, and I love the feeling of multiplicity...[when going back to Taiwan that year] I noticed that the international folk dancing community in Taiwan was also very multicultural in terms of dance genres." For SS, "international" means multiplicity in the number and types of dances. Being a committed dancer, SS asked international folk dancers in Taiwan for video recordings and music so that she could introduce different varieties of folk dancing back in California with accurate steps and cultural backgrounds. Notably, SS is now over sixty-five years old, and is still diligently taking many dance classes, such as international standard dancing, Argentine tango, and Chinese classical and ethnic dancing, to improve her dance skills.<sup>273</sup> From her decision to take these dance lessons, I suggest that SS is embodying her own vision of international with international folk dancing as the entrance.

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<sup>273</sup> S.S. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. May 16, 2017.

Interestingly, SS's practices inadvertently twist Foster and Savigliano's ideas of "international." First, she argues that people in this community do not need to limit themselves to practicing specific kinds of dances (i.e. "real" folk dances with significant regional features), because "...all forms of dancing are art."<sup>274</sup> Even though self-choreographed dancing is controversial to many current dancers, SS suggests that this specific sub-genre provides the opportunity for dancers to reconsider what folk might be,<sup>275</sup> while "...enabl[ing] dancers to be more creative and to gain new thoughts, because international folk dancing is only one type of art," she said. Second, basic ballet training and contemporary dance choreographies are now included in Chinese dance classes, which SS experiences. So, SS's embodiment of many forms of dance suggests an inclusiveness to world dance, or international dance, contrary to Foster and Savigliano argument that "world dance" is excluded from Western stage forms.

YG is the founder of a Taiwanese international folk dancing club in a major U.S. city, and the club is still in operation even after he moved from there to California. He established his own class because "...Taiwanese international folk dancing is different from what Western dancers do. I would say it is a comprehensive dance practice."<sup>276</sup> By saying comprehensive, YG means that international folk dancing in Taiwan not only includes folk dances from various regions around the world, but also has other sub-categories, such as self-choreographed dances, Chinese dances, and Israeli dances.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Y.G. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. Aug. 5, 2017.

<sup>277</sup> Interestingly, Israeli dances are excluded from American dancers' international folk dancing communities, and are only practiced by Jewish groups in the U.S. Also, in Jewish people's dance gatherings, they only practice Israeli folk dances and not folk dances from other regions.

Again, YG's opinion further supports that the meaning of international in the Taiwanese-American dancing community is broader than that in the Western dancing community. KR is another interviewee who has been living in California for more than twenty-five years. He is an instructor in a Taiwanese international folk dancing club in Southern California. In our interview during which we had dinner together, he shared with me his love of Israeli dance, and how he has spent hundreds of dollars buying Israeli dance videos and CDs for collection. Even so, KR still thought it most enjoyable attending Taiwanese people's dance groups, "...because the dance genres are more diverse."<sup>278</sup> I argue that the key reason for what YG and KR experienced is that many American international folk dancers are descendants of European immigrants, and they started practicing folk dancing as a way to connect with their cultures of origin, such as Irish step dancing, Greek dancing or Bulgarian dancing, even though they also learn other regional folk dances for entertainment. Conversely, for Taiwanese people, international folk dancing was a means of getting involved in the political party led by the United States after World War II. The dance was already promoted as a monolithic form, instead of a collection of divergent folk dancing genres. Further, this practice was "Taiwanized" during Martial Law, when some leading instructors in Taiwan started producing self-choreographed dances in response to the huge demand from the dancing population. The practice of international folk dancing in Taiwan then became a mixture of American input and elements of Taiwanese society and culture.

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<sup>278</sup> K.R. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. August 20, 2017.

Some other interviewees' comments strengthen the argument that there are different levels of internationality between the Taiwanese and the Western dancing communities in California. EC and RT, two experienced Taiwanese dancers who are now living in California, have abundant experiences participating in dance events and camps held by different groups and ethnicities on both the East Coast and the West Coast. My interview with them took place in their beautiful living room, just a few weeks before we went to the Stockton Folk Dance Camp together. They suggested that repertoires of Westerners' and Taiwanese people's international folk dancing communities are very different.<sup>279</sup> EC stated, "It seems like there is a lack of varieties in European dances in the Taiwanese dancing community; meanwhile, dances from all over Asia are absent from current Western dancing community." EC and I presume that the difficult movements in European couples dances hinder these dances' wide circulation. For example, Polish folk dances like Kujawiak, Oberek, and Krakowiak are all couples dances. Csárdás from Hungary and Tarantella from Italy are also couples dances with complicated turning techniques. As current dancers in Taiwan do not usually have a fixed dance partner, it is not easy to learn and practice different techniques in couples dances. "I once taught the Hambo<sup>280</sup> to some junior dancers in my college folk dancing club in Taiwan, but it has not been passed down. I do not think people in Taiwan are practicing it currently, either," EC said. On the other hand, dances from Asian countries—including China, India, Indonesia, and Thailand, to list a few—mostly have a lot of subtle hand gestures and arm

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<sup>279</sup> E.C. and R.T. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. June 12, 2017.

<sup>280</sup> The hambo is a couples dance originated from Sweden in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Taiwan, a specific dance piece was directly translated as "Han-Bo" dance, and was introduced in the Asia Camp in around 1989.

movements. For instance, Indian classical dancers use mudras (hand and finger gestures) to tell stories. The Dai ethnic dance from China features the “three-curve shape,”<sup>281</sup> which poses the dancer’s arm into three curves from the shoulder to the fingertips, with the two arches on the elbow and the wrist.<sup>282</sup> Further, because many Western folk dances focus mainly on leg movements, rather than hand gestures, Asian folk dances are less practiced in the Western dancing communities in America.

Summing up the above opinions, it is essential to ask, “How international is international folk dancing?” Another curious fact adds a further layer to this question, but might, in fact, help to answer this question. As mentioned, international folk dancing communities of Western dancers practice few Taiwanese or Chinese dances. However, this does not mean that there are none. Currently, many American international folk dancers are doing some of the older “Taiwanese dances” (from the 1960’s to the 1980’s), which are considered too old to be danced in Taiwan. According to some of my interviewees’ and my own experiences, Western dancers are always excited to tell us that they know these Taiwanese dances and request that we dance them together. Nonetheless, in most occasions, my interviewees and I have not known how to do those dances.<sup>283</sup>

Taking “Tai-Wan-Hao” (*Taiwan Is A Good Place*), for example, this dance was choreographed in 1979 by Chun-Zhi Tien. Even though Tien is an indigenous dance instructor who could choreograph Taiwanese indigenous dances with fewer problems of authenticity and appropriation, this dance is now seldom practiced in Taiwan because of

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<sup>281</sup> Ting-Ting Chang, “Choreographing the Peacock: Gender, Ethnicity, and National Identity in Chinese Ethnic Dance” (Ph.D. University of California, Riverside. 2008), 5.

<sup>282</sup> Chang uses the dancer’s torso (from the shoulder to the hips) as her example of the three-curve shape. In Dai dance, dancers can create many sets of three-curve shape with the entire body.

<sup>283</sup> EC and RT. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. June 12, 2017; Field notes. July 2017. San Jose, CA.

its old-fashioned music and simple steps. Interestingly, I learned this dance in a workshop in Southern California in 2015. I also encountered “Zhan-Zai-Gau-Gang-Shang” (*Standing On Top of A Hill*)<sup>284</sup> many times in California, and the dance is favored by the American international folk dancers. Similar to *Taiwan Is A Good Place*, this dance also contains simple steps and is repetitive. Again, I had rarely seen this dance on party repertoires in Taiwan in the past ten years. The student-based club I joined in 2007 did not put this dance into the regular teaching repertoire, either.

