

**A LIFELONG DEDICATION  
TO DANCE EDUCATION**

## Cheng Wai-yung



Cheng Wai-yung is a Council Member of the Chinese Dancers' Association, a member of the Board of Directors and Honorary Chairman of the Hong Kong Dance Federation, Chancellor of Starwave Dance Academy and Artistic Director of Starwave Production. Born in 1936, Cheng is now in her 80s. Since graduating from Hon Wah Middle School (now Hon Wah College) (Hon Wah) in 1955, she has been active in Chinese dance education for more than 60 years. Apart from managing her dance school and serving as a public servant in various capacities, she has been a judge for and advisor to the Hong Kong Schools Dance Festival over the years. In the 1950s and 1960s, Hon Wah was one of the cradles for dance development in Hong Kong. With its close ties to dance organisations in the Mainland, the school had greater resources in terms of teaching materials, teachers and opportunities for learning and exchange compared to other dance organisations in Hong Kong at the time. Members of the school's dance team were in a position to contribute to dance development in Hong Kong both during their school years and after graduation. As a Hon Wah alumna, Cheng still plays an active role in the school's activities. This feature interview traces her experience in dance starting from her study of dance at Hon Wah.

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(Second interview) 3 April 2017

Location: Starwave Dance Academy

Recorded and noted by: Joanna Lee Hoi-yin

I was not a student of the Hon Wah Middle School at first. One day in 1951 or 1952, I attended a dance performance there. The work was titled *yanwu* (*The Goose Dance*) (Plates 1 and 2). I was deeply moved by it, and I fell in love with dance. This prompted me to switch to Hon Wah and join its dance team (Plate 3). After graduation, I worked as a teacher at Hon Wah and promoted dance activities at the school. Some predecessors believed there were no dance activities in Hong Kong prior to the 1950s, and that the founding of the Zhongyuan Drama Club<sup>1</sup> initiated the public's knowledge of dance and drama. However, as early as 1948, the Primary Section of Hon Wah staged a new-style dance performance of the Western fairy tale *xingyunyu* (*The Lucky Fish*) (Plates 4 and 5). This is testimony to the fact that Hon Wah was a pioneer in this respect.

### The founding of the Hon Wah Middle School dance team

During its early days, the Zhongyuan Drama Club was located on the 2/F of a building on Hill Road, Sai Wan, and Hon Wah was located on the 3/F and 4/F of the same building, with access to the rooftop (Plate 6).<sup>2</sup> There were frequent exchanges between the two neighbouring organisations. Teachers and students of Hon Wah attended the drama club's activities, while members of Zhongyuan taught classes at Hon Wah, including Liang Lun, the drama club's founder, and teacher Ni Lu. Hon Wah's dance activities were practically inaugurated by Liang and Ni. They led the students to perform in the dance theatres *xinlu* (*New Path*) and *wantong gaizaoji* (*The Re-education of the Naughty Child*) by Ni Lu. Liang

1. Research findings indicate that the Zhongyuan Drama Club was founded in March 1946 in Hong Kong. It was initially established as a drama troupe, and it developed into an arts organisation that encompassed music and dance. The dance unit was founded in July 1946 with Liang Lun as unit leader. Liang Lun. "buiyi zhongyuan juyishe de wudao huodong" ("Recollections of the dance activities of Zhongyuan Drama Club") in Guangdong Drama Research Society's editorial committee for *Liben* ed. *Liben—zhongyuan juyishe de zhandou lichen* (*Liben—the Battles Fought by the Zhongyuan Drama Club*) (Guangdong: Guangdong Drama Research Society, 1993): 173.
2. According to the recollections of another interviewee Yeung Wai-kui, Hon Wah Middle School was located on 2/F to 5/F and the rooftop in the same building.



(From top to bottom) Plates 1 and 2:  
The score of *yanwu* (*The Goose Dance*).  
From Cheng Wai-yung's personal  
collection.



