**Tsai, Jui-Yueh (b. February 8, 1921, Tainan, Taiwan; d. May 29, 2005, Brisbane, Australia)**

**Summary**

Tsai Jui-Yueh was a concert dance pioneer in Taiwan. Born under Japanese colonial rule of the island (1895-1945), Tsai was one of the first Taiwanese to study modern dance (sometimes called ‘creative dance’ at the time) in Japan, first with Ishii Baku and then with his student Ishii Midori. After returning to Taiwan in 1946, Tsai established one of the first dance schools on the island and became an active dance teacher, performer, and choreographer in the postwar era. Though she was mainly trained in modern dance, Tsai taught and created ballet, modern dance and *min-zu wu-dao*, the Chinese national dance form inaugurated by the KMT government (Kuomintang, the Chinese Nationalist Party) in the early 1950s, during her half-a-century long career. In 1983, she immigrated to Australia with her son Lei Ta-Pung and continued teaching dance until the late 1980s. Tsai’s career as a performer, choreographer, and dance teacher witnessed two important eras in Taiwan’s modern history: first, the era of colonial modernity under the Japanese regime, in which individual fulfillment brought about by ideas of modernity was interwoven with the oppressive colonial power structure; second, the period of ideological control under martial law (1949-1987), in which she suffered from political persecution, being imprisoned from 1949-1952, and thereafter lived and worked under the surveillance of the KMT authorities for many years.

**Training and Background**

Born into an affluent family in southern Taiwan, Tsai Jui-Yueh was educated in the colonial school system established by the Japanese, in which she came into contact with creative dance through her Japanese physical education teachers. As early as the 1920s, dance was incorporated into physical education in elementary and secondary schools in Taiwan, following the Japanese example. The dance activities were mainly composed of two categories: one was rhythmic movements danced to Japanese songs or melodies; the other was something similar to callisthenic dance, in which different kinds of marching steps were performed to spirited music. When Tsai was in secondary school, she saw the performance of the Ishii Baku Dance Company in her hometown of Tainan. She was greatly inspired. As a result, after she graduated from high school, she persuaded her family to let her go to Japan to study dance, a rare choice for Taiwanese girls at the same.

In 1937, Tsai, at the age of sixteen, went to Tokyo alone in pursuit of her dance dream. She entered the Ishii Baku Dance and Physical Education School, where she was trained in ballet, creative dance and “Rhythmics,” Ishii Baku’s adaptation of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze’s Eurhythmics. In the Rhythmics classes, according to Tsai, improvisation was employed extensively to stimulate the students’ creative imagination. In 1941, Tsai switched to the dance school of Ishii Midori, a young emerging female choreographer, and soon became a principal dancer in her company.

Japan invaded China in 1937. The years Tsai studied in Tokyo coincided with the war period (1937-1945) when dance and other arts were mobilized to assist in the operation of the imperial war machine. As a consequence, Tsai joined her teachers in comfort tours to entertain Japanese soldiers and workers in southern China, Southeast Asia and many places within Japan. In her memoir, she recalled her conflicting emotions between witnessing Japanese soldiers’ brutality towards the Chinese and her sympathy for their harsh living condition at the war front. The interweaving of artistic expression and ideological dissemination in the performances during the war ironically prepared Tsai for similar conditions in Taiwan after 1949, the year martial law was declared, while simultaneously making her cherish more the corporeal experience of being with one’s own body in dancing in spite of the exterior oppressive circumstances.

**Importance to Modernism and Modernity**

After Japan was defeated in 1945, Taiwan was retroceded to the Republic of China led by the KMT. In early 1946, Tsai returned home and began teaching, choreographing and performing throughout Taiwan. Her best known works from the immediately postwar period included: *Song of India* (1946), an imaginative ‘Indian’ dance after the style of the Denishawn; *We Love Our Taiwan* (1946), a creative dance expressing her affection for the newly liberated homeland; *Le Cygne* (1946), a ballet piece inspired by Anna Pavlova’s *Dying Swan*; *New Construction* (1946), a modern dance with the themes of machine and labour performed to live percussion music; *On the Xiang River* (1948), a dance depicting the hardship of Chinese boat towers performed to contemporary Chinese songs; *Reminiscing the Ancient Time at Shuishe* (1948), a dance drama about a legend of Taiwanese indigenous people, among others. From this diverse list, we see dance forms that Tsai absorbed from her experience in Japan as well as attempts that reflected her new connections with Chinese culture and renewed attention to her homeland Taiwan. Tsai’s efforts to integrate indigenous elements with newly acquired modern forms of dance expression exemplified the identity construction typical of post-colonial artists in the twentieth century with the intersections of modernist pursuit and national identification often observed in their works.