Being seen as antiquated is not the only reason that the dances mentioned above are not practiced in Taiwan now. In other words, practicing those Taiwanese dances not only is related to conceptions of internationality, but also has something to do with the idea of authenticity. Current Taiwanese dancers are also more aware of authenticity issues in the sub-genre of self-choreographing, which was a production of the Martial Law Period. At that time, not only were there boundaries between Taiwan and other foreign countries, but also the people of Han ethnicity<sup>285</sup> in Taiwan were ignorant of the Taiwanese aboriginals. From my observation throughout the last ten years dancing, I notice that the Taiwanese people have demonstrated more awareness of problems of oversimplifying and being ignorant to the indigenous cultures. Therefore, current Taiwanese dancers often view those “Taiwanese dances” of earlier times as self-choreographed, as the dances’

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<sup>284</sup> The dance was choreographed by Shiau-Po Lui in 1970. The music of this dance has a taste of Taiwanese aboriginals, but from today’s point of view, the song is not a traditional music piece of any Taiwanese aboriginal tribes.

<sup>285</sup> The Han ethnicity was, and still is, the major population of Taiwan, and occupies the majority of the country’s higher social caste. Therefore, the aboriginal people were given less attention and were subject to stereotyping and homogenizing, and this situation only becomes better recently. Moreover, many aboriginal ethnic groups have resided on the east coast of Taiwan that is a mountainous region, and the transportation to and from the region is not convenient, even today. Thus, the National Government at that time made less effort to understand the differences of each aboriginal group.

elements do not accurately reflect cultures of the Taiwanese minority groups, although the choreographers have long claimed to categorize those dances as Taiwanese.

Still, old dances such as those mentioned above are seen as “Taiwanese” in the United States because Western dancers have not been informed about the complicated political background of contemporary Taiwanese history. Western dancers practicing “Taiwanese dances” can be considered encouraging by Taiwanese dancers because these dances contribute to the diversity of the dancing community. Yet, the fact that these dances perform misinterpretations of Taiwanese indigenous cultures raises questions about the implications of embodying these “Taiwanese dances” within the international folk dancing communities in both Taiwan and California, even though these dances contribute to the level of internationality of the dancing communities.

With the above example of varied understandings of “Taiwanese dances” in international folk dancing communities in different places, I argue that the example is actually less about the issue of authenticity; rather, I am presenting how truly complicated the notion of international is. In addition, Taiwanese dancers’ practice of international folk dancing complicates definitions of “international” in ways that are quite different from previous humanities studies. Instead of using “international” to describe dance genres that are seen as “others” outside of Western dance forms, such as ballet and modern dance, Taiwanese dancers accept all types of dance as potentially international, including self-choreographed dances that are often not considered “folk” within a more traditional understanding of folk dancing. By comparing different regional practices of international folk dancing, I furthermore suggest that the degree of internationality is

varied, and perhaps no group in the international folk dancing community around the world is “intentionally international.” Specifically for the Taiwanese practitioners, the sense of international does not equate to “places not where I am from,” meaning that this notion still carries an individual geographical label but does not center certain places. For instance, my interviewee LK<sup>286</sup> described Taiwanese international folk dancers as open-minded and a group of people seeking opportunities for learning dances from around the world.<sup>287</sup> In Taiwan, there are also many international folk dancing camps that feature dances of different regions, such as Taiwanese dance, Chinese dance, Bulgarian and Serbian dance, as well as self-choreographed couples dance. Even though dancers in Taiwan do not have equal opportunities to access all kinds of folk dancing, they are de-centering the idea of international as Western by understanding and embracing cultures of various places. In addition, international can refer to different styles of dances, even when those dances are seen as popular dances practiced everywhere and by people of different ages and ethnicities (e.g. self-choreographed dancing and international standard dance-inspired dancing). In fact, embracing all kinds of dancing also seems to challenge the idea of folk dancing, because “folk” often means dances with features specific to a singular regional, and I will explore this complexity in the next section.

### **3.2 Redefining “Folk”**

*Teaching Materials For International Folk Dancing* was published in July 1958 by the Ethnic Dance Monthly, which was a publisher under the Chinese Ethnic Dance

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<sup>286</sup> LK is an experienced folk dance instructor, whose introduction comes later in this chapter.

<sup>287</sup> L.K. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. July 30, 2016.

Implementation Committee.<sup>288</sup> This book contains dance routines of the twenty folk dances taught by Rickey Holden in Taiwan. Zhi-Hao Ho, founder of the Chinese Ethnic Dance Implementation Committee, wrote the book's preface, in which he stated that "...every form of dance is unique and has specific cultural representations and living habits." In *Let's Dance International Folk Dancing*, the author Chi Chen wrote, "...folk dances emerged from villages and rural areas."<sup>289</sup> These examples show that earlier dancers in Taiwan had similar understandings of folk to Shay's idea, that folk is an abstract symbol that demonstrates one's own authentic culture, emphasizing the idea of "us," which is different from "others." Nonetheless, I argue that international folk dancing itself challenges these earlier Taiwanese practitioners' perceptions of folk, as this practice is not as simple as a combination of all regional folk dances. In the previous section, I examined how the scope of internationality can be different among local dancing communities, even though everyone is practicing so-called international folk dancing. In this part, I question what "folk" refers to, and what international folk dancing means to younger and older generations of Taiwanese dancers, if these dancers do not solely practice folk dances that show distinct regional features.

My interviewees who are over fifty years old often started answering my question of "What do you think international folk dancing is?" with, "We [the interviewee and his/her dance cohorts] were told by our seniors..." or, "The information I got was..." For

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<sup>288</sup> The Committee is currently named the National Dance Association of R.O.C. For more information, see Chapter One of this dissertation.

<sup>289</sup> Ji Chen, *Let's Dance International Folk Dancing* (Taiwan: Ping-Yuan, 1968).

instance, RT<sup>290</sup> shared in the interview, "...our [the Taiwanese term] *tu-feng-wu* is called international folk dancing here in the United States. The information I got was dances of people from specific regions around the world. It [the notion of folk dancing] includes music, language, dance steps, and clothing."<sup>291</sup> HC started dancing as an undergraduate student and is now in her sixties. Since the 1990s, she has been the instructor in a Taiwanese international folk dancing club in California. We had brunch together before our interview, and she told me folk dancing is dance that has regional traditional elements.<sup>292</sup> I tried to humbly challenge HC and some other interviewees with the existence of self-choreographed dancing when they defined folk as regional- and ethnic-specific. "It was because we did not have a choice at that time [during the Martial Law Period]. If we refused self-choreographed dances, we would have nothing to dance to," HC answered. Her response indicates a social background that was more powerful and influential on the Taiwanese people than the enticement of achieving folk traditions within international folk dancing in a specific historical period. That is, many people were eager to engage in and to gain from this activity by learning new dances and attending workshops, parties, and other events. When teaching sources from outside Taiwan were not enough, instructors needed to choreograph dances to meet the participants' learning desire in regular gatherings. This situation made it not so important for dancers to think about what kinds of dancing were included in or excluded from "folk dancing," as long as there were new dances to learn and events to participate in. In other

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<sup>290</sup> Introduced ahead, she is an experienced dancer who has been involving in international folk dancing for more than twenty-five years. She moved from Taiwan to Northern California more than five years ago, and is now active in both Taiwanese and Western dancers' international folk dancing communities.

<sup>291</sup> R.T. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. June 12, 2017.

<sup>292</sup> H.C. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. Aug. 20, 2017.

words, “folk” seems to be occasionally not relevant at all, even within the practice of international folk dancing.