Plate 3: Cheng Wai-yung (centre) in her  
youth, performing in the *Lotus Dance* in  
her second year in senior high school.  
Photo courtesy of Cheng Wai-yung.



「幸運魚」演員表

角色	演員
第一主角	李麗芬
第二主角	李麗芬
第三主角	李麗芬
第四主角	李麗芬
第五主角	李麗芬
第六主角	李麗芬
第七主角	李麗芬
第八主角	李麗芬
第九主角	李麗芬
第十主角	李麗芬
第十一主角	李麗芬
第十二主角	李麗芬
第十三主角	李麗芬
第十四主角	李麗芬
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第十九主角	李麗芬
第二十主角	李麗芬
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第四十二主角	李麗芬
第四十三主角	李麗芬
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第九十六主角	李麗芬
第九十七主角	李麗芬
第九十八主角	李麗芬
第九十九主角	李麗芬
第一百主角	李麗芬

(From top to bottom) Plates 4 and 5: The cast list of *xingyunyu* (*The Lucky Fish*), a dance performance by the Primary Section of the Hon Wah College, published in *hanhua congkan* (*Hon Wah Newsletter*), p. 43, 4 January 1948.



Plate 6: The Hon Wah Middle School campus in Shek Tong Tsui. Photo courtesy of Cheng Wai-yung.

also created the dance theatre *mowang yu nuli* (*The Devil and the Slave*), which was never publicly performed. Most of the dancers who performed in *xinlu* (*New Path*) have left the dance sector. These dance productions may seem somewhat crude by today's standards. Given the circumstances and financial resources available then however, it was no small feat to produce a dance performance with musical accompaniment.

Upon switching to Hon Wah, I was enrolled in Secondary 3 in the second semester of the year. While I was determined to join the dance team, I had to pass an assessment. At the time, students who wished to join the dance team would gather on the rooftop to learn the “foundational training in new-style dance” programme, which had been introduced to Hong Kong by Liang, Ni and their peers. While it was called the “new-style dance”, there were few original dance materials available in the 1950s, since the People's Republic of China was only a couple of years old. The “new-style dance” programme included integrated training in traditional dance and ballet designed by Wu Xiaobang, and popularised fundamental dance techniques in traditional Chinese opera. The simplified materials were accessible even to students like me. Our teachers invented names that exemplified the

movements and which were easy to understand. For instance, weight transfer was named “Bending and Straightening”, as the movement was completed by the dancer bending or straightening her/his legs forward, backward, leftward or rightward. The pique was named “Traffic Cops”. The materials also covered training in Chinese opera movements such as the front kick, side kick, back kick, outward crescent kick, inward crescent kick, and *bazi* (fighting technique) training. New movements were created based on the demands of the story or choreography. After completing the initial training, we were assessed by teachers from the dance team.

Liang Lun only stayed in Hong Kong for a brief time; his main duty was cultural promotion in Southeast Asia, and he had left Hong Kong before China was liberated. Because of my young age, I did not have the opportunity to study with Liang like my predecessors Lu Shouxiang and Li Mingqing did. However, from the training I received in the dance team, I had first-hand experience of how the dance programme designed by Liang and Ni laid a solid foundation for the development of Chinese dance in Hong Kong. The strength of Ni's teaching materials lay in the specificity of his instructions. While he did not have any dance music on hand at first, he

asked the music teachers at school to play some music as he conceived the choreography, creating concrete study materials for students.

### **Hard-earned dance materials**

The members of the dance team were not troupe-trained, and they were students and teachers who did not belong to any professional network. They collected materials for creating choreography and teaching by observing and memorising different dance works, and imitating and refining the materials they had collected over time. Yet one could not go far with these second-hand materials. In addition, ethnic folk dance could not be created out of imagination. We had to seek out other channels for learning. In those days, Mainland Chinese song and dance troupes were unable to visit Hong Kong for performance, but they could travel to Shenzhen. Therefore, we went to Shenzhen to see their performances and attend short training programmes. Thanks to our alumni network, we had the chance to receive foundational training from the *huanan gewu tuan* (the South China Song and Dance Troupe) at the Guangxiao Temple in Guanzhou. We did acrobatic training, and studied the dance

