

Evoking Kinesthetic Empathy: Legend Lin Dance Theatre and its Choreographic Motions

Szu-Ching Chang
National Taiwan University of Sport, Taiwan

Abstract

Lee Chen Lin, the artistic director and founder of Legend Lin Dance Theatre in Taiwan, has created innovative works and toured in many international dance festivals. Lin's "walking aesthetics" is the most significant feature in her choreographies. It signifies her conceptualization of the dancing body and her philosophy of life and human beings. This paper analyzes the choreographic approaches and strategies that characterize her first three works: *Mirror of Life*, *Anthem to the Fading Flowers*, and *Song of Pensive Beholding*. With the emphasis on a kinesthetic way to understand Lin's Huan aesthetics, it focuses on how Lin's works may awaken the audiences' sensations by her various choreographic strategies. In conclusion, this paper suggests that Lee Chen Lin's choreographic strategies involve managing ritual efficacy into liminal status, arranging physical encounters synchronically and diachronically, and interweaving various tribal elements into new interpretations. Through the kinesthetic empathy, the audiences are likely to feel and resonate with all moving bodies involved in Lin's performances. This experience may pave the way for development of reflective insights and enables the unison of one's sensations and awareness to appreciate these extremely beautiful dance works.

대만의 예술 감독이자 레전드린댄스시어터의 설립자인 리첸린은 혁신적인 작품을 창작했으며 많은 국제 댄스 페스티벌에서 공연을 하였다. 린의 안무에서 가장 중요한 특징인 "걷기미학"은 춤추는 몸체에 대한 그녀의 개념화와 삶과 인간에 대한 철학을 담고 있다. 본 논문은 린의 초창기 세 작품인 「생명의 거울」, 「사라지는 꽃의 노래」, 「사유하는 응시의 노래」의 안무적 접근과 그 전략을 분석한다. 린의 환(Huan) 미학을 이해하기 위해 저자는 운동감각적 방법에 중점을 두고 어떻게 린이 다양한 안무 전략으로 관객들의 감각을 일깨울 수 있는지 살펴본다. 린의 안무 전략은 의례(ritual)적 효능을 한계 지점까지 끌어올리며, 신체의 만남을 공시적, 통시적으로 배열하고, 다양한 부족(tribe)의 요소를 새로운 해석으로 엮어내는 것이다. 운동감각적 공감을 통해 관객은 린의 퍼포먼스에 포함된 모든 움직이는 몸을 충만하게 느낄 수 있다. 이 경험은 성찰적 이해의 발전을 촉진시키고 감각과 인식의 조화를 통해 이 극도로 아름다운 춤을 감상할 수 있게 한다.

Key words

Legend Lin Dance Theatre, Huan Walking, Sensations, Ritual Theater, Kinesthetic Empathy

Introduction: Awakening Sensations in *Huan* Aesthetic

Lee Chen Lin, the artistic director and choreographer of Legend Lin Dance Theatre (LLDT) in Taiwan, staged her first evening-length performance in 1995. Lin has choreographed only four evening-long performances over the last two decades: *Mirror of Life* (*Jiao*, premiered in 1995), *Anthem to the Fading Flowers* (*Hua Shen Ji*, premiered in 2000), *Song of Pensive Beholding* (*Guan*, premiered in 2009), and *The Eternal Tides* (*Chao*, premiered in 2017). Notably, the first three form a trilogy called “Heaven, Earth and Human Beings”. It was not until the creation of her second work that she started to narrate her first dance, *Mirror of Life*, as the relationship between human beings and ghosts that demonstrates the concept of *Yin* and her second piece, *Anthem to the Fading Flowers*, as the relationship between human beings and Gods that embodies the concept of *Yang*. The two form the concept of *Tai Chi* and connect to Taoist philosophy. Both works also connect to the Buddhist concept of samsara, in which God, human beings, and ghosts all exist in one world (Ting Heng Lai, 2003). Lin’s works have been staged at many major international dance festivals, such as Festival d’Avignon, Lyon Dance Biennial in France, the Autumn Theater Festival of Madrid in Spain, and Festival Internacional Cervantino in Mexico. Also, Lin was considered one of the eight most significant choreographers in the world by ARTE (Association relative à la télévision européenne) in 2002 (Legend Lin Dance Theatre Official website, January 11, 2021). Lin’s choreographies are based on her unique body training methods and aesthetics, so she is a notable figure among audiences and dance critics, especially in Europe.

Lin consciously avoids and neglects the influences from Western culture in creating her own artistic autonomy. Her statements about artistic autonomy can be found frequently in her texts, including some writings distributed during shows and in dance reviews and articles. In fact, she received the 2005 National Artistic Award partly in recognition of her artistic autonomy and unique aesthetics (National Arts and Culture Foundation website, accessed Nov. 11, 2021). Her primary influences include Eastern spiritual practices and Taiwanese culture. Lin argues that Western dance techniques treat the human body as a tool. She contends that the human body should be regarded as an organic circular system, and this theory of the body influences her training as well as the body aesthetics that characterize her works.

