

UNTAINTED DANCE IN A CONVOLUTED ERA

Florence Mo-han Aw



Aw joined the Hok Yau Club (HYC) in 1956, and she was the chairperson between 1962 and 1974. The predecessor of the HYC, the Hok Yau Dancing Club, was an arts and cultural organisation active in the 1950s and 1960s. The HYC presented cultural and recreational activities for students and youth, the dance unit of which nurtured a number of dance talents and presented numerous dance performances. However, according to some insiders, the HYC was an auxiliary unit of the Communist Party of China (CPC); the arts was a tactic of united front work. During her tenure as chairperson, Aw witnessed how the HYC contributed to the development of dance in Hong Kong, while achieving its political objective with dance and cultural activities. Aw has left the CPC since her emigration to Canada in 1974. This avid dance lover and former underground party member described how Hong Kong dance made its way through the political and societal atmosphere of the 1950s and 1960s.

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The establishment of the Hok Yau Club

The HYC was established in 1949 when the CPC was about to gain its victory in China. Many Hong Kong citizens who supported the CPC were thrilled, and they set up local arts and cultural organisations in Hong Kong. A total of 38 dance and Chinese music organisations and choirs were established. The impact of these organisations following Communist ideology caught the eye of the British Hong Kong government, who decided to abolish them.¹ Ultimately, only the HYC and the Amateur Music Association of Hong Kong survived the ban. The HYC, labelling itself as a dancing club, stayed under the cover of dance research in the hope of making itself less of a suspected target and ensuring its successful registration as a society.

From the CPC's perspective, the 1949 situation remained volatile, which made it necessary to continue recruiting party members. The HYC had its roots in a publication called *xuesheng wencong* (*Students' Digest*) founded by Chen Zhemin, the fourth son of Chen Duxiu, the CPC General Secretary. The *xuesheng wencong* (*Students' Digest*) operated a readers' club called *xuecong zhiyou* (Friends of *Students' Digest*), of which Szeto Wah was a member. It seemed that its members had to make monetary donations to the club.

Six months later, *xuecong zhiyou* (Friends of *Students' Digest*) was renamed the Hok Yau Dancing Club. It had over 90 inaugural members, led by

1. In 1949, Sir Alexander William George Herder Grantham proposed ways to weaken and curb the CPC's activities in Hong Kong, including the Societies Registration Ordinance which was successfully implemented. Clause 5 of the Ordinance was: "The Societies Officer may refuse to register a society if he believes that the organisation has been set up outside of Hong Kong, that the society or the branch is a political body with connections to a political organisation, that a Hong Kong society is used for illegal matters or interferes with Hong Kong's law and order and welfare." Zhang Lianxing. "di ershier ren gelianghong" ("The 22nd Grantham") in *Xianggang ershiba zongdu* (28 Hong Kong Governors) (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing [Hong Kong] Ltd., 2012): 295.

Liu Yat-yuen² from the film industry. Szeto Wah was the deputy chief executive of the HYC at one point. Introduced by Liu, in 1949 Szeto joined the Chinese New Democracy Youth League (predecessor of the Communist Youth League). As the leader of Szeto in the League, Liu moderated his joining ceremony. In his memoir,³ Szeto talks about the establishment of the HYC:

From the onset, the HYC had been an auxiliary organisation of the Communist Party. It appealed to young people with progressive ideas, and in particular the students who were not from pro-Communist schools, with a magazine of obvious pro-Communism inclination. The HYC gathered the youth together as

2. Liu Yat-yuen, also named Liu Yuen, alias Liu Tik-sang, was born in 1920.

He became an educator after the Victory over Japan. In 1956 he switched to the film industry. He had been the General Manager and Director of Sun Luen Film Company, Director of Sil-Metropole Entertainment Limited, Director of Kiu Fat Investment Corp Limited, and Director of Chung Yuen Motion Picture, among others. Upon his retirement in 1985, he became the Honorary Director of the Sil-Metropole Organisation Limited and the Chairman of the South China Film Industry Workers Union. See the Chinese University of Hong Kong Library website: <http://docs.lib.cuhk.edu.hk/Exhibition/Liuyatyuen/author.htm>. Accessed 18 June 2018.