theatres that the troupe created from the folk materials they had collected in Guangdong, like *The Lantern Festival* (Plate 7). It is worth noting that besides Chinese dance, the *huanan gewu tuan* (the South China Song and Dance Troupe) also performed folk dances from Asia, Latin America, and Africa, as well as socialist countries in the West. This gave me the opportunity to study Polish and Hungarian dances. There was only a limited range of dance materials available in Hong Kong then. With our intense passion for learning dance, we did not limit ourselves to dances from particular regions, but studied all kinds of materials.

One year, we travelled to see a performance of *Twin Lotus Flowers on One Stalk* by the *hebeisheng tielu wengong tuan* (the Hebei Railway Arts Troupe) in Shenzhen. We were deeply touched by the work. It was a dance theatre with classical sensibilities, which we found fresh and exciting. We also envied the troupe for having such excellent material in their repertoire. We were lucky to be given the music, the score, and some video clips of the production. It just so happened that Hon Wah had made plans for an upcoming performance, so we spent two months adapting the materials we had on hand into a new work. Our alumnus Jiang Chengtao, who had

returned to Hong Kong after his study of music in France, rearranged the music; Lu Shouxiang<sup>3</sup> and I worked on the story and choreography. Together we created *Sunset Glow*, a dance theatre in three acts and four scenes.

Since it was easy to travel from Hong Kong to Shenzhen, we often went to Shenzhen to watch performances and collect dance materials. Among the productions we saw were performances by the Sichuan Song and Dance Troupe. The Xinhua News Agency also sent Lau Siu-ming, Ng Sai-fun and Lee Kow-chou to study with them. The three of them stayed at the Overseas Chinese Building in Shenzhen, and attended classes and rehearsed at Shenzhen Theatre. They would get together for coffee whenever they had free time, and they remain friends to this day. The content of our dance learning was decided by the organisers. For instance, we attended *The Red Detachment of Women* and the post-performance talk. At the time I was working on a small-scale dance theatre piece, *The Little Sisters on the Prairie*. When I met the director of *The Red Detachment of Women*, Li Chengxiang, at the talk, I showed him the script of *The Little*

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3. Lu Shouxiang's activities in the Hong Kong dance sector in the 1960s are also covered in the feature interview of Florence Mo-han Aw in this publication.

Plate 7: *The Lantern Festival* is a folk dance routine from South China. It was collected along with other folk materials by the *huanna gewu tuan* (the South China Song and Dance Troupe), and adapted into a performance piece. Photo courtesy of Cheng Wai-yung.





*Sisters on the Prairie*; he read the whole script and offered me some very encouraging words. The script is still among my possessions today! While none of us were trained in ballet, we practised the ballet routines in *The Red Detachment of Women* by studying the dance notations. That was how much we craved new dance materials in those days.

When I was working as a teacher at Hon Wah (I have forgotten the exact years), the China Arts Troupe toured Japan and stopped in Hong Kong on their way back to the Mainland. The troupe conducted a short training programme at Mount Davis. I got together a few dozen people including Lee Kow-chou, Lau Siu-ming, a group of Pui Kiu Middle School students and some Xinhua News Agency employees to attend the training with me (Plate 8). What impressed me most was the Xinjiang dance taught by Liu Feng. A principal actor of the troupe, Zhao Qing, also joined the visit to Hong Kong. When the training was over and the troupe members were heading home, we saw them off at the train station. Among the rewards of our training were the 8mm film recordings we made of the China Arts Troupe's performances in Hong Kong and Macau. Using the recordings and the music as references, we copied and adapted the dance movements into new materials.

Undeniably, it was easier for left-wing schools to get hold of dance materials from the Mainland at the time. Hon Wah had connections to teachers and arts and cultural organisations in the Mainland, so all the dance materials we had in the early years were from the Mainland. I did not know much about those connections, however, since I was focused on teaching at the time.