According to Lin, the ideal body can only be achieved when one connects and reconnects with one’s own body repeatedly, which is the main aspect that she extensively focuses on in training. She also argues that earnest dancing can only be “lived” and that one can truly be with one’s own body only by “living out” dance (Lai 2003). In other words, Lin claims that her dance is life itself and that dancers “live” out as opposed to “performing” it. She insists that dance is a spiritual practice,

which also involves self-cultivation. As a result, she emphasizes on delicate and proper ways of moving in her dance. Lin has developed several training sequences and movement practices, later named Legend Lin Techniques, for dancers. Her philosophy of the human body involves five main themes: (i) Silence (*Jing*), (ii) Settling (*Ding*), (iii) Loosening (*Song*), (iv) Profundity (*Chen*), and (v) *Huan*. Her philosophy later includes the sixth theme: Strength (*Jin*). The first five themes and actions also represent the stages involved in the process of deepening the body's ability to move (see, e.g., Chang 2011; Seetoo 2013; Mo 2014 on Lin's training system). These concepts form the basis of Lin's philosophy of organism, her training methods, and her body aesthetics. In addition, all LLDT productions embody these concepts.

I have not translated *Huan* into English because, depending on the context, it could mean "to delay," "to postpone," or "to revive"; it does not always mean "slow" (Cheng 2010). Lee Chen Lin and her dancers emphasize on distinguishing *Huan* from slow and point out the slight differences between the two. LLDT dancers are trained to move in a very sensitive and inward manner during performances. The skins of their feet seem to sink into the land, and touch and slip on the floor. The dancers focus their awareness on the surrounding environment and on the core of their bodies, while all movements are performed extremely slowly. In this context, to postpone is to bring forth awareness and feeling; it also means to open all senses and to welcome the spirits to join the performance. The dancers constantly maintain physical distance with each other and carefully keep certain inter-relationship in their motions. Lin's works consist of beautiful scenarios; these scenarios constantly move and shift from one after another smoothly and slowly as the most fantastic impressions on her works. *Huan* Walking, which represents Lin's "walking aesthetics" (Wang 2011), is the most significant feature in her choreographies. It signifies her conceptualization of the dancing body and her philosophy of life and human beings. It also signifies Lin's resistance to and reflection on fast flows in this globalization era. Expressed in fantastic and beautiful scenarios, her choreographies highlight her physical statements that are based on these underlying and seemingly effortless, yet difficult, motions.

Lee Chen Lin established her aesthetics in Eastern philosophy, transformed her trainings from Eastern bodily practices, and created her dances from the culture of Taiwan. Lin's works can be seen as examples of "Oriental Avant-garde" that is a claim for Asian artist's anatomy as well as her resistance against the Western registered term "Avant-garde" (Chang 2011). To clarify, Lin never claims that her style of choreographies and aesthetics as "Oriental Avant-Garde." However, from most critics' and scholars' viewpoints, her aesthetics that is grounded on Eastern philosophy but craves out a non-traditional approach in forms and contents in achieving specific performativity that can be seen as part of the larger tread of Eastern Body Aesthetic in Taiwan since 1990s (Chen,

1997). Her works have been praised with enthusiastic welcomes in European Festivals that also perceived her works as forward in time and in style. Different from Western (entitled) “Avant-garde” theater works that hired the forms from other cultures to estrange, to de-familiarize and, therefore, to rebel western theater tradition (Chang 2011, 314-316) and also different from the criticized approaches of “Self-Orientalization” (Chang 2011, 317-319), Lin’s approaches and transformations not only constructed her unique style, but also challenged traditional ways of representing Taiwanese dancing bodies on stage. Similarly, theater scholar Jow Jiun Gong (2013) suggests that Lin’s approaches can be seen as an effort to identify and establish the point of origin of the Taiwanese human body. Drawing from theater scholar Yu Pin Lin’s (2009) argument of “Asia as a method” in studying Butoh, Gong (2013) argues that the *Huan* aesthetics is an alternative way to carve out the space for body discourses— an approach that distinctly belongs to Taiwan. However, Lin’s works seem to be similar to and often compared with Butoh, a significant Japanese experimental performance form and a body training system, because the feature of her dances often involve dancers painted in white and move on an extremely slow tempo. As per Lin’s own admission, “she never received training in Butoh and it is possible that some basic concepts of the body are shared among different training systems in the world” (Lin, in Workshop, 2009). When *Song of Pensive Beholding* was performed at the World Theatre Festival Shizuoka in Japan, scholars and audiences discussed the differences and similarities between Butoh and Lee Chen Lin’s works. Some scholars argued that, although the visual elements of her work may appear familiar, her works represent a unique viewpoint toward Eastern aesthetics and the human body. Other scholars argued that Lin’s approach and her choreographies might be influenced by the aesthetics of Butoh (Chiu 2015). Scholars also suggested that Lin’s unique style may at once be based on Eastern Taiwanese culture as well as various other ethnic elements drawn from different nations and cultures so her works may be a hybrid of these elements.