3. Szeto Wah. *dajiang dongqu: situ hua huiyi lu (To the East the River Flows: The Memoir of Szeto)* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press [China] Ltd., 2011).

a community. It tried different ways to wipe out the “redness” of the youth and dress them in a “grey” outfit,⁴ turning the community into a students’ organisation without any political colour on the surface, under the guise of dance research. However, its core was an underground organisation tightly managed by the Communist Party. Every step had been meticulously calculated.⁵

4. “Grey line was a front specialised in works targeting students outside of the red schools under the Hong Kong Work Committee’s education front. It was a concealed network of single line connection or small groups operation. Its gatherings usually took place in a member’s home or a rented residential unit deployed as its base. One could not see the ‘grey line’ with his eyes but only feel it in his heart.” Florence Mo-han Aw. “*ganggong shenmi renwu: Cai Peiyuan*” (“The mysterious figure of the Communist Party of China in Hong Kong: Cai Peiyuan”) in *wo yu xianggang dixiadang (Hong Kong Underground Parties and Me)* (Hong Kong: Open Books, 2012): 44.

5. Original quotation from the book: “The objective was, with a magazine with obvious leftist characteristics, to appeal to students with progressive ideas from non-left-wing schools. Together the youth were gathered as a community. The [HYC] tried different ways to wipe away their ‘redness’, and turned the community into a students’ organisation without any political colour, under the cover of ‘dance research’. A ‘grey’ outfit was thus worn. Yet its core was tightly managed by the underground Communist Party. Every step was a meticulously planned strategic deployment.” Szeto Wah. “*chuangjian xueyoushe he mimi rutuan*” (“The founding of the Hok Yau Club and joining the club in secrecy”) in *dajiang dongqu: situ hua huiyi lu (To the East the River Flows: The Memoir of Szeto Wah)* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press [China] Ltd., 2011): 57.

I agree completely with Szeto's definition of the HYC. The situation was exactly like that when I joined. I can affirm, without any hesitation, that the HYC was led by the CPC from the onset. It was an underground affiliate organisation of the CPC.

Grey line organisations

I joined the HYC in 1956 when I was 17, a high school second-year student in Heung To Middle School (Plate 1). My teacher Guan Manyao repeatedly approached me and talked to me about patriotism and the CPC. She made me think that the future of China lay in the hands of the CPC. At home, my second and third elder brothers were also under the sway of patriotism. My second elder brother joined a reading club when he was a student of LaSalle College. The club's leader was called Brother Zhu. At home, my second elder brother frequently talked about patriotism and brought home copies of *xuesheng wencong* (*Students' Digest*). I read them and learnt that China had been liberated. Gradually I was influenced. Later on, my brothers went to the Mainland to study. Before boarding the train, my second elder brother instructed me to enrol in Heung To



Plate 1: Florence Mo-han Aw (second left in the front row). Through the referral of her teacher at Heung To Middle School, Florence Mo-han Aw joined the HYC. Year unknown. Photo courtesy of Florence Mo-han Aw.

Middle School and to uphold my patriotism. He planted a patriotic seed in me. Actually, my parents were pained by my brothers' choice because they knew nothing about the CPC and could not see its future. My eldest sister was also influenced by patriotism, but my parents' hands were tied. In general, Hong Kong citizens were sceptical of the CPC at that time but some, in particular the youth, were influenced by patriotism. At school, I had been very obedient to my teacher Guan and had joined the Communist Youth League. Then she sent me to the HYC. I liked dancing, but joining the HYC was in fact a mission for me. I was to be responsible for the tasks targeting youth and students. That was clear. By joining the League, I was affiliated with the organisation and had to report to the leaders. People like me usually had a job as a cover, for example being a teacher or an office worker, while carrying out the mission of the CPC. Back then, many people had double identities.

When I graduated from high school in 1958, I witnessed the HYC power struggle, or the "member re-election incident".⁶ Back then, the CPC was dissatisfied with what Szeto Wah and his gang were doing at the HYC. That re-election concerned the rights of the HYC members,

as it was proposed that sponsoring members should also have the right to vote. At that point in time, many party members came from Heung To Middle School, Hon Wah Middle School (now Hon Wah College) and Pui Kiu Middle School. Teacher Guan's candidate list received the highest number of votes. I was not even aware that I had been on the list. In the end, I was elected a standing member in 1958. In 1959 I officially "picked up the connection". Teacher Guan led the education front of the red schools. Government-subsidised schools and the HYC were on the grey line. I was transferred from the red school line to the grey line. My leader was Ouyang Chengchao, and his superior was Liang Huanran. I became an official CPC member in 1961. Under the leadership of Ouyang Chengchao and Lu Shouxiang, Kenneth Ore,⁷ Yeung Wai-kui and I went to study in Guangzhou. The most important thing was to have the forms

6. Back then Szeto Wah did not hold any official position at the HYC, but he was supported by many of the members. The underground party accused Szeto of planning another election name list, of being "disobedient", and "[taking] advantage of the crowd's support to make himself important". Aw believes that the party was looking for a group of loyal and obedient people to lead the HYC. As a new member having joined the club for less than a year, Aw was listed as a candidate only because she had been named by the CPC. Florence Mo-han Aw. "*xueyoushe duoquan shijian*" ("Power struggle in the Hok Yau Club") in *wo yu xianggang dixiadang (Hong Kong Underground Parties and Me)* (Hong Kong: Open Books, 2012): 114.