Around 1980, leading instructor Ching-San Chang thought there were too many self-choreographed dances in the Taiwanese international folk dancing community.<sup>293</sup> It was also the last phase of the Cold War and Martial Law was not as strict as it previously was. Some dance instructors were able to visit international folk dancing camps overseas, and foreign instructors could come to Taiwan and hold dance workshops. For example, Chang attended the Mainewoods Dance Camp in Maine, while another instructor, Chang-Xiong Yang, attended the Stockton Dance Camp in California. The two instructors then exchanged dances they learned from the two camps to decide what to introduce to the Taiwanese dancers.<sup>294</sup> EC said, “Mr. Chang was conducting a transformation, meaning to form the Asia Camp and to invite foreign instructors as a means of introducing ‘international folk dancing’ [to dancers in Taiwan]. Dances from the Balkan region were introduced to Taiwan starting from this time period.” The Asia Camp featured international instructors from different countries, such as Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, and the Czech Republic, to list a few. In recent years, the Asia Camp committees also invited dancers from different Taiwanese indigenous tribes to raise awareness of Taiwan’s own folk cultures. The camp has been one of the most famous international folk dancing events around the world, and just celebrated its sixty-year anniversary in February 2018.

Similar to the abovementioned, more traditional understandings of folk, another interviewee, JL, also prefers dances with what she sees as “...more significant folk

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<sup>293</sup> Y.G. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. August 5, 2017.

<sup>294</sup> H.C. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. August 20, 2017.

elements.”<sup>295</sup> She is an experienced instructor who started a ten-year teaching career at a student-based international folk dancing club soon after she graduated from university in the early 1980s. From the very beginning of her teaching career, she “...always chose those that ‘were more like folk dances’”<sup>296</sup> when she organized annual performances for her students as the club instructor. By saying “more like folk dances,” she referred to those with regional elements and features, instead of some choreographed with movements that were practiced worldwide, such as waltz and ballet. For instance, she once chose Alma Ata Khan, a Uyghur dance, for the club members to perform; in another performance, she arranged a dance from the Alps for her students.<sup>297</sup> In other casual conversations with former members of the same club as JL, these Taiwanese practitioners also shared with me that they performed the Krakowiak and the Oberek from Poland, as well as the Tarantella from Italy.<sup>298</sup> These dances are considered more traditional as they present significant features of specific regions; therefore, they are preferred by some practitioners and clubs.

EC and JL are about the same age, and EC was also introduced to international folk dancing as an undergraduate student in mid-1980s, though via a different student-based club. Still, he holds similar ideas about folk dancing as dances with regional significances, and he defines folk dancing as an embodiment that its participants—including both viewers and dancers—can connect to specific regions. He said in the interview, “...[the dance features] should be regional and present locality. For example,

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<sup>295</sup> J.L. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. March 15, 2017.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Field notes. January 2017. Taipei, Taiwan; Field notes. August 2017. Monterey Park, CA.

when a dance is accompanied with 5/8 or 7/8 time signatures, I recognize which country or region it comes from.” Another interviewee, CM, has been dancing for over thirty years. I do not even consider her an amateur dancer, as she has devoted so much time to not only dancing but also learning music and other languages in order to gain deeper understandings of dance and cultures. Her passion and contribution to this dancing community are often praised by other participants. In our interview, she suggested that only dances with distinguished, noticeable features are folk dancing.<sup>299</sup> “For example, many contemporary Israeli dances are composed of international standard dance elements like salsa, jive, and cha-cha steps. I do not think these [Israeli] dances are folk dances,” she said. Even though CM has a more strict definition of what folk dancing should be, she does not refuse to practice dances that are “not so folk-dancey.” In fact, she is well-known in the community as an all-around dancer who is good at many styles of dancing.

Dissimilar from many senior dancers’ opinions mentioned above, Taiwanese dancers of younger age have a broader definition of “folk dancing.” Three of my interviewees, TS, DL and TZ, are all between thirty to thirty-five years old, and they define folk dancing without the requirement that those pieces must represent specific regions or cultures. TS was introduced to international folk dancing in Taiwan as an undergraduate student. She continued participating in related activities after moving to the United States for her Ph.D. degree in bioengineering. She said, “To my understanding, all kinds of dance originated from folk dancing if you pay a lot of efforts tracing back the origins.” TS’s perception seems to be historical-oriented. For example,

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<sup>299</sup> C.M. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. July 16, 2016.

waltz is now standardized for dance competitions, but was originated from Landler, a form of folk dancing of the German and Swiss region. TS furthermore defined folk dancing as a form “...[that] has to be practiced by a group of people altogether.” In other words, the communal feeling of the practice of international folk dancing is the crucial element for TS. Another interviewee, DL, is a Taiwan-based young dancer. Even though he attended a university that was in another city different from where he is now working, he has been constantly practicing international folk dancing. Without acknowledging that international folk dancing is an equivalent term for *tu-feng-wu*, DL believed that *tu-feng-wu* is a broad term that includes dance forms in which practitioners enjoy themselves. DL’s suggestion indicates two concepts. First, folk dancing (i.e. dances with significant regional features) is a part of international folk dancing, but is not the only component; second, every genre of dance can be seen as a type of *tu-feng-wu*, as long as the person doing the dance gains pleasure from it.

This purpose-oriented explanation echoes TS’s historical-oriented understanding of international folk dancing, because these two perceptions both relate to a sense of humanity, which was in fact proposed by my other interviewee TZ. TZ started dancing when in high school around 2000, and has had abundant experiences working with student-based dance clubs since then. We met during his lunch break from work, and I worried that the one-hour meeting would not be enough. He proved my worry unnecessary, as he prepared so well with the questions I sent him prior to the interview. He shared, “Folk is about people...and people have their cultures. So I think as long as a dance form—this can be applied to music as well—is preferred by a group of people in a

specific time and space, it [the art form] is ‘folk.’”<sup>300</sup> Putting together the responses from TS, DL, and TZ, and comparing different ideas about folk proposed by my interviewees of different generations, I suggest another definition of folk that is dissimilar to the existing explanations from other scholars. Folk is flexible, dynamic, and is not rooted. To be more precise, the idea of folk in the international folk dancing community is strongly communal-related however is not tied to anyone specific. Even within the same community with people practicing the same dance form, notions of folk are conceived very differently due to distinctions in age and dancing experiences. There are debates and controversies about folk, and there are no correct answers to what it is. I suggest that new versions of “folk” can arise through embodying international folk dancing through multiple avenues, as this *transnational embodiment* was favored during the Taiwanese Martial Law Period and has lasted since then.

### **3.3 “Self-Choreographing:” A Localized Transnational Embodiment**

In the previous sections, I have discussed how international folk dancing challenges existing ideas of international and folk. In this part, I am using the example of self-choreographed dancing to more explicitly examine how this *transnational embodiment* offers a unique viewpoint to interrogate notions of international and folk. I emphasize self-choreographed dancing as a critical tool to reveal challenges in these two foundational concepts, but it is not the only vehicle to investigate the notions of folk and international.

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<sup>300</sup> T.Z. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. September 26, 2016.

“Self-choreographed dancing,” a sub-genre of international folk dancing, sometimes has slightly different names, such as “creative dancing,” or “contemporary created dancing.”<sup>301</sup> As introduced in Chapter One, the addition of self-choreographed dances to teaching and party repertoires had an important purpose besides enjoyment. When international folk dancing was at its peak during the 1970’s, many workshops, dance classes and parties were held every week. Yet, it was still the Martial Law Period, when Taiwanese people had limited access to outside information. Under the pressure of participants’ expectation that new dances would be released at these routine gatherings combined with social limitations to information access, some instructors started choreographing new dances to their preferred music for the practitioners in Taiwan. This feature remains within Taiwanese people’s international folk dancing communities, even after Martial Law was lifted in 1987. This sub-category continues to play a huge part of the Taiwanese international folk dancing communities in both Taiwan and California, but it also raises questions regarding its representation of folk and international. For instance, some members question whether the choreographers have the right to produce whatever types of dance they want to, if this community claims itself practicing “folk dances.” Some others argue that if this dance form is “international,” it might not be necessary to argue the level of being traditional. Since I have demonstrated how folk and international are understood in the dancing communities in the previous two sections, I now focus on how current Taiwanese practitioners approach the idea of self-choreographing in this dance practice.