Moreover, her works involve extremely beautified visual effects as well as movements based on an extremely slow tempo, so audiences tend to be fascinated by the former and disinterested, or even bored, by the latter. As a result, critics have sought to ascertain whether her works engage the audience critically or whether their appeal is based merely on the elements of religious fantasy. Theater scholar Mo Lin Wang (2010) criticized that Lin’s work *Song of Pensive Beholding* only represented lifeless bodies and meaningless, yet beautiful, forms, thus it did not inspire the audience to develop any physical and sensual awareness. On the contrary, theater scholar Ken Chuan Yeh (2014) disagreed with Wang’s assessment and argues that Lin’s works must be experienced and analyzed in the context and the inner spirits of her distinct body techniques, which are in turn based on her unique training system and

philosophy. He argued that doing so is essential to better understand her works and to go beyond the analysis of forms. Similarly, Jow Jiun Gong (2013) also considered Lin's works precisely based on the ideal approach in studying body that Wang want to propose on his support on Butoh. Thus, from these diverse viewpoints, Lin's extremely beautified dancing sceneries should be appreciated from a profound understanding on the context of her creating and her training system where her philosophical insights are deeply grounded.

To respond to these debates on audiences' experiences and reflections and to further deepen my discussions on her works, I propose to analyze Lin's choreographic aesthetics with an emphasis on kinesthetic viewpoint. As Susan L. Foster (2011) argues, "any notion of choreography contains, embodied within it, a kinesthesia, a designed way of experiencing physicality and movement that, in turn, summons other bodies into a specific way of feeling toward it" (2). In other words, the ways in which the audience perceives and responds to Lin's works may be determined by the specific cultural context of the performance and the audiences' own specific backgrounds, including their physical experiences and cultural tastes.

Based on my preliminary experiences, in which I had been to the workshop held by Legend Lin Dance Theatre for three months in 2009 for my previous research, the deeper understanding and physical experiences in Lin's training system did help me appreciate her works more and to gain more reflections from her viewpoints of body. It is because that Lin's works are based on an inward-looking training system and are expressed through the invisible, yet lived, principles of body aesthetics, and this requires the audience to actively participate and respond kinesthetically.

Positioning Lin's approaches of choreographing in the context of her *Huan* aesthetics, I analyze the choreographic strategies of her three works to explore the ways in which her works seem to elicit empathy from the audience. I especially focus on the ways in which Lee Chen Lin's works achieve ritual effectiveness, thereby recalls the audiences' sensations and awareness. In doing so, Lin's works may enable the audience to feel and resonate with all moving bodies involved in the performance, including dancers and other subjects on stage. From my perspective as a viewer who has more kinesthetic experience, I argue that Lin's choreography and her corporeal strategies do not merely express ideal and beautiful scenarios, they also seek to evoke the audience's kinesthetic empathy and critical reflection.

Compassion and liminality in *Mirror of life*

As the music of "South Tube" fills the air, a female dancer, dressed as the Ocean Goddess Ma Zu, appears upstage center. She is closely

followed by two male dancers dressed as Ma Zu's guards. More dancers (both female and male) follow, and they disperse across the back of the stage. The dancers walk very slowly, as though sinking and floating, and they gradually approach the audience in a coherent rhythm. There is a faint light in the background; there are brighter lights in the front, and these create an illusion. It appears as if the dancers are floating on the ocean, like a ship moving closer and closer. (author's notes, 2011)

Lin's *Mirror of life* relies heavily on the ritual meanings and symbols of the Ghost Festival as well as the beliefs about the Ocean Goddess *Ma Zu*. Lin also draws from several Taoist religious practices that are commonly witnessed at the Ghost Festival in Keelung. However, Lin does not duplicate the rituals; she abstracts certain elements of the ritual and transforms them in order to construct her spiritual world. In this spiritual world, moreover, the invisible circulation of human beings, the ghosts, and the Goddess communicate with each other, which are enacted through ritual actions. The audiences do not simply sit and appreciate the spectacular ritual atmosphere. They are deeply engaged and situated in the transforming space of this performance by this arrangement.

In the first part of the performance, which is entitled *Purification*, Lin first invites a Taoist priest to conduct a ritual and continually emphasizes ritual symbols throughout the performance. In the subsequent parts, the dance expresses the sorrows faced by the ghosts and later pacifying the ghosts' hatred. In the fifth and sixth parts, entitled *Preparation* and *Recollection*, a female bride surrounded by other female dancers in red yarn is shown putting on her makeup. However, much to her own shock, the bride soon recognizes herself as a ghost, following which her male lover is introduced. The male lover walks slowly from the other end of the stage to the center. The scene ends when the bride and the lover touch each other, signifying the fulfillment of their desire to unite (Wang 1995). In the ninth section, which is entitled *Possession*, four male dancers are shown battling the ghosts of the past. The dancers fight with each other; they express their hatred as well as their struggles and violent energies. This situation is eventually resolved by a male Taoist priest and by the performance of the female dancers in the sections entitled *Reflection* and *Transmigration*. The last section, entitled *Extinction*, involves the burning of a paper boat and all dancers carrying lights to the stage—the act that marks the end of the performance in a ritual setting.