In February 1947, the traumatic ‘2-28 Incident’ occurred, which led to bloody conflicts between Taiwanese people and the Chinese authorities. In the aftermath of high tension between Taiwanese and Chinese mainlanders, Tsai married Lei Shi-Yu, a Chinese poet who came to Taiwan after the war, in spite of disapproval from her family. In 1949, martial law was declared in Taiwan (1949-1987), ushering in the era of ‘White Terror’, in which suspected political dissidents were persecuted in the name of national security and anti-communism. Tsai was arrested and imprisoned for three years because of her connection with Lei, who had been accused of spying for the communists and expelled to China earlier in 1949, leaving behind Tsai and their one-year-old son. Tsai’s several works created in the 1950s bore the imprint of these painful memories. *Skeleton of a Warrior* (1953), first created when Tsai was in political prison, was danced to a Chinese song of the same title. It depicted a dialogue between a fallen leaf and a fallen soldier on the battleground, where death’s overshadowing presence embraced everything. In *Puppets Going to War* (1953), Tsai used the metaphor of puppets to insinuate the fate of her broken family manipulated by a brutal force beyond her control. In *Death and the Maiden* (1953), set to Schubert’s music of the same title, the young maiden’s desperate struggle for life in the shadow of Death suggested an allusion to Tsai’s personal struggle for survival in the hostile ambience of the White Terror era. The symbolic possibilities of modern dance form enabled her to convey autobiographical emotions and covert protests in an age of strict censorship and thought control.

It should be noted that to Tsai’s generation of Taiwanese dancer/choreographers, unlike her contemporaries in Europe and the U.S., ballet and modern dance were not incommensurable genres of dance. Introduced by the Japanese from the West, they both represented artistic forms that were ‘new’ and ‘progressive’ within the context of colonial modernity. In addition, they both provided opportunity of personal expression through the body, a rare experience for women in the still highly conservative society of prewar and postwar Taiwan, where women from respected families were restrained from physical display in the public. During the 1950s and 1960s, Tsai and her students also actively participated in the performances and competitions of *min-zu wu-dao*, the Chinese national dance form promoted by the KMT to re-Sinicize the Taiwanese and to promulgate the dogma of anti-communism. In the ideological network encompassing all arts during martial law era, dance, with its infectious effect on body and mind, was instrumental in the official cultural policy of political indoctrination. Tsai’s career as a dance artist testified to a trajectory of dance modernity full of political disruptions and ideological setbacks due to the historical circumstances of her times, in which individual creativity were constantly interfered with by the forces of the state.

**Legacy**

Because of the KMT’s suppression of Taiwan’s prewar and postwar history, the significance of Tsai’s generation of dance pioneers was neglected until the mid-1990s. In 1995, the first ever conference devoted to the early dance history of Taiwan was co-organized by the Council for Cultural Affairs and the National Institute of Art (now Taipei National University of the Arts). In 2000, a concert of reconstruction of Tsai’s dances from the 1940s and 1950s was staged in Taipei. After she passed away in 2005, a memorial dance studio was established on the site of her dance school in Taipei and a series of dance festivals have been held annually in her name to honour her as a pioneer in concert dance and women’s role as creators of art and culture in Taiwan. Her most famous student is Yu Hao-Yen, a member of the Martha Graham Dance Company from 1973 to 1978 and later a renown choreographer and dance teacher in Taiwan. Her son Lei Ta-Pung was once a member of the Australian Dance Theatre (1972-1975) and her daughter-in-law Ondine Hsiao was a choreographer and social activist and is now the director of the Tsai Jui-Yueh Cultural Foundation.

**Chen Ya-ping**

**Selected List of Works**

*Song of India* 印度之歌 (1946)

*We Love Our Taiwan* 咱愛咱台灣 (1946)

*Le Cygne* 白鳥 (1946)

*New Construction* 新建設 (1946)

*On the Xiang River* 湘江上 (1948)

*Reminiscing the Ancient Time at Shuishe* 水社懷古 (1948)

*Skeleton of a Warrior* 勇士骨 (1953)

*Puppets Going to War* 魁儡出征 (1953)

*Death and the Maiden* 死亡與少女 (1953)

*Miao Maidens Dancing with Wine Cups* 苗女弄杯 (1959)

*Cleopatra* (1965) 姑婁芭女王 (modern dance drama)

*Moon Light* 月光曲 (1970)

*Love at Grave Site* 墓戀 (1970) (ballet dance drama)

References and Further Readings

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Ed. Hsiao Wuo-Ting. Taipei: Council for Cultural Affairs. (Chinese)

Moving Image Material:

I suggest to have video clips of the reconstruction of *Song of India, Puppets Going to War, We Love Our Taiwan*.

Paratextual Material:

I suggest to have photos of *Song of India, New Construction, Farewell My Concubine, Miao Maidens Dancing with Wine Cups, Cleopatra.*