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<sup>301</sup>All these three terms are my translations from Mandarin Chinese. In my dissertation, I use “self-choreographed dancing” or “self-choreography/ies” for consistency.

Given this discussion of the problems brought up by self-choreographed dancing, one might pause and question: What is the definition of “self-choreographed dancing?” What kind of dances should be categorized under this sub-genre? These inquiries are more complicated than they seem, due to the fact that practitioners of different generations and different backgrounds have their own understandings to this sub-category, and these different approaches are entangled with their varied thoughts about what “folk dancing” is. CS, one of the most prestigious international folk dancing instructors who is now over eighty-five, suggested that dances categorized as international folk dancing could avoid censorship during the Martial Law Period. At the same time, waltz, tango, and other “international standard dance-inspired”<sup>302</sup> elements were considered stylish as these types of dances appeared in the movies. For these reasons, people would practice some other non-folk dances under the name of international folk dancing.<sup>303</sup> With the shift of times and social environment, many dances with elements of Paso doble, English tango, and waltz choreographed at that time are now categorized as “self-choreographed dancing.” In this regard, this sub-genre could be seen as an escape from governmental prohibition, a term that has made international folk dancing an even more ambiguous dance form. Even so, this ambiguity allowed many people during Martial Law to avoid political censorship and to gain some satisfaction from practicing dances viewed as fashionable by then.

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<sup>302</sup> By using this term, I refer to dances that apply natural turn, contra check, five step, and other techniques from the international standard dance. However, these techniques were simplified in order to fit the level of these Taiwanese dancers who were not professional. I will use “ISD-inspired” afterwards.

<sup>303</sup> C.S. Interviewed by Hsu, Tung, and Wu. February 6, 2018.

CS's comments echo what I have talked about in Chapter One, that self-choreographed dancing in the earlier period contributes to the representation of Taiwanese-ness. For example, the choice of using the handhold gesture, instead of closed position, suggests a historical specificity of contemporary Taiwan due to political restrictions and social norms. HT, who started practicing international folk dancing around 1980 as a university undergraduate, expressed the feeling of seeing those ISD<sup>304</sup> inspired dances. She said, "We were once fascinated by those dances because they were just so different." Two other male interviewees, HD and RH, also recalled that they, along with many other high school boys in the 1970's and 1980's, worked hard on these couples' dances, because "...others would admire you and consider you very cool if you could lead the girls well."<sup>305</sup>

This sub-genre of "self-choreographed dances" has stayed in the dance repertoire in Taiwan since it was invented, and has undergone a revolution in its styles. As social environments of past and present Taiwan are different, the approach to self-choreographed dancing has also shifted. Some embrace and welcome this action, while others resist the notion. However, even those who resist have to engage with those who self-choreograph because it is so common. For dancers who resist this sub-genre, many define "self-choreographed dancing" as dances composed of techniques without elements of specific regions. These dancers and some other practitioners also consider dance forms accepted in the academic setting (e.g. ballet, Chinese classical dance, and contemporary dance) "self-choreographing," because these dance styles do not fully match international

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<sup>304</sup> As a reminder, ISD stands for international standard dance.

<sup>305</sup> R.H. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. July 14, 2016; H.D. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. June 6, 2017.

folk dancing's initial intention of being a culturally-specific recreational activity for people during the Martial Law Period.<sup>306</sup>

Interviewee HY majored in Chinese literature as an undergraduate student. With her profession in linguistics, HY often considers dance terms with knowledge from linguistic studies. She dislikes the term “self-choreographed dancing” because “...all dances are choreographed after all.”<sup>307</sup> As a younger dancer than myself, she questioned me during our interview whether using self-choreographed dancing was a humble way that those choreographers used to refer to their own productions. She furthermore shared, “...I think ‘stylistic dancing’ or something similar is more suitable,”<sup>308</sup> as being stylistic can refer to either a choreographer’s own styles or regional features and specific techniques applied to a piece. HY’s assumption of dancers being humble and thus categorizing their own dances as self-choreographed raises another possibility: self-choreographed dancing might be a way for choreographers to de-emphasize the mixed features of one dance piece. For instance, a dance piece may have folk techniques choreographed with popular music; choreographers who themselves are immigrants also choreograph dances that combine music and dance steps from different regions. These complex situations require a new phase of research. For now, I want to quote the experienced dancer CM’s challenge to the dilemma between folk and self-choreographing. CM argued, “...folk dance has to have recognizable regional features...self-choreographed dances are difficult to define, because a person can also choreograph new dances with regional

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<sup>306</sup> Field notes. March 2018. Taipei, Taiwan.

<sup>307</sup> H.Y. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. June 29, 2016.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

features.” She furthermore stated in our interview, “...I think it is ‘self-choreographing’ when today’s Bulgarian dancers use Bulgarian traditional music and steps to produce a new dance piece [because those regional steps and featured music have long been recognized and studied].” CM suggested a more suitable term for herself to indicate the act of “choreographing folk,” that is ‘rearranging.’ She suggested that rearranging could also describe the situation of that person [a Bulgarian instructor] putting some Bulgarian steps together but with varied orders and different music.<sup>309</sup>

Even though there are varied definitions of self-choreographed dancing, most people, regardless of their ages and dancing experiences, seem to agree that this sub-genre in the field of international folk dancing refers to those pieces that do not have significant folk elements passed down generation to generation; those pieces could also be called “fusion,” which merge traditional steps with popular music or combination of folk music and techniques without regional specificity. As FC said to me, according to her experiences dancing for about fifty years, dancers today choreograph with music or techniques they are fond of, as the social and political environment today is not the same as that during the Martial Law Period.<sup>310</sup> Due to the fact that self-choreographed dancing currently often comes with more fashionable music and sometimes with formal props—silk fans, scarfs, or ribbons—more and more dancers have been paying close attention to this sub-genre and focusing less on other kinds of folk dances that are considered more traditional. For example, in dance parties held by specific international folk dancing

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<sup>309</sup> C.M. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. July 16, 2016.

<sup>310</sup> What FC meant was that during Martial Law, those dance instructors choreographed because they had to. Mentioned in Chapter One, they needed to satisfy the participants’ expectation that new dances would be released in those regular gatherings. Differently, no imported information is restricted and no dance is prohibited now. There is no pressure and no limitation for choreographing.

groups, almost one third of the dances on their party repertoires are self-choreographed dances. Some other participants complain about this situation and argue that the limited preferences to dance would lead the community away from the path of “international folk dancing.” While my interrogations on what folk and international are can be helpful in consideration of this debate, my interviews with some experienced instructors and dancers in this community, shown in the following sections, also assist us in scrutinizing the meaning of self-choreographed dancing.

Describing international folk dancing as her lover is not enough to demonstrate how CC loves dancing. She has participated in this dance form for over thirty years, and she even shared a poem she wrote about her love towards international folk dancing during our interview. CC choreographs her own pieces when invited to teach in workshops. Her choreographies are often inspired by Chinese ethnic dances, most likely because she has been most exposed to those dance styles, and her dances are very popular among the members of the Taiwanese international folk dancing communities in both Taiwan and California. According to our interview, CC believes that it is fine to produce one’s own choreographies, as long as both the choreographer and dancers are aware of what they are practicing. “If we consider all types of folk dancing through a temporal manner, weren’t many folk dances ‘self-choreographed’?” CC asked me during the interview. What she meant was that even though many folk dances have been passed down for decades, they were once choreographed.

In other words, CC believes that because many folk dances have existed for a long time that international folk dancers around the world might not be able to trace back to

those dances' choreographers, diminishing and even ignoring the glory of choreographing. In my opinion, the idea of choreographing has not been ignored, because current dancers are aware of the person who introduced a dance, or the camp that released a dance. Instead of deemphasizing choreographing, I suggest that CC views choreographing with a broader point of view, which includes the act of organizing regional elements to craft those elements into a dance piece that later practitioners may engage in despite never knowing the origin of the elements.

