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during the Sino-Japanese War**

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Use of Dance to Spread Propaganda during the Sino-Japanese War

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Abstract

During the Sino-Japanese War, Mainland China was divided into three areas: the Liberated Region, Japanese-occupied Area, and National-Party-ruled Area; in each area, both sides of the war used *propaganda* to shape peoples' opinions. In this regard, this study examines how dance was used to spread propaganda among the Japanese-occupied Area and National-Party-ruled Area. Despite some historical records that exist in Mainland China, few researchers have referred to these records because it was assumed that they were primarily not related to the history of the Communist Party. However, through an investigation of these historical documents and interviews with older dancers, the results of the present study are obtained as follows. In the National-Party-ruled Area, Chinese dancers organized small dance companies and barnstormed; that is, they presented concerts that were sponsored by both the National Party and Communist Party. The programs generally advertised the crimes of the Japanese Army or the courageous resistance of the Chinese people. Notably, the techniques and principles of these dances were a combination of classical ballet and German modern dance. Meanwhile, in the Enemy-occupied Area of China, Japanese dancers organized dance companies and entertained the Japanese Army or artisans working in munitions factories in order to promote the "Five Races under One Union," which was a national motto in Manchukuo, among the occupied Chinese people. Therefore, they performed traditional Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean dances, as well as traditional Japanese dance and German modern dance, to military songs. Note that colonized Taiwanese and Korean dancers participated in these Japanese dance companies, which was a tactic of passing on their own ethnic culture, although they were performing under the "Japanese Empire." After the war, these Taiwanese and Korean dancers helped popularize modern dance in their respective countries. However, during the political transitions of the Korean War and the White Terror in Taiwan, some dancers were suppressed because of their "cooperation with Japanese imperialism."

Keywords: Sino-Japanese War, dance, Propaganda, Taiwan, Colonization.

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Introduction

This study examines how propaganda took advantage of dancers during the Sino-Japanese War and focuses on three dancers: Choe Seung-hui, Tsai Rui-yueh, and Lee Tsia-Oe. They came from either Korea or Taiwan, where the Japanese occupied territory. Additionally, this study will introduce their contribution to establishing modern dance in their own countries and examine the political repression they experienced during the period of decolonization. Most studies regarding entertainment for Japanese soldiers have not focused on the fact that the entertainers were colonial subjects. In July 1937, the Japanese launched a full-scale invasion of China and extended its empire to Manchuria, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and countries in the South Pacific. At that time, mainland China was divided into three areas: the liberated region, the Japanese-occupied area, and the area under the National Party rule. In the liberated region and the area controlled by the National Party, Chinese people spread anti-Japanese propaganda through literature, music, plays, and dance, while in the area under Japanese occupation, Japanese people spread propaganda to justify the Japanese colonization. Furthermore, this study will analyze the dance troupes that toured around the Japanese-occupied area or in Japan to entertain the Japanese army and the laborers working in military factories. Choe Seung-hui, Tsai Rui-yueh, and Lee Tsia-Oe participated in these troupes as “the Japanese.”

Baku Ishii Dance Troupe to Entertain Soldiers

I have focused on these three female dancers because all of them studied dance under Baku Ishii (1886–1962), a pioneer of Japanese modern dance. Ishii studied classical ballet under Giovanni Vittorio Rossi (1867–), an Italian choreographer who taught at the Imperial Theatre in Tokyo, and later began to cultivate a modern dance style of his own. He went to Europe to hold recitals, which were popular among the public in the 1920s. After the Sino-Japanese war began, the military authorities requested that Ishii go to entertain the Japanese troops, and he traveled around the northern cities of mainland China, Shanghai, Taiwan, and Vietnam with some dancers who had graduated from or were studying at the Ishii Dance School in Tokyo.

Cho Seung-Hui Aimed at Spreading Korean Culture

Choe Seung-hui was a top dancer among the students of Ishii, who earned a global reputation during the war. She began studying dance at the Ishii School because her brother expressed appreciation for a performance by Ishii that took place in Seoul in 1926. Ishii advised her to incorporate Korean ethnic dance into modern dance. She held her first solo recital in Tokyo in 1934 and received enthusiastic applause. Furthermore, a film titled *A Dancing Girl in the*

Korean Peninsula, which featured Choe, was produced. Then she went to the United States and Europe to hold recitals and received unprecedented praise.

Because Choe had acquired significant success in the West, Japanese critics thought that she should represent “Five Races under One Union,” which was the slogan of Manchuria. For instance, a Japanese critic named Natsuya Mitsuyoshi stated the following regarding Choe’s recital in Shanghai in 1943:

Now it is a remarkable assignment for us Asian people who are devoted to establishing a Great Asia. Thus, we have great hope for the success of the first concert of Choe Seung-hui in the Middle of China, and that the concert will impress the Chinese people.¹

Mitsuyoshi’s comment reflected his expectation that Choe would help justify a Great Asia under Japanese rule. Choe performed as a “Japanese” dancer on the surface; however, through her dance, she significantly appealed to the Korean ethnic culture. Since the end of the war, she has been severely criticized in North Korea for accepting the dance culture of the Empire of Japan. Explicit details of her death in North Korea are unclear.