Heart Sutra, a well-known Buddhist Sutra in China, is always played before the commencement of the performance and at the final of all performances, in which the dancers hold candles when the Sutra is played. The opening verses of the Heart Sutra refer to the concept of "Emptiness," which is similar to the biblical concept of "Vanity." According to Buddhism, emptiness is the nature of life and the universe.

As per this concept, nothing in the universe is a perceptible entity. In addition, the concept also holds that everything is impermanent. The Sutra not only expresses Lin's worldview but also contextualizes the performance. It also enables the audience to engage with the rituals depicted in the performance. The Sutra also creates a religious environment, which calms the audience's mind and body prior to the performance. The religious setting generally works on the audience irrespective of their personal religious beliefs and cultural backgrounds.

Heart Sutra is not only a strategy used to prepare and to calm the audience. It is also an important part of the dancers' rehearsals, training, and performance. As the pre-show rehearsal draws to a close, all dancers, along with Lin, sing the Heart Sutra and seat themselves in a circle in a meditative posture (Chen 2013). The group's rendition of Heart Sutra functions as the process of transforming that it enables the dancers to situate themselves in a state of liminality (Turner 1987, 33). In other words, it enables the dancers to situate themselves at the cusp of the mental and/or psychological state required to be maintained in Lin's performances. The rendition of the Sutra might also serve another purpose: it may be seen as an acknowledgement of the spirits in the theater, which may in turn console the spirits. This is a valid interpretation given Lin's belief in Animism, which will be discussed a later stage.

Taoist elements are incorporated into the performance in order to create a ritual-like atmosphere in the theater. First, a female dancer impersonates the goddess *Ma Zu* and is introduced by her two guards. They move from the upper center of the stage toward the audience. This appears as though they are moving slowly toward the audience from afar through dark fog. This scene contextualizes that *Ma Zu*, the Ocean Goddess, is shown emerging from the ocean, expressing the original story in Taoist religion. The dancer impersonating *Ma Zu* draws attention to her goddess status and holiness through her attire. The two guards are shown walking at a lower level on the stage. Their twisted muscles, odd movements, and scary facial expressions signify their lower status. On the other hand, *Ma Zu* is shown walking in a stable manner on a higher, horizontal level on the stage. The positioning signifies here power and nobility.

Religious objects, such as burning incense, lit candles, and lotus lights, are employed in this performance in order to indicate the transition from one section to another. These objects are often used as the means to communicate with the spirit world. Fire can illuminate objects, and it also destroys the objects it burns. Fire is used to signify the transitions of time and space in the performance. As mentioned above, the final stage of the performance involves the burning of a paper boat. This act is particularly important, and its ritual function involves sending all the ghosts back in the actual Ghost Festival. The burning boat—in particular, the smoke emanating from the burning boat—represents otherwise intangible things such as hatred, love, emotions, and memories. The

burning also represents appeasement. Textiles are burned during this process. This process enables the audience—even those unfamiliar with the ritual—to feel or project the presence of the spirits in their minds as well as in a bodily manner. As the fires sway within the theater, a ritual-like atmosphere is created. In other words, this process makes the rituals depicted in the performance effective.

In addition to these authentic and recognizable religious elements, Lin also used several objects that are not generally associated with religious practices or rituals. For instance, objects such as reed flowers and red clothes and bells were used as mediating object. They were, however, used in the performance in order to create symbolic, visual, and ritual effects. Therefore, it can be said that *Mirror of life* is based on a largely metaphorical system, which in turn is transformed from Taoist practices. The metaphorical system aims to acquaint the audience to the spiritual world in order to create a mutual space for the spirits and the audience. In particular, the use of reed flowers, which are often found in the wild lands near the rivers of Taiwan, tends to create open-ended sensations in the audience. These sensations in turn enable the audience to project their imagination toward a different time and location of Taiwan. Lin aims to move the audience very deeply, and the slow tempo of the performance is meant to achieve this end. In addition, the slowness makes the performance appear symbolic in nature. Lin's arrangement of the objects on stage follows a set pattern, and the pattern also represents her belief that every object is home to a spirit. The representation of this belief in turn enables the audience to feel and to sense Lin's empathy toward the world.

Moreover, in *Mirror of life*, all the meetings seem to take place only within this liminal space. For example, the bride finds that mirrors do not reflect her image; through this, she recognizes that she is a spirit. Armed with recognition, she also realizes that she can meet her lover, the male spirit. This coming together can happen only in a liminal space, in a space between the spiritual and the real world. Therefore, the dance *Mirror of life* itself is the choreographed stage of liminality. Another example involves the temporary meeting between the priest and the other spirits. The priest introduces the ocean goddess and the ghosts; he also points to the connection between the real world and the metaphysical world. Later, the priest consoles the violent ghosts and the emotions of resentment. In other words, in the liminal space in which *Mirror of life* constructs, the living meets the dead, love meets hate, and the past meets the present, all of which represents the circle of life.