LK is another well-known instructor in the community. He has abundant experiences teaching advanced international folk dancers and also has his own classes for beginners. He met me for the interview during a one-day folk dancing party, making the atmosphere of our conversation relaxing but productive, and the recording of the interview was full of dance music. This reminds me of his personality as an instructor who seems to be able to strike the balance between being funny and serious. LK emphasized issues of history and temporality when I asked him about the controversial issue of self-choreographing in the international folk dancing community. His thoughts about temporality refer to a relative sense of past and present, meaning that the dances we now consider "more folk-dancey" were self-choreographed at some point. Similarly, the self-choreographed dances we are practicing now will probably be seen as folk dances by future dancers decades later.<sup>311</sup> "Nowadays, many Israeli folk dancing instructors choreograph to popular music [to attract younger generations to join the dancing community] as well," LK suggested, "...because those older folk dances have existed for

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<sup>311</sup> L.K. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. July 30, 2016.

a longer period of time and have been passed down generation by generation, contemporary dancers do not challenge the degree of being considered credible folk in those dances.”<sup>312</sup> LK’s temporal approach to self-choreographed dancing resonates with what CC suggested, that these older folk dances currently are not questioned as “self-choreographed dances” because they can bear the test of time. As CC said, “...there must be many more self-choreographed folk dances throughout the development of international folk dancing.”<sup>313</sup> According to the two instructors, whether dances have significant elements of regional cultures, or are dances of fusion, those choreographed before that are still practiced today have gone above the controversial stage of “self-choreographing,” because time has proven them preferred by past and current dancers. “I am not against self-choreographed dancing,” LK concluded in our interview. Thinking about what LK said, that how we dance and how we categorize dance are only reflections of our temporal mindsets and the contemporary dancing environment, I suddenly realized that LK truly manifests this *transnational embodiment*. He not only welcomes all forms of dances and truly breaks the boundaries among them, but also views this practice as more than a dance form; it is a lifestyle that people embody at this moment.

CC and LK are not the only instructors who hold an open-minded attitude toward self-choreographed dancing. YG, a California-based Taiwanese immigrant who founded his own dance class in 2012, questioned me during the interview, “Where do all those old dances come from?” Responding to himself, he argued that choreographing enabled a set

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> C.C. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. August 4, 2016.

of steps being passed down as a dance piece.<sup>314</sup> I could not fully agree with YG as I have met a few international folk dancing instructors who encourage students to occasionally improvise. There are also some types of folk dancing that relied on the leaders and their signals.<sup>315</sup> Nonetheless, I admit that folk dances with set routines are still the majority and one of the features of this dance practice. Those dances with slight improvisation are also less practiced now, because people in this community are still used to set routines that everyone can do together.<sup>316</sup> Similar to CC's understanding of choreographing, YG considers setting up steps into routines as an act of choreographing. Applying YG's words, "...I think we could allow a wider range [of international folk dancing and do not reject 'self-choreographing']...if we see contemporary Israeli dances as folk dancing, why can't self-choreographed dances in Taiwan be called folk dancing?"<sup>317</sup>

Instead of considering all folk dances as choreographed, some Taiwanese dancers accept self-choreographed dancing but view this sub-category as different from other "folk dances." This is because while most dance pieces are categorized by their respective countries, a sub-genre entitled "self-choreography" declares that these dances are neither regional nor folk. Recalling the quotation from HT a few paragraphs before, she used "fascinated" to describe how she and her peers were allured by those self-

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<sup>314</sup> Y.G. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. August 5, 2017.

<sup>315</sup> In some open-circle dances, there are a few sets of steps but the entire pieces do not have set routines. Dancers in line rely on the leader (i.e. mostly the first person at the right of the line) and his/her signals to dance and change between different sets of steps.

<sup>316</sup> According to my own experience attending a national camp in 2012, the participants looked embarrassed whenever the instructor told everyone to improvise. Many chose to mimic what the instructor was doing at that moment. I do not intend to discuss improvisation in the international folk dancing community in Taiwan, nor the docile bodies presented here. But I am aware of this situation and will examine related issues in the future if possible.

<sup>317</sup> Y.G. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. August 5, 2017.

choreographed dances with ISD-inspired elements.<sup>318</sup> For her, self-choreographed dances are not “folk.”<sup>319</sup> Even so, she told me in our interview, “...I practice international folk dancing in order to experience all types of dancing. In this case, why should I avoid specific sub-genres of international folk dancing?” HT considers it unreasonable to create a hierarchy of dance genres, because “...each generation has its own preferences. There is no right or wrong practicing of self-choreographed dancing.” RH, who is also in his fifties like HT, also views it as no problem to practice self-choreographed dancing. During my interview with RH, I reminded him that he just defined international folk dancing as “dances with folk or traditional elements” a second ago before we dove into conversations about self-choreographed dancing.<sup>320</sup> He threw a question back to me, “Does it really matter if self-choreographed dancing is not ‘real folk dancing?’ As long as I remember the spirit of international folk dancing in my mind, I accept all forms of dances existing in this community.”

Regardless of one’s attitude toward self-choreographing, this sub-genre seems to be more and more popular within the Taiwanese international folk dancing community, thus making it impossible for any practitioner opposed to it to not engage in self-choreographed dancing. JL, who leaned more toward traditional folk dances, said, “It seems unavoidable that more and more contemporarily choreographed dances appear in our community. But at least that person [the choreographer] needs to keep some folk elements.” With more complicated steps, techniques, or sometimes with beautiful props,

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<sup>318</sup> As a reminder, ISD refers to international standard dance. According to HT, she said specifically, “...waltz, tango, and those kinds of dances.” (H.T. Interview. 2016).

<sup>319</sup> H.T. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. October 5, 2016.

<sup>320</sup> R.H. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. July 14, 2016.

current dancers find these more advanced dances more attractive, as opposed to “traditional” folk dancing, which are often simpler with much repetition and rarely with props. Recalling HD’s and RH’s sharing of how they liked to show off their leading techniques to girl dancers when they were in high school, I suggest this mindset of challenging oneself and sometimes being able to show off is similar. With movements of high kicks, spins, or hip hop and contemporary ballet techniques, younger dancers find physical and mental satisfaction in these self-choreographed dances, while senior dancers are less capable of these dances usually because of physical limitations. This fact creates a generational tension within the community. On the one hand, senior dancers hope to have younger dancers participate in international folk dancing; on the other hand, those young dancers have different preferences from senior dancers. This conflict creates different levels of understanding about self-choreographed dancing and the debate will continue.

As some of my interviewees mentioned the Israeli folk dancing community as an example during our conversations regarding self-choreographed dancing, I intend to finish this section with some discussion of the Israeli community and its contemporary approach to the idea of self-choreographing. BC is a Taiwanese dancer who has resided in Israel for over five years for personal reasons. She generously offered her time for me to interview her during her visit back to Taiwan. BC shared that folk dancers in Israel do not hesitate to assert their intention to choreograph Israeli folk dances. In fact, there is a

specific sub-genre in Israeli dancing called “choreographed popular dance.”<sup>321</sup> Some Israeli folk dance choreographers (usually instructors as well) even have commercial relationships with popular singers, and those dance instructors specifically choreograph to the songs of these singers. These singers also produce special editions of those songs that people dance to, increasing commercial benefits for themselves and for the music industry. Besides this economic win-win situation for the dancing community and the music industry, the Israeli dancing community also benefits from the increase in the dancing population. BC shared that in regular gatherings held by some popular dance instructors, there are even specific time slots opening for younger dancers who are fond of circle dances and line dances choreographed to popular music.<sup>322</sup> In Taiwan, a non-student international folk dancing group that practices a lot of Israeli dances has become the most popular dancing club in Northern Taiwan.<sup>323</sup>

Besides BC, there are also many other Taiwanese dancers who pay extra attention to Israeli dance groups because of their own interests. It seems like Israeli folk dancing communities in both Israel and California have successfully been attracting young people and new participants to join their activity,<sup>324</sup> even though recently there have been debates about whether Israeli dances are “folk enough” within those dancing groups. While I hesitate to firmly conclude that it is worth adding fashionable, contemporary elements into “folk dancing,” self-choreographed dances with today’s preferred

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<sup>321</sup> This is a literal translation from Mandarin Chinese to English, quoting BC’s term [in Hebrew]; B.C. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. September 25, 2016.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Field note. May 2018. Taipei, Taiwan.