While the British Hong Kong government did not suppress Hon Wah's activities as it did the labour unions', it did interfere with our events at some point. In around 1953 to 1954, our school was organising a performance for the parent-teacher meeting, and we had to file a recording with the police prior to the event. The police only granted us permission to perform previously approved works but not our new work, so we had to stage a rerun of the Russian work *The Enormous Turnip*. However, some of the cast members of the original production had graduated, and we had to get some students to learn and rehearse the work in one week. The Ten-school Sports Day<sup>4</sup> organised by left-wing schools was also cancelled, since the event permit was not granted by the authorities (Plate 9).



Plate 8: Some of the instructors and participants who took part in the China Arts Troupe's training programme in Mount Davis: front row, Chan Shue-biu (second left), Chan Hung-kei (third left), Du Ruzhen (sixth left), Xie Weixiang (seventh left), Liu Feng (third right), Tao Qingying (second right), Huang Cihuai (first right); back row, Lee Kow-chou (first left), Lau Siu-ming (second left), Gao Xiaolin (fourth left), Cheng Wai-yung (eighth left), Zhao Qing (ninth left), Tian Zhongheng (fourth right), Wang Yuzhen (third right), Wang Duanmei (second right), Lu Shouxiang (first right).



Plate 9: The rehearsal of the Ten-school Sports Day jointly organised by ten left-wing schools that was held at the South China Athletic Association. Wang Zhenan is the person dressed in performance costume. The sports dance performance, which included the dragon dance, drum waist dance and fan dance routines, was cancelled as the event permit for the sports day was not granted by the authorities. Year unknown. Photo courtesy of Cheng Wai-yung.

## Organising dance performances: teachers and students working together

Hon Wah's passion for dance activities was on par with that of the Chinese Reform Association (Hong Kong Chinese Reform Association, HKCRA).<sup>5</sup> While the teachers and students were only able to rehearse after school hours, we staged a successful performance of the aforementioned *Sunset Glow*. On 26 and 27 August 1963, we presented the *hanhua zhongxue xiaoyouhui wei muxiao choumu jianxiao jijin gongyan* (*The Hon Wah Middle School Alumni Association's Fund-raising Performance for New School Building for its Alma Mater*) (Plates 10 and 11). As well as students and alumni of Hon

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4. "In the autumn of 1958, the left-wing schools in Hong Kong planned to organise a joint-school sports performance to foster cooperation and connection among the schools... It was initiated by ten schools: Pui Kiu, Hon Wah, Chung Wah, Sun Kiu, Shun Shau, Fukien, Yuk Kwan, Nam Chung, and Wai Man. There were more than 20 schools joining later on in what was set to be a major event for united front work by left-wing schools. The event was scheduled to take place at the South China Athletic Association Stadium on the evening of 9 December, and it was called the 'Ten-school Sports Performance'." Zhou Yi. "gangying dui zuopai wenhua yishu de jinzhi" ("The suppression of left-wing arts and culture by the British Hong Kong government") in *xianggang zuopai douzheng shi* (*The History of the Left-wing Struggle in Hong Kong*) (Fourth Edition) (Hong Kong: Lee Shun Publishing House, 2009):181-182.

5. The activities of the HKCRA during that period are also covered in the feature interview of Stephen Kwok in this publication.

Wah, actors from the South China Film Industry Workers Union (South China) also took part in the performance. That was made possible by Ng Sai-fun—the director of one of the programmes, *The Parasol Dance*—who had joined South China and established the dance unit in the organisation. The performance was organised by the performance committee, which only had sufficient personnel for tasks such as house programme production. It required considerable resources and labour to organise the large-scale event, including various dancers, prop makers, make-up artists, singers and sound technicians. The duties were shared among the actors, Hon Wah's alumni, students and teachers. *Sunset Glow* was written and directed by Lu Shouxiang, Li Huixian, Zhang Jinghui, Kwan Lun-kwong and me, and featured Lee Kow-chou in the main cast. We took inspiration from dance materials from the Mainland in creating the choreography, which had much more weight than our previous works. It remains a representative work in the history of Hong Kong dance.