Victor Turner (1982) focused on what is called the “temporarily undefined” liminal stage of a ritual (44-46). Given its temporary lack of definition, this liminal stage also tends to be a productive space. Richard Schechner (1995) later built on this concept of liminality. He argued that experimental theater should primarily place the audience in a state of undefined, or indefinable, uneasiness, as in a ritual. This

state of uneasiness, Schechner (1995) argued, enables the audience to participate more effectively, thereby also enabling them to reflect on the performance and on the experience of watching experimental theater. Turner and Schechner expanded the boundaries of performance studies, and they also highlight theater's potential to heal and transform the audience, much like religious practices and rituals.

However, the most important factor without discussing in this context is the audiences' capacity for engagement and spectatorship; this is even more important in the case of ritual-theater performances, such as Lin's choreographies. Different from the radical approaches of experimental theater, Lin's ritual theater works seek to engage the audience with such concepts and feelings as stability and holiness. Lin's choreographic strategy leaves the audience engaged with her or his own projections and experiences to the extent that they sometimes find it difficult to ascertain whether *Mirror of life* is a ritual performed as theater or vice versa. The audience may sometimes feel that they are situated in the "third space"—the space occupied by the hyphen in the "ritual-theater" bond. To perceive it as a ritual or as a theater is the key point to maintain the distance of spectatorship and the reflection may be brought out. When the fantasy of the ritual is so successful to engage the audiences into the transitional process, it may be a danger to flatten the ways that a theater can provide to reflect and to rethink its underlying body discourses.

Therefore, it is important for the audience as well as the performers to be compassionate and awareness at the same time. It is equally important to engage the mind as well as the body, but, at the same time, one must also maintain critical distance in order to appreciate the art form. Moreover, those familiar with the local significance of the Ghost Festival are likely to perceive and project more personal experiences than others. The latter may only be able to appreciate the fantastic elements of the ritual. As Susan L. Foster (2010) suggests, "individuals, based on their heritage of past experiences, literally perceive the world distinctively." In addition, when one experiences the performance openly, especially the ritualistic elements, one is likely to feel compassionate toward the suffering ghosts; one may also feel comforted by the subsequent ritual-like dances. More importantly, by carefully sensing the dancers' movements and feeling the patterns of motions of the objects on stage deeply, one may even feel empathy for the dance and for the world at large that generate reflections against violence in our living real world.

The Ephemeral is Eternal: Romantic Encounters in *Anthem to the Fading Flowers*

Anthem to the Fading Flowers is structurally more distinctive compared to Lin's other pieces. This piece is divided into four sections, and these four sections correspond to the four seasons. As the performance begins, the dancers who represent Spring, Summer, and Fall as well as Winter gather on the stage for a silent pause. The scene looks much like a painting. A long, white cloth is set horizontally across the center of the stage, much like a bright road. Two male dancers wearing dark brown paint are seen walking slowly on this road. One carries a bowl of fire and walks in the lower level at the front. The other dancer carries a big drum on his shoulder, and he hits the drum, heavily and slowly, one after another. The beats echo and awaken the spirits in the theater, and also symbolize the awaking of the Earth.

In the first part, entitled *Spring Shoots*, the Spring God and Goddess, with their white, beautiful bodies are introduced. They enter the stage from opposite ends, slowly walking toward the center of the stage. They meet each other and share a slow, intimate dance before parting ways. Although they appear to have processed this encounter in a seemingly silent manner, they, in fact, feel the fire of love within. Their intercourse marks the growth of shoots of spring, which, in turn, leads to the blooming of the most brilliant flowers.

In the second part, entitled *Summer Shades*, several male dancers in dark brown paint appear on the stage holding bamboo sticks; they dance and react viciously toward the hot conditions. The God of Summer wears a mask decorated with several long feathers like wild hair. The mask appears to be an obscure indigenous ritual mask. Their movements are animal like, wild, and primitive. Their fleshly qualities point to the summer heat, and the dryness and severity of the season. Later, a female dancer performs the role of Spirit of Summer. The part depicts her passionate and violent meeting as well as her intercourse with the God of Summer.

The third part, entitled *Autumn Awakening*, involves a very gentle illustration of all the female dancers; they are shown walking on water. Several female dancers can be seen holding reed flowers with their head palms slightly open down that lightly pat the tails of the reed flowers on the floor, one after another, which signifies the vision of water dropping and the imagination of the bigger water. As others female dancers hold stickers, which in turn support a silk cloth arranged like makeshift ceiling, the goddess of autumn walks through the stage, gliding like a boat on water. She waves her arms up and down, as if summoning the things from the ground. All the dancers retreat from the stage quietly and smoothly. This gently moving picture is just like an old saying of "There is no crinkle after the boat passed by." This represents the

passing of autumn and the transition to winter, imperceptibly.