<sup>324</sup> B.C. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. September 25, 2016; E.C. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. June 12, 2017; Field notes. December 2015. Palo Alto, CA.

components might be one way to solve the difficulties presented by aging Taiwanese international folk dancing communities. Israel dancers' open-minded attitude toward choreographing folk dances and their success in attracting newcomers provide Taiwanese dancers another path to reconsider the meaning of self-choreographed dancing.

“Self-choreographed dancing” has created continuous debate within the Taiwanese international folk dancing community. Different dancers' opinions toward this sub-genre and the example of Israeli dancing community provide varied aspects for all international folk dancing practitioners to reconsider what international folk dancing may be, and how this practice can be passed down. No matter what, I argue that self-choreographing represents a sense of “localized transnationality” in the Taiwanese international folk dancing community,<sup>325</sup> and thus is a presentation of Taiwanese-ness. Self-choreographed dancing, especially that produced during the Martial Law Period, was the symbol of a localized embodiment. Moreover, the Taiwanese immigrants who practice international folk dancing in the United States have brought this localized embodiment to their second homeland, labeling self-choreographed dancing the most significant difference between Taiwanese people's international folk dancing groups and those of non-Taiwanese dancers.

### **3.4 Folk, International and Challenges in Cultural Politics**

International folk dancing, by its name, is a dance form in which practitioners embody folk dances from around the world. Therefore, the issue of authenticity of the

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<sup>325</sup> As a reminder, I argue that self-choreographing is a sign of Taiwanese-ness in this dissertation. However, this does not indicate that Taiwanese dancers are the only ones who are practicing this sub-genre.

dances concerns many participants. For instance, many practitioners claim it is important to learn and perform dances that are close to their origins, even though I argue that the intention of staying close to one's origins is an approach to authenticity but is not the only one. In contrast, the issue of appropriation is less discussed because embodying other nationalisms has always been part of this dance practice. As Casey defines, international folk dancers "...come from various backgrounds and do not practice only their respective regional folk dances."<sup>326</sup> Since I started my studies in graduate school, I have felt isolated by the inclusive dancing environment that encourages practice of every type of dance because such an all-encompassing practice actually unsettles my investigation of the dance study praxis, as authenticity and appropriation are intriguing to dance scholars like me. These notions are often combined with discussions of colonialism, nationalism, or sexism. For example, Jane Desmond notes that, "Combined with ideologies of colonialism, these ideas [stereotypes of Hula and Hawaii] can produce imaginaries that merge the feminine and the exotic."<sup>327</sup> In "The Bodies Beneath the Smoke or What's Behind the Cigarette Poster," Srinivasan also talks about how white bourgeois American female artists used colored bodies to create a cultural capital hierarchy and to claim the rights of female socially, politically, and economically.<sup>328</sup> In light of these scholars, I cannot stop questioning if Taiwanese international folk dancers are consciously ignoring the problem of appropriation, if they are creating cultural

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<sup>326</sup> Betty Casey, *International Folk Dancing U.S.A.* (NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981).

<sup>327</sup> Jane C. Desmond, "Introduction," in *Staging Tourism: Bodies on Display from Waikiki to Sea World* (IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>328</sup> Priya Srinivasan, "The Bodies Beneath the Smoke or What's Behind the Cigarette Poster: Unearthing Kinesthetic Connections in American Dance History," in *Discourses in Dance* 8 (2007): 7-48.

hierarchies in this dance practice, and if they ever question “whose dances” and “who’s dancing.”

These struggles piqued my curiosity to close this chapter by exploring the issue of cultural awareness. Specifically, due to my interview results, the varied ways people conceive of folk and international and how dancers view self-choreographed dancing lead to the question of what authenticity and appropriation might be in Taiwanese people’s practice of international folk dancing. Transnationality is essential to this *transnational embodiment*, but is there a way to evaluate to what degree someone is adhering to the origins of a dance form? Do dancers have the right to perform or even to choreograph whatever dances they want if this community is entitled “international folk dancing community?”

“I think this question is too much,” HT responded immediately, when I asked her about the right to embody others’ dances. She commented that it would be too serious if I thought practicing international folk dancing meant interpreting other cultures. For her, dancers should set their own pace and determine their individual degree of involvement when engaging folk dances and cultures, because “...we are experiencing, trying our best, and enjoying different cultures.”<sup>329</sup> She moreover questioned, “Why don’t you ask whether I have the right to play Chopin’s piano pieces? Do you mean that we can only play Chinese music?”<sup>330</sup> HT was not the only one who used music as an example, as YG also mentioned that people who are not German play Beethoven’s music all the time. Another interviewee, TZ, responded to my question about practicing others’ cultures,

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<sup>329</sup> H.T. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. October 5, 2016.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

“Why don’t you ask if Taiwanese people can eat fries and make Western food?” As diet is also a part of culture, TZ argued that there is no limitation for one to approach others’ cultures in any aspect, because today’s world allows people to have access to so many things. TZ’s argument seems to support YG’s statement that “...if you think you ‘own’ the culture, then others do not have the right to enjoy it.” In other words, for people who express interest in others’ cultures and for those whose cultures are experienced by others, both groups should have an open-minded attitude so that it is possible for outsiders to appreciate different cultures. As HT argued, “I will never say that I fully understand them [different cultures and their folk dances], but I gain pleasure with these experiences.”<sup>331</sup>

“Teaching international folk dancing allows my students to know the world better, even if they do not have opportunities to go to every place they want to,” LK said. He has been volunteer-teaching in a community center for over five years, focusing on popularizing international folk dancing outside the community. Even though he did not earn a penny from teaching, this work for him seemed to be very rewarding, as he proudly told me about the increase in student population during our interview. As a teacher, he reads books and watches dance clips again and again, in order to “make the students feel as if they were traveling around the world.”<sup>332</sup> Similar to HT’s humble assertion that she does not fully understand the respective cultures of the dances she has practiced, LK admitted that international folk dancers do not have complete understanding of all kinds of dances, “...but many instructors have been doing research

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<sup>331</sup> H.T. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. October 5, 2016.

<sup>332</sup> L.K. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. 30 Jul. 2016.

diligently on specific genres of folk dancing they are interested in, and we see their efforts.” Like many other interviewees, he claimed that people should be happy to see their own cultures being understood and embodied by others, and that “no one would protect his/her culture by preventing others from experiencing it.”<sup>333</sup>

When I interviewed CC, another experienced international folk dancing instructor, she used the example of a dance competition<sup>334</sup> in China to support her opinion that we do not need to see it as a problem when dancers perform folk dances of others. “The outcome [of this dance competition] is positive,” CC said, “...you can see the dancers trying very hard to present the steps correctly, although you know some of the steps are not accurately performed. For me, I would be very proud to see my own culture embodied by others.” But as an elementary school teacher and an experienced folk dance instructor, CC indicated that it is important to be aware of different contexts. That is, teaching obviously requires the highest standard in understanding backgrounds of different dances, meaning the greatest sense of cultural awareness. Besides the steps and techniques, the instructor should have the ability to explain historical, geographical, and cultural backgrounds of the dances taught, including music, clothing, and living habits of that region.<sup>335</sup> When it comes to performances, CC thought that the audience should be able to determine whether the performers attempt to have a good background understanding of the dances they perform. Even though a performer cannot achieve some techniques or styles in a short amount of time, their diligence in trying is apparent.