During my years at Hon Wah, I directed many productions. One of them was *The Luminous Pearl*, a fundraiser and a joint dance theatre production with the *Overseas Chinese Daily News*. The work revolved around the story



(From left to right) Plates 10 and 11: The hanchua zhongxue xiaoyouhui wei muxiao choumu jianxiao jijin gongyan (Hon Wah Middle School Alumni Association's Fund-raising Performance for its Alma Mater) house programme, including the personnel list of the *Umbrella Dance*. From Cheng Wai-yung's personal collection.

of a girl who was physically mute, and it was staged at the King's Theatre. Another was *xiang canglong* (*Winning Over the Dark Blue Dragon*), a story about communal flood-control efforts. The dance team also actively took part in National Day celebrations. There were two Chinese restaurants, the Guangzhou Restaurant and the Kam Ling Restaurant, near our school at the time. There were many banquets held at the restaurants around National Day. We would perform original works and works inspired by Mainland Chinese classics, such as *Long Live the Motherland* (Plate 12), *Ode to the Motherland* and *Ordos*.

As part of our participation in National Day celebrations in the community, we often performed at different labour unions. In those days, most labour unions were located on the rooftops of residential buildings. We also performed at the Astor Theatre and the Ko Shing Theatre. For instance, *The Tea Picking Dance* had a run of over 30 shows during National Day celebrations, and it won first prize in the First Yuen Long District Dance Competition organised by the Yuen Long District Arts Committee. Wu Kam-ming, one of the performers in *The Tea Picking Dance*, joined the Hong Kong Dance Company later.



Plate 12: *Long Live the Motherland*. Photo courtesy of Cheng Wai-yung.

There were many other former teachers and alumni of Hon Wah who went on to work in the dance sector. After his return to the Mainland, Ni Lu joined the *huanan gewu tuan* (the South China Song and Dance Troupe); he later switched to the Hainan Singing & Dancing Troupe, and finally the Ministry of Culture. As for Yeung Wai-kui and Yeung Wai-kiwok, the elder brother has served as a dance advisor, while the young brother has worked as a dance instructor at tertiary institutions. Leung Ki-fun founded *xiaoyao wudao tuan* (the Carefree Dance Troupe),<sup>6</sup> Kidance, and Forever Dance Troupe. Becky Lau and Alan Yu founded the Alan & Becky Dance Group, while Sek Sing-chor joined TVB's dance department.

### **Gradual acceptance of dance among the Hong Kong people**

While the Hong Kong people had limited knowledge of dance in the 1950s, students of Hon Wah were extremely passionate about studying dance. Those who were not in the dance team often saw us rehearse at the hall in 5/F. Over time, they started to get familiar with what we did and

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6. Research findings indicate that it should be *xiaoyao wuji* (the Carefree Dance Club). See the Hong Kong Dance Federation website: <http://www.hkdf.org.hk/groupmember>. Accessed 28 August 2018.

grew supportive of us. Most students at Hon Wah came from lower class families where both parents had to work; therefore, many of them stayed on campus after school. They had stronger patriotic sentiments and felt a sense of belonging towards the dance team. One of my students played the role of the younger sister in *The Little Sisters on the Prairie*. Her core and leg movements were rather weak, so I asked her to come to school early for special training every morning. She was happy to do so. Through engaging in group activities, students in the ensemble dance team grew more confident, cooperative and healthier. The duty of coordinating rehearsals, costumes and make-up for each performance also helped them to develop their organisational skills. I remember there was a weevil character in *The Enormous Turnip*; we did not have the money for a custom-made weevil prop, so we bought a lot of chewing gum. Each member of the dance team chewed a piece of chewing gum and washed it afterwards, and we made a weevil from the chewing gum.