As the stage darkens, the musicians sit on the upper end of the stage and play the music in short, intricate, and quick flute sounds. The section of *Winter Withering* is shown in this extremely white scene; with white pieces falling and floating on the air like snowing and all the musicians wear white costumes. A male solo dancer enters the stage, representing Winter, carries a long stick. He looks like an exhausted, yet resolute, swordsman, who stands alone on the stage and even in the world. Rooting on his legs and centering on the “core” of his body, he waves his weapon in big circles repeatedly; finally, he expends all his energy and lies on the floor, gasping weakly. The big, white snow then covers him.

Visible and invisible encounters are important in *Anthem to the Fading Flowers*, because they disclose Lin’s philosophy of Time and evoke audiences’ sensations. The duet announcing the arrival of Spring is an extraordinarily beautified sceneries to outline the ephemeral and momentary encounter of the two, the God and the Goddess of Spring. Similar to the duet in the *Mirror of Life*, the two dancers both painted in white, approach each other very slowly until they are extremely close to each other. It is only when they are so close that they finally meet and lean slowly forward and toward each other. This encounter seems to be a destined meeting after long lasting waiting with anxiety. They slightly touch the other’s body but never fully touched other’s skin, in a manner with highly sincerity and maybe with carefully concealed passion. This intimate encounter is the moment that awakens the Earth. At this point, their bodies slowly retreat, and their heads depart away from each other. As they do so, one’s long strand of hair hangs on the other’s ear, without using their hands to adjust, and this represents their emotional and intimate connection. The hair finally falls off the other’s ear, and this signifies their permanent separation.

The duet announcing the arrival of Summer is rather uncharacteristic of Lin’s works, especially since the duet is highly energetic. The duet represents the burning desires between the two dancers, whose faces are painted dark brown. As the dancers meet each other, their facial expressions and body movements all seem very passionate. The dancers move in animal like motions and their muscles are tense, and they struggle to control their urge to pounce on each other. Their excitement about their encounter is expressed in the quality of movements, which is full of direct, lower, and heavy weighted kinesthetic efforts. Their intercourse is expressed in a very violent and dynamic manner; however, their love soon fades away.

Another beautiful encounter occurs, without physical meeting, between autumn’s retreat and winter’s coming. More particularly, this encounter takes place when the goddess of autumn wraps her body in a silk cloth and retreats from stage in the opposite direction, compared to other dancers’ exits. At this moment, the solo male dancer walks in lonely

steps with all musicians on the distanced upper stage, bringing in the winter. Autumn and Winter never really meet on the stage, but the meaning of introducing is connected tightly with the two. Their meeting is only alluded to. In fact, it represents and highlights their inability to meet each other. Their encounter happens on the moment of dark and on the air with the mixing of melancholy and of cool. The two meet only due to the audiences' sensual and visual persistence and, therefore, in audiences' momentary memory.

The various encounters, between the male and the female, between the dancers and the natural object as well as spirits they carry, between the dancer and other dancers, highlight the corporeal and spiritual inter-relationships. Inter-subjectivity is generated when the dancers resonate kinesthetically and when they are involved in physical and emotional exchange with all elements presented in this dance. It occurs when the dancers have the will to openly share space and time, mind and body, and their senses and sensations with others. Moreover, these careful, sincere, and ephemeral encounters may make the audience feel empathetic toward other creatures. The audience projects their own stories; they tend to recognize the onslaught of feelings as they remember and recall. The audience projects their own stories and the onslaught of feelings as they remember and recall, and is touched and moved by sharing kinesthetic empathy with these dancing encounters, ephemeral yet eternal.

“Tribal Aesthetics” in *Song of Pensive Beholding*

Drawing from her childhood experiences, Lin creates a legend about the existence and extinction of an eagle community. The legend is set in the past. The primary concern of this piece is to give voice to the Earth. The following characters play a crucial role in this legend: White Bird, the younger brother of a member of the Eagle tribe, Samo, the elder brother of a member of the Eagle tribe, Yaki, and the Walker. The dance can be divided into the following sections: *From Time Immemorial*, *Reflecting on Water*, *Heeding the Pulses*, *Intimate Encounter*, *Born Attached*, *Becoming Disenchanted*, *Passing through the Mirror* and *Beyond Beholding*. However, this dance does not feature any pause or break; it is performed as one whole piece, much like Lin's other works.

The dance begins with the Walker picking little stones from the center of the stage that symbolizes the beginning of the story. The beautiful White Bird appears and is involved in a fantastic and intimate encounter with Samo. This encounter spells the White Bird's death. Her death creates conflict between Samo and Yaki, and their fight burns out and destroys the whole eagle community. This symbolizes the Earth's ruining and suggests the extinction of mankind. The show ends with

the Walker setting down all the stones back in line. However, this mythical story takes place in the cycle of time; it is endlessly repetitive.