7. Kenneth Ore is the ex-husband of Florence Mo-han Aw. They met in the HYC.

filled up for record. I became the chairperson of the HYC in 1962.

Convergence of young dance lovers

At first, the HYC did not have a dance unit. It only had a dance leader unit headed by Ouyang Rongsheng. Its regular gathering, which I described as “the song and dance group”, meaning singing, dancing and group games, was held on Saturday evenings. I often attended the gathering. We danced Hungarian dance and *Youth Waltz for Friendship*. Those dances had a circular formation within which the participants exchanged partners. I enjoyed them a lot. I had never practised them at Heung To Middle School. The HYC focused on folk dance at the time (Plate 2). In 1956, I noticed a newcomer in HYC by the name of Kenneth Ore. He was doing basic ballet technique training with a few young women. I thought their dance looked very attractive. When I was a student at Heung To, I had listened to some ballet music, and to *Swan Lake* at the gatherings of my wealthy classmates. During the training of the school’s gymnastic team, teacher Zhu Jintian played some Mozart. That left an impression on me. I embraced that kind of music and was happy to see Ore showing up at the HYC.

Plate 2: A Hora Agadati performance at the May Fourth Celebration Party in 1954.
Photo courtesy of Florence Mo-han Aw.



Back then I was just a regular member, yet I noticed something unusual. We already had the dance leader unit headed by Ouyang Rongsheng. Ore was like a new force emerging out of nowhere, even though he was not yet officially teaching dance there. In 1958, the HYC moved to 2/F, 719 Nathan Road in Mong Kok, above the ABC Bakery.⁸ The power struggle incident happened at that time. The “27 Gentlemen”, including Ouyang Rongsheng and Szeto Wah, withdrew from the HYC. I became a member after that election and I was in charge of recreation. Liang Junsheung remained the chairperson. The dance unit was formed after that, headed by Ore. Walter Chan was the deputy head. Together with Yu Dongsheng, the three of them formed the choreography unit. They studied dance at the Azalea Reynolds Ballet School. I heard that Reynolds was the first Western ballet teacher in Hong Kong.

Ore joined the Communist Youth League in 1948, but he disconnected with the party between 1951 and 1957 for reasons that remain unknown

8. According to research findings, it should be ABC Restaurant. Hok Yau Club. “cong ‘xueyou zhongxi wudao yanjiushu’ dao ‘xueyoushe’” (“From ‘Hok Yau Dancing Club’ to ‘Hok Yau Club’”) in *xueyoushe sishi zhounian jinian tekan (The Hok Yau Club 40th Anniversary Commemorative Edition)* (Hong Kong: Hok Yau Club, 1989): 45.

to this day. He enrolled in Chung Chi College in 1952. While at school, he participated in many different activities, such as fencing, wind surfing, and ballet. The Azalea Reynolds Ballet School organised performances on top of regular classes. Back then, the three of them were the only male students at the ballet school.⁹ In 1955 when the Azalea Reynolds Ballet School presented *Les Sylphides*, Ore was the only male dancer in the performance. At the ballet school, Ore became acquainted with many dance lovers. One of them introduced the HYC to him. That was how he made it to the HYC in 1956. He had not been sent by the underground party; he joined simply out of interest. Later on he said that he smelt pro-Communism from the HYC’s activities and the participants, and he was positive that there were party members in the HYC. For that reason, he decided to stay in the club. In 1957 he picked up his connection with the party again, while he continued to study ballet in other places. In 1959, the ballet school presented *Swan Lake*. Ore played the role of the prince. Chan performed too; from what I remember, he played the devil. I was

9. According to Kenneth Ore’s memoir, the performance featured four male dancers. Kenneth Ore. *Song of the Azalea: A Former Chinese Communist in British Hong Kong* (United States: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013): 147.

among the audience. Later on, as I learnt more about *Swan Lake*, I realised that while that was a simple performance, its structure was complete with ensemble dance, pas-de-deux, and solo dance. It was telling of the vision of Reynolds, who managed to present a solid performance under the difficult circumstances of the time. From what I remember, the performance took place at the Empire Theatre¹⁰ and tickets were sold to the public. Most of the members of the audience were foreigners. The ballet circle back then was mostly made up of expatriates in Hong Kong.