Dancing at Military Factories: Tsai Rui-Yueh

Tsai Rui-yueh admired Ishii’s performance in Tainan and went to Tokyo by herself in 1937. When Tsai began studying dance at the Ishii Dance School, dance concerts had already been prohibited as being superficial activities. Thus, the only way to dance was to go to the front or to a military factory to entertain the soldiers or the laborers. After two years, Tsai became more sympathetic toward the performance of Midori Ishii, who was once a student of Baku and had set up her own dance company, and she moved to Midori’s company.

From 1941 to 1945, Tsai traveled around mainland China and Japan as a member of Midori’s company. Initially, they went to Gaoxiong in Taiwan and to Burma to entertain the Japanese army, which was sponsored by the Japan Broadcasting Corporation. The soldiers never failed to make the dancers feel welcome. In Japan, the dancers traveled around almost all the areas and danced for the factory workers, and this tour was sponsored by the Mainichi Newspapers Company, the Home Front Apprenticeship Association, and so forth. They danced to military songs such as “If I Go Far Away to the Sea,” “Shooting Goes On,” “The Patriotic March,” and Japanese ethnic songs.

After Japan’s defeat, Tsai returned to a decolonized Taiwan; however, this was the beginning of her hard times. At the beginning of the White Terror in Taiwan, her husband, Lei Shi-yu, was arrested and was forcibly deported back to Hong Kong, and then Tsai was also arrested. The reason was ostensibly that she was suspected of having engaged in espionage for the communist party;

¹ MITSUYOSHI, N. 1943. The Dance of Choe Seung-hui. *Tairiku Shinpo (The Continent News)*. (Sep.29).

however, at that time, the people being arrested were the intellectuals in various circles in Taiwan who had received higher education under the Japanese rule. Thus, it can be said that Tsai was arrested because she had studied dance in Japan and been involved in spreading “imperialistic” dance. During her imprisonment, Tsai was often forced to dance to entertain high officials in the Chinese Nationalist Party. Released from prison after three years, Tsai established the Tsai Rui-yueh Dance Art Research Center and taught many notable dancers.

“Lee Tsia- Oe of Taiwan”

Lee Tsia-Oe (1926-) enrolled in the Ishii Dance School in 1939. At that time, Zai Pei-huo (1889–1983) who was the leader of the Taiwanese new cultural movement, encouraged Taiwanese youth to pursue a higher education in Japan, in order to establish Taiwanese culture on their own initiatives. Therefore, he took Lee, whose father was his good friend, to Tokyo.

Baku Ishii discovered Lee’s talent and selected her to participate in dance competitions. She won first prize for her solo performance in the dance competition held by the Miyako Newspaper Company in 1941, received second prize for a group dance in the same competition, and was awarded first prize for a group dance in another competition. It seems that Ishii aimed to allow Lee to symbolize Taiwan through dance, while Choe represented Korean ethnic dance. Fortunately, she returned to Taiwan in 1943, before Japan’s defeat.

Lee also toured with the Ishii Dance Troupe to entertain soldiers. In mainland China, the dancers traveled around Harbin, Mudanjiang, Dalian, and Changchun, and then went to Hanoi. Lee said that she was very popular among the soldiers as “Lee Tsia-Oe of Taiwan,” because she was the winner of the first prize.¹ The dancers performed to military songs such as “If I Go Far Away to the Sea,” Japanese popular songs such as “The Moon over the Ruined Castle” and “Oriental Waltz,” and many more.

After returning to Taiwan, Lee stopped dancing until she was invited by the Taiwanese government to be a modern and ethnic dance teacher as part of the spirit of the Taiwanese ethnic culture movement at the time. In comparing the differences between Lee and Tsai, it appears that this break helped Lee escape from being embroiled in the oppression during the White Terror era. She established the Lee Tsia-Oe Dance School in Gaoxiong in 1954, choreographed many repertoires, incorporated Taiwanese ethnic dance into modern dance, and even now she trains modern dance instructors and her successors.

¹ HOSHINO, Y., and YANG, T., 2014. Dancing Life: An Interview with a Taiwanese Contemporary Dance Artist LEE Tsia-Oe. *Studies in Language and Culture*. Vol.35, No.2, 69-82.

The career of Lee as a dancer in Japan was exceptional; however, it was relatively short. Thus, she could rid herself of being a cultural symbol for Great Asia.

Conclusion

Because dance is a physical performance that is free from the boundaries of language or dialect, it can become a convenient carrier of propaganda. Korean and Taiwanese dancers' performances were often a more effective way of representing the aims of Japanese imperialism. The oppression experienced by Choe and Tsai bear witness to this reasoning.

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