In the 1980s, Lin undertook ethnographic research in order to learn about the folk and indigenous cultures of Taiwan. Her aesthetics and choreographic style in the late 1980s foreshadowed her later interest in the concept of Eastern Aesthetics, which was largely based on ritual like movements and mythic settings. Lin also incorporates indigenous materials in all her dances, but especially so in *Song of Pensive Beholding*. Inspired by the feeling of attachment, she created ritual-theater performances based on transforming these “primitive” and “ancient” elements. In other words, the semi-indigenous is never drawn from any real community. It is a mix of different items that lead to the creation of her ideal item. The elements that contribute to her choreographic strategies are analyzed below.

The narrative of *Song of Pensive Beholding* was set as a legend from an ancient and unknown eagle tribe. Its ritual setting and mythic atmosphere represent the unknown, semi-indigenous community. Eagles have been regarded as ancestors or gods in many indigenous communities around the world, such as in the beliefs of the *Paiwan* People of Taiwan and of the Native Americans. The eagle is seen as an important totem. It is mentioned in the literatures and artistic works of different indigenous writers and creators. The flying eagle was considered the messenger of the spirits that always watched the people from above. In this performance, the eagle represents the vision that watches the world. To represent the image of eagle, Lin used pheasants’ tail feathers. These are traditionally used in Chinese Opera to signify heroic character. They are used as the headdress of the eagle tribe in this dance. The headdress of Native American people consists of many eagle feathers. The headdress of the *Paiwan* people in Taiwan consists of two or three short feathers. The headdress used in this performance is unlike any of these. The incredibly long tails on Yaki’s and Samo’s headdress produce a beautifully extended curve along their heads and bodies, especially when they stand or walk. This is accentuated when they weave or shift during the dancers’ moves. In addition, the dancers’ foreheads are painted white, red, and gold in order to create wide lines above their eyes. As always, the male dancers’ bodies were painted dark brown and top naked. They perform the roles of human beings; they also fight and indulge in violence. In this dance, the face painting is used to construct an image of the eagle community as an unknown ancient tribal people.

Their movements are energetic, and they represent the greedy desires of the eagle tribe. Through their light frames, wide open legs, and tense muscles, the male dancers demonstrate a wide range of frantic emotions. They fight amongst themselves and cause each other harm. However, they do not touch or hit each other, and this creates strong momentum. Their movements are not fast paced and involve invisible pulling and pushing. Lin represents human brutality in a very subtle but

powerful manner. The primitive and forceful movements, in particular, represent human brutality.

Lin is known for her love of historical items. She especially enjoys collecting traditional fabrics and clothes from ethnic groups. This piece is based on such old material, especially the materials used to create the image of the White Bird. The headdress of the White Bird is made using a skirt designed by the Dong ethnic group, an ethnic minority in the southwest of China. This pleated skirt is made of many elegant layers and ethnic textiles. When the White Bird walks slowly, the headdress hangs smoothly behind and beside her head, just like her folded wings. When the White Bird pauses or leans forwards, the headdress spreads out and surrounds her head, much like the feathers on a bird's head. When the White Bird turns slowly while kneeling or sitting on the floor, the fabrics of the headdress also slowly flow downwards, much like flowing river water and its intricate details are also visible to the audience.

The round silver pieces on the White Bird's forehead and neck are also made of old ethnic materials collected by Lin. The headdress is composed of three round silver pieces; it is shaped like an inverted triangle and also contains pendants, which signify the bird's third eye, or the Eye of the Spirit. The necklace consists of two round silver pieces on either side. This imparts a sense of balance and also a circular invisible cycle connecting to its visual design. These simple, but abstract, symbols represent the mythic and ethnic nature of the White Bird. The motions of White Bird are always appearing like a ritual is processing. Other female dancers hold rice straws in front of her to clear the space for her entry and introduction. The White Bird's nobility is expressed through bodily aesthetics and her slow demeanor. In the duet of intimate encounter with Samo, there is slight touching of the skin, yet there is always some space between the bodies. This arrangement contributes to a breathtaking moment. Her extended fingers are attached with long Cloisonné nail sets, signifying the beak. They shake and tremble in order to disclose excitement and love. Even as she dies, the White Bird dances alone and shows her extreme beauty and sorrow in a very slow manner. The death occurs in a ritualized setting under the gaze of four male dancers.

Mother Earth, performed by the singer Ching Chun Hsu, is responsible offers prays in a comforting voice, and this encourages the dancers. In several texts published by the dance company, Lin terms this role *Zu Ling*. This is an indigenous term used by the peoples of Taiwan to signify their ancestors' spirits. Hsu's singing is lyric-less and produced from her inner energy with her improvisations, much like innovative religious prayers. This bears resemblance to a witch's singing in ancient indigenous communities, and the singing serves as a means of communication for the spirits.