Ore had been an office worker in Central while giving dance classes at the HYC dance unit. Later on, in 1960, possibly due to the CPC's dissatisfaction with him working outside of the party, party leaders asked him to resign from the foreign-funded company in Central and be the secretary of the HYC. His salary was merely HK\$180 or HK\$120. My understanding was that the party wanted to cut him off from the capitalistic way of life, so that he would be more loyal. It was a test for him.

10. According to Kenneth Ore's memoir, the venue was Princess Theatre. Walter Chan described the venue as the Astor Theatre. See Walter Chan's blog: http://walterchanboston.blogspot.hk/2009/09/blog-post_5893.html. Accessed 18 June 2018.

Ore agreed. Because of the reduced income, he went through a period of hard times trying to make ends meet. In 1965, Zhang Zhenni and her husband Lee Fai contacted the Xin Hua News Agency, hoping to recruit a male performer. Through the underground party, the Xin Hua News Agency asked Ore to perform. That was a mission, resulting in *chunlian* (*Spring Love*). Lee was the composer and live pianist. Ore and Zhang were co-choreographers. This performance differed from previous ones, as Ore was befriending them on behalf of the underground party. I joined their gatherings as well.

A rich collection of arts and cultural programmes

At the beginning I also studied dance and performed. Later on the leader told me not to join the activities because, as the chairperson, I should focus on administration and ideological education (Plate 3). The three-member choreographic unit of the HYC contributed immensely, not artistically but to important popularisation work. The first performance by the choreographic unit took place in 1959 at the Hong Kong Grand Theatre, at the tenth anniversary of the HYC (Plates 4 and 5). Programmes

included the *Swan Lake*—Pas de Deux, performed by a woman possibly surnamed Huang,¹¹ folk dance by Walter Chan, Chinese dance by students of Hon Wah Middle School, and Chinese music. Between 1959 and 1966, the HYC organised many performances including three dance shows, three variety performances for the “Relief of Underprivileged Children” campaign on the invitation of *Overseas Chinese Daily News* (Plate 6), three variety shows, and three shows to “raise funds for a permanent club site”. In addition, there were *Lin Chong’s Nocturnal Escape* by the drama unit, and *The Assassination of Emperor Qin by Gao Jianli* which took place before I had joined. Over a decade, 14 presentations totalling 18 music and dance performances took place, mostly at the Astor Theatre, King’s Theatre, and City Hall at a later stage. During those times, there was barely any organisation capable of presenting so many programmes (Plate 7).

Programmes I personally found more mature and creative included the

11. Research findings indicate that the woman surnamed Huang should be Huang Huizhen. Yeung Wai-kui. “shanli de xueyoushe wudao” (“The sparkling dance of Hok Yau Club”) in *xueyoushe wushi zhounian jinxi sheqing tekan* (*The Hok Yau Club 50th Anniversary Golden Jubilee Special Edition*) (Hong Kong: Hok Yau Club, 1999): 24.

Plate 3: Florence Mo-han Aw (right) became the chairperson of the HYC in 1962. Photo courtesy of Florence Mo-han Aw.



Plate 5: *xueyoushe shizhounian sheqing jinian tekan* (*The Hok Yau Club Tenth Anniversary Special Edition*). From Florence Mo-han Aw’s personal collection.



Plate 4: The HYC’s tenth anniversary performance in 1959. Photo courtesy of Florence Mo-han Aw.

dance theatre *The Poor Match Girl, Faust—Dance of the Devil* performed by Walter Chan and choreographed by Kenneth Ore, and *Asian Dance Collection* presented by Yeung Wai-kui. They were programmes that stood out and which I was pleased with. Another programme I have fond memories of is *The Golden Feather*, performed in 1962 at the then new City Hall Concert Hall. There were three showings, with a running time of 90 minutes each. It was a large-scale mythical dance theatre in three acts and five scenes.¹² Jiang Chengtao was the composer and Wong Kwong-ching the conductor. Featuring a band of close to 30 musicians, at least 150 performers and backstage crew members, and 23 consultants from different fields, the production attracted media coverage from four TV stations and over a dozen newspapers. Yeung Wai-kui was the director and leading male performer. It was one of the peaks of his performing career. In this respect, the HYC was an organisation with ambitions and ideals. It enriched students' lives through collective activities and fostered the popularisation of dance (Plates 8, 9, 10 and 11).

12. According to the recollections of another interviewee Yeung Wai-kui, *The Golden Feather* was a large-scale dance theatre in three acts and four scenes.