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Entitled the “Golden Lotus International Friendship Cup,” this Chinese ethnic dance competition was first held in 2002. Non-Chinese dancers from 14 countries participated that year.

<sup>335</sup> C.C. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. August 4, 2016.

CC's argument about cultural awareness again echoes CM's assertion<sup>336</sup> that "...authenticity of your performance is defined by the audience or the people of that culture, which you are practicing. You do not claim yourself as being authentic when embodying cultures of others."<sup>337</sup> In this regard, how close a performer is to the original culture is even harder to define because being "authentic enough" becomes a subjective issue. JC is an experienced dancer who started international folk dancing around 2002 as an undergraduate student. Because of her love of dancing, she transferred her career from a finance-related job to dance teaching and administration. Thus, she has had abundant experience working with dancers of different backgrounds, including contemporary dancers and folk dancers. JC's experience learning Chinese classical dance in China serves as another demonstration that levels of authenticity are difficult to measure. She shared that these dance sessions were taught by a famous principal of a dance institution, and there were students from both Taiwan and China. "Everyone was taught by this same instructor with exactly the same movements. But in the presentations performed by the two nationalities of dancers, the style and feeling were significantly dissimilar," JC said. She argued that each dancer's body was rooted in the place where he/she lives and was affected by his/her culture. Therefore, it seems unnecessary for folk dancers to debate the issue of authenticity. After all, it is likely that two Taiwanese dancers present individual feelings and styles even when performing the same Taiwanese folk dance.

TS, who is only three years younger than JC, suggested that "...everyone has the right to practice and to perform all kinds of folk dances" in regards to my question of

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<sup>336</sup> CC and CM both are instructors of the international folk dancing community in Taiwan.

<sup>337</sup> C.M. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. July 16, 2016.

cultural awareness during our interview. She continued, "...specifically for performances, the audience should be aware that each dance piece carries the dancer's own interpretation and understanding, and the content might not truly present the original culture." TZ is two years older than TS, and they both were members of the student-based club I joined when in university. As an experienced international folk dancing participant who works a lot with newcomers of the student-based club, TZ argued that his goal is to tell his audience that there were these kinds of folk dances around the world and that those dances were accessible to these beginners. He further stated, "...I am fully aware that an exchange student from Russia might think that I need to improve my technique to be more authentic. I am also aware that what I am dancing is a production of an instructor or a choreographer." TZ's argument indicates that even though folk dancing performances by international folk dancers are not completely the same as the original cultures performed and might not satisfy the requirements from people of those specific origins, these performances are still valuable. International folk dancing performances raise awareness for audiences of different cultures around the world. Moreover, TZ concluded our conversation about authenticity: "...as long as I raise the interest of one single person and make this person willing to search for more performances of professional dance companies...[my performance is meaningful]." These words from TZ bring us back to JC's opinion. Recalling all her experiences working with performers of various backgrounds, JC asserted that the intention of a dance piece was more important than dancing "correctly." She quoted a Taiwanese contemporary dance choreographer

and said, "...there is not only one option of 'Taiwanese-ness,' but [there are] many possibilities."<sup>338</sup>

According to my conversations with many interviewees, most Taiwanese international folk dancers are aware of the issue of cultural politics. While a majority of practitioners are anxious about participating in dances originating from other nationalisms with credible authenticity, younger dancers who are now in their thirties, such as TS, JC and TZ, seem aware yet unworried about adhering to cultures of origin. I suggest that it is because these young people did not experience the limited freedom of Martial Law; they have had abundant chances to experience various forms of performing arts besides international folk dancing, such as the Dance Theatre<sup>339</sup> and musicals. The exposure enables them to view complete authenticity as a lifelong process, instead of an ultimate goal. Like JC said, "...it is more important to ask why we practice these dances, instead of what we are practicing."<sup>340</sup> There is no doubt that every form of embodiment is unique, but it is also true that the process and mindset of embodying a dance practice is crucial. The issue of authenticity is worth reconsidering, especially in this generation when cultural exchange and mixture are unavoidable.

The open-minded attitude of these younger dancers towards achieving original cultures does not mean that the younger generations ignore any concern for authenticity. On the contrary, there are many young dancers, including JC herself, who have transferred their careers to dance from other fields after they got their bachelor degrees.

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<sup>338</sup> J.C. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. 15 Dec. 2016.

<sup>339</sup> The German Tanztheater (translated as dance theatre in English) is a specific art form emerged from the 1920's Germany. This art form combines dance and dramatic elements. Famous masters include Rudolf Laban, Kurt Jooss, and Pina Bausch.

<sup>340</sup> J.C. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. 15 Dec. 2016.

Among them, some stayed in Buenos Aires for years to learn Argentine Tango. Some others went to Spain for Flamenco; still others enrolled in dance institutions in China for professional training in Chinese dance. These dancers mostly own their own dance studios in Taiwan now. It is important to acknowledge these people's transitions into their new careers because this fact not only proves international folk dancing to be a life-changing practice, but also confirms that the pursuit of greater authenticity can lead participants of this *transnational embodiment* to actual, physical transnationality.

In this chapter, I have discussed the notions of folk, international, and cultural awareness, with the example of self-choreographed dancing to highlight the complexity of these ideas in the practice of international folk dancing. By interviewing Taiwanese dancers of different ages from Taiwan and California, I maintain that folk, international, and cultural awareness are concepts that are always under construction. Even within international folk dancing communities where everyone practices this same genre of dance, dancers of different ages and with dissimilar preferences potentially challenge one another's approach to those critical notions and implicitly the definition of international folk dancing itself. This dance practice is a *transnational embodiment* for its practitioners to experience and learn other cultures; at the same time, dancers also interpret this dance form within their own particular living structures and cultural understandings, a situation that I view as Taiwanized international folk dancing. The addition of self-choreographed dancing that stretches the sense of cultural awareness and expands on the ideas of folk and international is a clear example of this "Taiwanization." Last but not least, these debatable issues are shared by the Taiwanese international folk dancing communities in

Taiwan and California, indicating the essential feature of this dance form being a *transnational embodiment*. To be more precise, even though dancers in Taiwan and California do not necessarily belong to the same generation and have different living and dancing experiences, international folk dancing is an embodied lineage that enables the dancing communities in the two regions to experience similar enjoyment as well as challenges. These shared experiences powerfully show this dance practice to be a means of forming a community that delineates a path across the Pacific Ocean, further portraying international folk dancing as a way of living for dancers in Taiwan and California.

## Conclusion

I thought of this one woman occasionally when I did my research on international folk dancing, though we were not close. She is over eighty years old. Every Sunday evening I visited this dance gathering in Taipei, and I knew that I would see her sitting there watching people dance. Although she rarely stood up to dance when attending the gathering, she always dressed up with an elegant top and a skirt matched in color, as if the weekly gathering was a festival that needed to be handled with consideration. Every time I greeted her good night and take care in Taiwanese—instead of Mandarin Chinese—upon her leave, she always responded with a big smile. Even though we have had limited conversations mainly because of my limited abilities in Taiwanese, I found myself worried about her whenever I did not see her attending the gathering.

In fact, many of my interviewees mentioned this lady during our interviews, due to the fact that she started an international folk dancing gathering, which was different from the one I mentioned in the previous paragraph, and was devoted to it for more than thirty years. For the generations of dancers now ranging from their late thirties to their fifties, following her at that gathering seemed fundamental for Taipei-based international folk dancers.<sup>341</sup> “She never canceled the gathering, rain or shine,” many experienced dancers told me,<sup>342</sup> “...nor on holidays.” As a young dancer, I did not have a chance to participate in her gathering, because her gathering had discontinued due to her seniority.