This piece also alludes to the cyclic nature of time and space. The Walker signifies the passage of time as well as timelessness. During

the beginning of the performance, she takes pieces of ancient stones brought from the Himalayas away from the center of the stage. She puts them back at the end. The Walker's motion represents everyday sorrow and violence. The cyclic conception of time is an important concept in Buddhism; it is also deeply rooted in the spiritual beliefs of many indigenous communities. Also, because Lin believes that everything has its own spirit, she insists that dancers have to take caution and maintain a very respectful attitude toward every object used in the piece. Most of her materials and props are natural objects, such as stones, rice straws, branches, and leaves. She also treats the theater as a holy space, inside and outside of which she pays respect to all spirits.

By drawing visual ethnic materials, employing vocals of world music, and highlighting the theme of Mother Earth, Lin constructs her dance into a mythical tribal legend in the history of human beings. Combining different ethnic materials from various sources, Lin outlines impressive images with her tribal aesthetics. The imposing visual setting, touching, singing, and extraordinary slow movements impact the audience. The audience may automatically respond—physically and emotionally—to this performance. They may then find themselves deeply involved into the mind-body resonance with the dance and be transported closely to the mythic ancient times.

Lin's choreographic strategy is to transform and mix different indigenous objects together. She does so to engage her audiences with mythic imaginations, aimed at presenting an unknown, primitive, and beautiful origin and myth. Although it may be argued that this, too, is an act of appropriation, the purpose of Lin's transformations is to echo the core philosophy and cultural thoughts of pan-indigenous communities. She aims to throw light on the greed and violence human beings bring to the world. Her choreographic strategy suits contemporary global tastes and her works are appreciations of vogueish tribal scenarios. Lin's work illustrates the profound insights of indigenous cultures and worldviews.

Lin skillfully leads her audiences to feel the ground-ness and spirituality in the dancers' movements. Lin subscribes to a cosmopolitan worldview and considers that all indigenous communities as the common origin of human beings. Given this worldview, she condenses the long histories of human beings into this cautious ritual-theater work *Song of Pensive Beholding*. Lin intends to remind audiences by reviewing the sorrow legend in theater, a sacred space nowadays to provide a deeply reflective experience. Just like what Susan L. Foster (2010) suggests, "engagement with the environment profoundly affects how one sees and consequently what one sees" (9). Lin aims to motivate the audience to feel with others, to feel empathy, and to reflect on our place on the Earth.

Conclusion: Evoking Kinesthetic Empathy

Lee Chen Lin's choreographic strategies involve managing ritual efficacy into liminal status, arranging physical encounters synchronically and diachronically, and interweaving various tribal elements into new interpretations. The dancing bodies in her works intend to move and awake the sensations of the audiences to respond, both kinesthetically and emotionally. Moreover, her works require the audience to sense openly and feel deeply and to engage with their whole bodies and their imaginations. Her sincere dances necessitate sincere audiences; especially those who are willing to temporally let obsessive thoughts go for getting into the state of "semi-trance" in their viewing experiences. In this state, the audiences who have more kinesthetic experiences may be easier to keep their conscious and awareness without enchanting by the fascinating and extremely beautiful ritual-theater setting of the dance. The different levels of the spectators' kinesthetic experiences may have an impact on how they appreciate Lin's body philosophy and on the potentials of self-reflections generated.

The awaking of the sensations of audiences not only replies on the audiences' previous kinesthetic experiences, but also is highly influenced by the vehicles of dancing, the dancers' minds and bodies, which requires full devotion. Although Lin refuses and disagrees with several scholars' statements about her concepts and practices of dance trainings are influenced by theater director and theorist Jerzy Grotowski, I suggest that her ways of treating and training dancers to "live" her arts is very similar to Jerzy Grotowski concept of "art-as-vehicle". Lin's dancers have to empty their mind and body to allow the roles and the spirits to enter them and to maintain to live with this status, without doing or "performing", in their training and performance.

Lin's body aesthetics forms the basis of her dancers' training regimen. The "lived" performance without "performing" only can be reached by the long-term self-cultivation, like religious or spiritual practices, of dancers to achieve the specific body techniques and body philosophy that Lin created and theorized. Therefore, her dancers must train for several years before acquiring what Lin calls the "honest" dancing body. It is only by acquiring this body can a dancer influence the audience. In order to understand the elements and intricacies of Lin's system, her dancers require the ability to empathize with others. This may involve the collective singing of the Heart Sutra or treating every item with respect. Dancers at LLDT devote to sharing empathy with the world via their dancing bodies.

Lin's choreographic approaches are not intended to detach the audience from reality. Instead, her approaches aim to immerse the audience in reality and the living world. The ground-ness of her choreographed dancing body, sinking into the land but slipping over it with sincerity, signifies her philosophy of living in the world and the suggestion she

gives, as a self-reflective artist, to the participants of her dances. Lin's dances are located and grounded in local contexts, cultures, and rituals—especially Taiwanese and Asian cultures and contexts. At the same time, her works embody humanistic concerns and worldviews. Dancing and observing with empathy, Lin's dancers and audiences may participate together and share openly with each other. This paves the way for reflective insights and thoughts. It also paves the way for inter-subjectivity and also enables the unison of senses and sensations.

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