Plate 6: In 1961, the HYC presented variety performances for the “Relief of Underprivileged Children” campaign at the invitation of *Overseas Chinese Daily News*. From Florence Mo-han Aw’s personal collection.



Plate 7: The house programme of the HYC’s dance performance at the Princess Theatre in 1960. From Florence Aw’s personal collection.



(From left to right, top to bottom) Plates 8, 9, 10 and 11: The HYC presented many dance performances in the 1950s and 1960s, including ballet and Chinese dance programmes. Photos courtesy of Florence Mo-han Aw.



Regarding production budget, on the surface HYC did not have any operational funding, so where did the money come from? Take our site at 24/E, Kiu Kwun Mansion, North Point as an example. It was announced that over HK\$50,000 had to be raised. To this end, we organised fundraising events. Actually it was the CPC's money that had been allocated to different individuals, who in turn donated it to the campaign. It was made to look as if we had raised the money we needed. I never had to worry about the box office of the performances I presented. Students of grey line and red line schools would definitely attend. The party made many different arrangements. I had never concerned myself with funding, since the finance department would take care of that. Moreover, our programmes were really popular. Members of the public bought tickets too. We posted street bills to publicise our shows. I organised the members into groups to post bills in different districts, as if it were a mass movement.

Nurturing dance talents

I witnessed many HYC dance unit members pursuing dance as their profession, such as Henry Man. I remember his first HYC activity was a

Hong Kong Island tour. We chatted on the beach, and I asked him if he was interested in dancing at the HYC. Later on he joined us and studied with Ore. His interest in dance grew. I went to his performance after he returned to Hong Kong from the UK. Although his development as a dancer did not take place at the HYC, he was enlightened by the experiences he had at the club. I was so pleased about that. We could nurture dance talents too. It demonstrated my sincerity about dance and the arts.

Walter Chan contributed to choreography and teaching at the HYC, where he demonstrated his talent. He became a professional actor and director with Rediffusion Television (RTV) later and continued his dance career after emigrating to the US. There was also Leung Wai-neoi, a student of Ore's, who was a professional dancer with RTV at one point. She is now running a dance school. Also from the HYC was Leung Yan-suet, who joined the dance unit shortly after its establishment and was also a student of Ore's. Later she joined the youth dance troupe¹³ formed by Man and Tania Tang. I am so glad she is still dancing. And then there is my younger

13. Hong Kong Ballet For All. Further details about the activities of this organisation are also covered in the interview of Julie Ng in this publication.

sister Leung Mo-shan. She became a dance teacher at St. Paul's Primary Catholic School and choreographed a number of dance works for her students entering the Hong Kong Schools Dance Competition.¹⁴

Dance creation got muddled

In 1962, the underground party placed a new leader at the HYC. He was Lu Shouxiang, the mathematics teacher of Hon Wah Middle School. When he first joined the HYC, I wondered if he could dance. Later on I saw a piece of tom tom dance of the Yao ethnic group, choreographed by Lu, at a Hon Wah evening gathering. It impressed me, and I came to respect Lu. At that time, the dance unit was led by Kenneth Ore, Yeung

Wai-kui and Liang Manyu. Together with me, Ouyang Chengchao, Lu Shouxiang and the most senior leader Liang Huanran, the seven of us were the core underground leading group of the HYC. After his transfer to HYC, Lu made us study Mao Zedong's *Talk at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Arts*. The HYC went through massive changes from that point onwards. In 1942, Mao Zedong gathered arts and cultural practitioners at Yan'an and made a speech. He pointed out that arts and culture should go together with labour, architecture and military to serve the proletariat. His speech influenced the development of arts and culture in the subsequent decades in China, and it seems to me that its impact has reached Hong Kong now. The crux of his speech was to advocate for arts and culture as structural parts of the revolution, and that they should communicate the class perspective. Arts and culture were to be shown to workers, farmers and soldiers. Therefore, they must only praise and not expose. Creative works by intellectuals must meet the needs of workers, farmers and soldiers. Therefore, the intellectuals had to undergo ideological transformation. Under the leadership of the CPC, intellectuals and arts and cultural practitioners underwent involuntary ideological transformation. Arts and culture had to defer to the government. A united

14. The Hong Kong Schools Dance Festival, which is commonly referred to as the Schools Dance Competition or the Schools Dance Festival. According to *Hong Kong Dance History*, the Schools Dance Festival was founded in 1956: "[It] was initiated by Angus Campbell, Senior Education Officer of Education Department, with Education Officer Betty Mair and Physical Education Inspector Lee Chan Po-chi being in charge of its planning. Ballet teachers including Joan Campbell, Stephen Kwok, Jean M. Wong and Lau Siu-ming were invited to serve as advisors and judges. It saw the launch of the inaugural competition-based 'Hong Kong Schools Dance Festival', commonly known as the 'Schools Dance Competition'." Hong Kong Dance Sector Joint Conference. *Hong Kong Dance History* (Hong Kong: Cosmos Books Ltd., 2000): 11. [English translation by Nicolette Wong]

front was to be developed in the arts and cultural field.