Nonetheless, I heard about her because of other experienced dancers. Different

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<sup>341</sup> P.T. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. August 23, 2016; T.Z. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. September 26, 2016; S.L. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. July 16, 2017. Field notes. Taipei, Taiwan.

<sup>342</sup> R.H. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. July 14, 2016; C.M. Interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. July 16, 2016; Field notes. August 2016. Taipei, Taiwan.

generations merge together because we have this touchstone in common. These shared memories of common activities like the gathering and people like this woman are crucial to building a community.

As a topic infrequently mentioned in official Taiwanese history, international folk dancing and its related memories are often ignored. However, as historian Luisa Passerini argues, memory and history are analytics and processes, rather than truths and fixed things.<sup>343</sup> This project not only looks for clues to international folk dancing in published archives, but also values the memories of individual dancers, in order to understand how the practice itself and the notions of “folk,” “international” and cultural politics are remembered and conceived by Taiwanese dancers. I argue that international folk dancing highlights communal acts as an important and alternative lens for understanding Taiwanese nationalism and Taiwanese identity—i.e. Taiwanese-ness.

*Transnational embodiment* has framed my research as a means of understanding the notion of Taiwanese-ness. I have argued that Taiwanese people’s practice of international folk dancing indicates three layers of Taiwanese-ness. First, the dance form was promoted and popularized by the National Government as a kind of American culture, and it started to become a part of Taiwanese people’s lives during Martial Law, like coffee and bread did.<sup>344</sup> The dance practice was a way for the government to show their political alliance with the United States during the Cold War era. In addition, because of limited information access during Taiwanese Martial Law, international folk dancing was

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<sup>343</sup> Luisa Passerini, “Memories Between Silence and Oblivion” in *Memory, History Nation: Contested Pasts*. Hodgkin, Katharine, and Radstone, Susannah, eds. (NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 238-254.

<sup>344</sup> V.H., interviewed by Wei-Chi Wu. November 9, 2016.

a means of having a glance of the outside world for many young people. The second layer of Taiwanese-ness appears in the post-Martial Law Period, when the concept of Taiwanese identity was redefined by different generations of Taiwanese international folk dancers. On the one hand, senior practitioners embody other nationalisms in order to make global connections. On the other hand, younger generations of practitioners have been exposed to an enriching living and learning environment that they are able to apply gained experiences from other dance to their understanding of “international,” “folk,” and Taiwanese-ness. Younger Taiwanese dancers’ approach has thus changed how international folk dancing represents the notion of Taiwanese identity.

In the first and second layer of Taiwanese-ness, the Taiwanese international folk dancers perform the dance’s *transnational embodiment* by embracing the cultures of other nations. The third layer of Taiwanese-ness is presented in Taiwanese immigrants’ international folk dancing communities in California. As this dance practice is a shared memory for many, these dancers turn their memories of dancing in Taiwan into a lively practice after immigrating to the United States. They duplicate the dancing space and interpret Taiwanese identity through performing dances of others. Whether in Taiwan or California, international folk dancing is a recreational activity that serves practitioners of different ages, occupations, and with varied agendas.

My investigation of international folk dancing has direct implications for scrutiny of “folk,” “international,” and cultural politics, notions that are highly contested in academic discourse. Ultimately, I suggest that “folk” and “international” are unstable terms contested by different generation of Taiwanese practitioners. The two terms also

intricately associate with each other in making international folk dancing an inclusive dance practice that welcomes dancers of all ages and ethnicities. Even though this dance form seems to take everything in its scope, its dancers have put in mind the issue of cultural awareness and paid attention to unique characteristic of each dance genre and style.

Finally, bridging the practice of international folk dancing with critical interdisciplinary theories is meaningful in shaping my positionality as a transnational dance scholar. Every time I went back to Taiwan, I forgot routines of some dances and had to learn from the beginning. My body was also not as flexible adjusting from one style to another as before because of my lack of practice. Suffering from “recovery” somehow enables me to better feel the empathy with the migrating Taiwanese dancers who have made unimaginable efforts in reestablishing a similar dancing community in their migrating destinations. Hence, the embodiment of transnationality does not merely refer to the dance practice, but is also manifested through shared emotional experiences among dancers.

I will continue focusing on international folk dancing in my future research. Since there is lack of scholarly work on this dance practice, many possible projects await. First, I would like to understand contemporary politics between Taiwan and Israel via international folk dancing, due to the fact that Israeli dances are one of the most represented forms within Taiwanese international folk dancing communities. As mentioned in Chapter Three, some Taipei-based dance clubs have had increased their populations because these clubs practice a significant number of Israeli dances. Some

participants shared with me that many Israeli dances are not as complicated as Eastern European dances or Chinese dances, enabling them to focus more on the enjoyment of dancing.<sup>345</sup> A participant pointed out to me the crowds when I attended one of these dance groups, and he said, "...this is the market trend, and if you do not want international folk dancing to wane...[maybe we should follow what the majority likes]."<sup>346</sup> Even if it is understandable that within international folk dancing, there are styles and regions that are more preferable than others, it is still compelling to investigate Taiwanese dancers' current perceptions of Israeli folk dances and how these perceptions possibly again complicate ideas of "folk," "international," and cultural politics.

I would also like to expand my notion of *transnational embodiment* from a transpacific level to a wider scope. For instance, while research in Asian American Studies has been thriving, there seems to be lack of scholarship on Taiwanese immigrants in Europe. I have proposed that international folk dancing was used as a political connection between Taiwan and the United States during the Cold War, but what about the positionality of Europe in Taiwanese migration history? Specifically, many Taiwanese dancers now visit European countries, such as Hungary, Bulgaria, Serbia, Poland, and Spain, to learn folk dances directly from local instructors. This fact not only reinforces *transnational embodiment* physically, but also creates a potential for me to compare varied performances of transnationality that originate from Taiwan to different continents. Japan, a country that is only two and half hours flight away, can be another

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<sup>345</sup> This statement is somewhat inclusive, and it involves arguments about "technique, professional, and amateur" in international folk dancing. Nonetheless, I quote these words only to show that Israeli dances are preferred; Field notes. Taipei, Taiwan.

<sup>346</sup> Field notes, October 2016, Taipei, Taiwan.

essential research target. Specifically, many of the materials during the Taiwanese Martial Law Period were brought from Japan and translated from Japanese by the Taiwanese instructors. It is thus curious to tease out complicated triangular relationships between Taiwan, Japan, and the United States. My intention to compare and contrast the meanings of practicing others' cultures by Taiwanese and Japanese dancers will furthermore bring Dance Studies into existing interrogations on Asian Studies and trans-Asian connections. With my concentration on *transnational embodiment*, I hope to develop my research to investigate how this dance practice possibly cultivates relations among practitioners in Taiwan, overseas Taiwanese dancers, and local dancers of other countries.

This dissertation is a transnational written work, not solely because it is based on the Taiwanese bodies that practice folk dances around the world, but also because the flights that carried me back and forth across the Pacific Ocean made this project literally transnational. I somehow forced myself to write, even only a couple of paragraphs, on the planes because those were moments that I was truly embodying the sense of transnational and transpacific. Other times I wrote my dissertation at dance parties or gatherings. I felt my research was empowered by the music, the steps, and the happiness of these members of my community. Simultaneously, I would realize that those anonymous initials were actually dancing in front of me on the dance floor. In this dancing space, I was so close to them physically; yet, in my dissertation, our mental distance was much closer. I sang along to the songs when dancing and connected hand-in-hand with other dancers to create a circle, thinking that I was contributing to this embodiment in different ways and with

different layers. But in fact, I benefited from the practice's transnationality, when the recordings, the transcripts and the dancers memories have reached beyond spatial and temporal boundaries, assisting me to finish my writing. From a dance practice to a dancing community, international folk dancing is not merely cultivated by transnationality and embodiment, but is irretrievably intertwined with the body and mind of its dancers.

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