I now find this line of thinking extremely destructive. Arts and culture should not serve anyone. They should serve neither the country nor the class struggle. What is important is whether an artwork delves into humanity and reflects the times, whether it represents human's struggles in society, whether it refines one's temperament and elevates her/his spirit. That is what makes a good work of art. Mao Zedong's idea had lasting adverse effects on many people, and it should be solemnly criticised. However, I completely agreed with it at that time. I followed Lu Shouxiang's direction in the HYC, and so did the rest of the core members. We heartily believed in it, because we had been indoctrinated with the class struggle mind-set. We thought it was all logical.

The works of the HYC changed from then on. Take Yeung Wai-kui's *Wind and Rain at Dawn* as an example. The production had a class perspective, depicting how the poor suffered during a flood and how Mao Zedong's ideology lit up the future. Kenneth Ore also changed. He choreographed a ballet to the music *Red Lilies Crimson and Bright* in which the dancers

wore turbans and ethnic costumes. He called that a return to [our] ethnicity. The play by Zhang Huai of the drama unit also conveyed a distinct class perspective. During the 1967 Riots, the drama unit formed an arts and culture battle unit. It presented an over ten-minute-long act of revolutionary gestures at the North Point Market, and performed the dramas *The Song of Ouyang Hai*, *hefeng songge (Praise to He Feng)*, and *zhongzhiqi qian biao zhongxin (Express our Loyalty in Front of the "Zhong"* [Chinese character for "China"] *Flag)*. The performers were escorted by the workers when they left after the performances. Among the battling acts, there was one that I cringe to think about even now. It was *Chairman Mao's Love for Us is Deeper than the Ocean*, a one-act drama directed by Zhang and Yeung. The script was published in *Wen Wei Po*. It was a prime example of arts and culture serving politics. By then, the HYC had become a completely different organisation. The purpose of those performances was not about how the audience responded, but in order to mobilise the radically thinking youth. Before that, HYC productions had been pure. The party did not interfere as long as the club brought the students together in the name of dance research.

Back then I saw the HYC possibly developing into a semi-professional arts and cultural organisation made up of students. I was planning to set up a tailoring unit, a costume unit, and a lighting and stage design unit. If it were not for the interference of the CPC, I am positive that the HYC would have developed along that path (Plate 12). Look at Yeung Wai-kui, Zhang Huai, and Kenneth Ore. They had artistic aspirations. The problem was interference from the underground party. Everyone had to learn and agree with what the party advocated, and there was nothing we could do about that. Before the 1967 Riots, the HYC had been considered a success from the standpoint of the CPC. We could create any production we wanted. Our job was to inculcate patriotism and Mao Zedong's ideology. We cultivated students as party members when they showed the willingness to stay with us. Our later productions, however, had to be steeped in ideology, class and race. That cut off other possible ways in which party membership could be developed. We described it as the struggle between two directions: the radical and the moderate.



Plate 12: Florence Mo-han Aw (fourth left in the middle row). A photo shoot party for dancers in costumes at the HYC. Year unknown. Photo courtesy of Florence Mo-han Aw.

The 1967 watershed

I started to grow sceptical of the CPC when the “Lin Bun Incident” took place.¹⁵ The British Hong Kong government searched the Kiu Kwun Mansion during the 1967 Riots. At the HYC office, I was punched by a Police Tactical Unit officer, and I had to see a bonesetter afterwards. I thought I would be arrested, but I ended up being beaten. It was just a warning for us. I supposed that was a tactic targeting the students: no real harm, just intimidation. During the riots, the HYC did not announce any manifesto like the labour unions did. Nor did we hoist any five-star flag at our site. We discussed whether we wanted to hoist a flag and decided against it, because the HYC had always been discreet. We were lucky because we would have been arrested if we had hoisted the flag. Looking back, we were driven by a sense of revolutionary heroism; we could not care less if we had been jailed. Yet when I realised later the number of deaths that

15. Lin Bun was a radio commentator at the Commercial Radio Hong Kong in the 1960s. During the 1967 Riots, he criticised the violent actions of leftist agitators in his own radio programmes. In August 1976, he was attacked in the street. He was burnt alive inside his car when it was set on fire. He died the following day.

had been caused by the riots, I found it problematic. Lin Bun was burnt to death for no reason. This is something I have been contemplating ever since. To my mind, the party’s action was ruthless. The party should have upheld its policies and provided directions for its members; rather, it let its members run amok. I was deeply confused. Then the “Lin Biao Incident” took place.¹⁶ We had said “long live deputy chairman Lin” during the Cultural Revolution but Lin, as the number two person of the party, was dead all of a sudden. I could not understand why. Then I thought about the central administration. That aspect had never crossed my mind before, and I could not figure out what was on the mind of the seniors. Later on, the CPC took certain actions to pacify us. News about Lin’s son plotting to murder Mao Zedong reached us. We were shown the letter written by Mao to Jiang Qing to prove Lin’s plans to rebel. But I still could not comprehend the reasons behind all these happenings. I was depressed. A part of my job was meeting my subordinates. They felt lost over what had happened, but there was nothing I could say. What could I say on behalf of the party?

16. Alternately named the “September Incident”. Once considered the successor to Mao Zedong, Lin Biao’s relationship with Mao later deteriorated. Lin Biao’s plane crash took place on 13 September 1971.

After the 1967 Riots, the HYC was completely banned from performing. The City Hall would not accept our application, so we organised our performances in Kenneth Ore's name. We later renamed ourselves "Blue Bird" and performed at Loke Yew Hall at the University of Hong Kong in 1968 and 1969. The underground party did not interfere, probably because it believed the students had come to their senses after the 1967 Riots. During one performance at Loke Yew Hall, our light music unit sang *Blowin' in the Wind*. That was the first time I had heard the song. I have fond memories of the moment. I have a unique emotional attachment to this song, because it represented an escape out of the extreme ideological imprisonment at the time. The first line in particular touches me. I did not have any concept of popular music back then. Members of the light music unit performed with their long hair and bellbottoms. I had left Mao's ideology behind me, and I was moved by those young and rebellious spirits.

I emigrated to Vancouver in 1974 and saw the downfall of the "Gang of Four" in 1976. Although I had realised there was something wrong with the party, I still felt an attachment to it. When Zhou Enlai passed away, I bought a funeral wreath and went to the Chinese Consulate in Vancouver.

It was like a habit, an emotional bond which had not been entirely cut off, until I read *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* written by his personal physician Li Zhisui. Then came the 1989 Democracy Movement. I felt my own life experience echoed that of the times. If it had not been for the many things that happened, I might have returned to Hong Kong two years after emigration. The party never contacted me after I moved to Vancouver. Most likely, they regarded me as a traitor, like a member who was automatically out of the party once she stopped paying the membership fee.

My dancing life in Vancouver

Not long after I had emigrated to Vancouver, I went to see some performances at local schools on National Day. I heard stories about these schools competing for fame and ranking. It deeply saddened me. From that moment on, I wished to build solidarity among local dance schools and to present a performance for local Chinese and Westerners. I also wanted to find fulfilment. While I organised many performances back in the HYC, I was a coordinator rather than a producer. In 1994,

I started joining arts and cultural activities again and organising dance events. I re-entered into the world of dance in order to realise my own dreams. I founded a dance advancement association under the auspices of the Chinese Cultural Centre (Plate 13).¹⁷ The first performance was for the reception of the China Arts Troupe. The second performance featured the work of Li Hengda, a student of Gao Dakun's from the Beijing Dance Academy. There were very few people who would organise these kinds of events in Vancouver at the time, and I came to know many dance artists in doing so. I presented performance after performance, and it filled me with joy. I brought together students from 11 Chinese dance schools in Vancouver to perform the *Autumn Dance Gala*, which received extensive coverage in the local press and left a lasting impact. There were many dance schools in Vancouver. Parents liked to have their children learn Chinese dance. It could perhaps be attributed to their sense of nationalism and nostalgia for their homeland.

17. The full name of the organisation is the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Vancouver, which was established in Vancouver in 1973. See the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Vancouver website: <http://www.cccvan.com>. Accessed 18 June 2018.

Plate 13: Florence Mo-han Aw founded the Chinese Cultural Centre Dance Advocates Club in Vancouver. The club presented *Autumn Dance Gala* at the Michael J. Fox Theatre on 21 and 22 November 1998. From Florence Mo-han Aw's personal collection.



Besides performance, the association conducted various talks such as an introduction about the works of Lin Hwai-min.¹⁸ Mimie Ho,¹⁹ who founded possibly the first dance school for Chinese people in Vancouver, sought the assistance of the association in taking care of Dai Ailian on her visit to Vancouver. After that we received Bai Shuxiang and Jia Zuoguang, renowned dancers from China. I was most pleased to present *zhongguo minzu fengqing wuji* (*Chinese Ethnic Dance Showcase*) with the Cai Feng Performing Arts Club, which I co-founded with a friend of mine. The performance focused on Chinese ethnic dance. I oversaw all aspects of the production, onstage and backstage. I saw it as my graduation examination in dance. It was supported by the Vancouver Municipal Government. I presented them with three reasons why our production should receive funding: Firstly, there was a growing interest in Chinese dance among both Chinese and Westerners; secondly, there were dance schools with distinctive characteristics; thirdly, the audience would gain a deeper

18. Lin Hwai-min (1947-), Taiwanese novelist and dance artist. He founded the Cloud Gate Theater in 1973 and served as its Artistic Director. In 1983, he founded the Department of Dance of the National Institute of the Arts (now Taipei National University of the Arts).

19. Maria Mimie Ho established the Strathcona Chinese Dance Company in Vancouver in 1973.

understanding of Chinese dance from the performances by different schools. My one regret is that I never presented a classical Chinese dance performance in those days. In the meantime, I pushed forward audience development. The local dance teachers and students only paid attention to performer training and overlooked the audience. It was my responsibility to nurture the audience and enhance people's ability to appreciate what they saw, so that they could catch up with the development of the arts. There were dance units in most of the community centres in Vancouver. I saw people's interest in dance, as some elderly people in their 80s or 90s were still dancing. They were the audience. They only performed in the community centres or at dinner gatherings, but I invited them onto the stage. The last stage performance I presented took place during the summer holiday of 2003. On the square of the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Vancouver, more than 50 people danced Chinese dance and group dance together. My mother passed away in the same year, and my own health was fragile. Since then I have not presented any dance events. I did a lot of work over those years. There were many twists and turns. In Vancouver I again did what I had done in Hong Kong a few decades before.

Dance and politics

To many, compared to other art forms, dance is beautiful, elegant and different. It seems classier. Some dance styles are hard to learn, such as ballet. My thinking about Chinese ethnic dance has changed. I used to enjoy watching Tibetan and Mongolian dances a lot, which I felt conveyed a strong ethnic flavour. In them I saw pure traditions. Later I did not want to watch Mongolian and Tibetan dances, because I could not quite cope with it emotionally. I felt that we, the Han ethnic group, appropriated the dances of the minority ethnic groups and called them Chinese tradition. It is as if we were thieves. The ethnic dances we see now are somewhat distorted. One does not see the traditional ethnic style in them. They look neither traditional nor contemporary. I see the CPC as monopolising the cultures of the minority ethnic groups, with ethnic dance as a tool.

I was baptised in 2000. I stopped organising dance activities in 2006 to focus on writing. I seem to have become a current affairs critic. It is my mission to tell the others what happened in the past. I am not sure what it is like exactly in Hong Kong now, but some things look similar

to what I experienced before. It seems like history is repeating itself. This is important. When others remain silent, I speak as long as I can. This is my responsibility. I pay a lot of attention to what is happening in Hong Kong. I used to buy newspapers. Now I read the news about Hong Kong online every day. The situation in Hong Kong is critical, and I am deeply concerned about it. Yet I can see community organisations sprouting in different fields. It is a sign of awakening. In this respect, film seems to be at the forefront of the arts. Therefore, we have films such as *Ten Years*.²⁰ Film, literature and poetry are direct expression of ideology through words, which makes them more incisive art forms. Dance is more abstract. It may be because the awakening among choreographers and dancers is not yet reflected in their works. At times, expressing awakening is not necessary. Human nature can be encapsulated in abstract works that allow greater room for expression. It surprises me to see the whole of Hong Kong waking up.

20. A Hong Kong film released in 2015, it comprises five short films based on fictitious stories that envisage what Hong Kong might face in ten years' time.

Some current dance and arts practitioners may do what pleases the authorities for the sake of their own livelihood. To me, what matters is the bottom line. Is what they are doing damaging to universal values? If not, I think I can sympathise with them. However, one must be ready to make sacrifice if she/he insists on the expression of democratic ideology. You cannot have both worlds; you have to choose. The choice is a matter of conscience and awakening. You cannot force it; you have to follow the flow. Even if democracy cannot be realised, one should keep trying if there is room in the process to do so. Considering the current situation in Hong Kong, we should not ask for incisive criticism or harsh condemnation. To me, the bottom line is that whatever one does, it should not damage universal values.

(Translated by Joanna Lee Hoi-yin)