According to Hon Wah's school regulations, it was part of the teachers' job to visit their students' homes, while parents had to attend the annual parent-teacher meeting. We had rather close contact with the parents.

For instance, there was a student in my class named Chan King-hung. Both his father and he left a deep impression on me. The son of famous photographer Tchan Fou-li, Chan was among the few students who came from more affluent backgrounds. I came to know the parents rather well through regular household visits. Once Tchan asked me if I wanted to model for him. Some time later Tchan and I both joined the Literary Circles (The China Federation of Literary and Art Circles), and we often reminisced about the past.

Apart from the parents' circle, the school also promoted its dance team in the community. It sent some of its teachers and students to teach dance classes at Chinese department stores, banks and newspaper offices. Li Minqing, who was team leader when I joined the dance team, got a job at *Ta Kung Pao* through her family network after she graduated, and organised dance activities at the newspaper. During my school years, I was assigned to teach dance classes at The Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong, where I also taught some deaf-mute students. Later I even taught at a bank. Teaching dance at different organisations was a valuable experience for me. Here is one example: The adult staff at the bank were very protective of me

when I was a young student wearing a teacher's hat. I would design the course content based on my students' aptitude and preferences. The classes were held at the lounge above the bank branch. Both the staff and their families joined the classes, and they rehearsed together for special performances like the bank's anniversary celebrations and National Day celebrations. They also invited me to join bank activities such as dance parties. Although I did not know any social dance, I got along with my students as though we were family. I was not paid for the teaching, and I believe the school did not charge tuition fees to the students. On one occasion, I received some vouchers from The Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association. I did not at all mind not getting paid, nor did I ever tire of the work. I believe everyone has the right to experience the joy of dance, and Chinese dance is more closely connected with the life of Hong Kong people.

### **Popularisation of dance by the Schools Dance Competition**

Since its inauguration by the Education Department (now the Education Bureau) in 1965, the Hong Kong Schools Dance Festival<sup>7</sup> has played a pivotal role in promoting dance among local schools in the past five

decades. I have been involved in the competition in various capacities since its second iteration. In the early years I choreographed dance works and coached students who were taking part in the competition; in recent years I have served as a judge. When the inaugural edition was launched in 1965, only government schools were qualified to join the competition. The competition was open to private schools the following year, and oriental dance works were accepted as competition entries. Hon Wah has participated in the competition from the second year on, and it has always been one of the top performers. As the number of participating schools increased, preliminary rounds of the competition were held on the Hong Kong Island, in Kowloon and the New Territories. The winning teams and contestants from each district advanced to the finals. In the first dozen years or so, both the main branch and the New Territories branch of Hon

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7. 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]

Wah achieved excellent results at the competition. Hon Wah, Bishop Hall Jubilee School and Kowloon Technical School were the three top performing schools. Later, the Primary Section of Hon Wah also joined the competition. The number of participating schools continued to rise in this year’s (2016) Schools Dance Festival, partly due to the introduction of the “Lower Primary” category which was open to children age six to seven.

In its early years, the Schools Dance Festival was held on the campuses of local schools such as the Clementi Secondary School, and the Hong Kong Sze Yap Commercial and Industrial Association Wong Tai Shan Memorial College (Plate 13). The contestants performed with the audience in the seating area of the school hall, while the judges sat on stage. Although it was held at school halls, the competition still attracted large audiences. It received almost daily coverage in the *Overseas Chinese Daily News* and *Wen Wei Po*. In-depth features about the competition were published in the *baihua zhuankan* (*The Hundred Flowers Special Issue*) of *Wen Wei Po* (Plates 14, 15 and 16). Students of Hon Wah would even ask the newspaper for photos of their performances. As the coverage was extensive and included competition results, it was a source of tremendous encouragement for the students.



Undeniably, I participated in the Schools Dance Festival in the early years as our school wished to enhance its reputation by picking up awards in the competition. In those days, physical education teachers doubled as dance teachers in local schools. The presence of professional dance teachers only emerged later. In the past, the contestants were handpicked by the teachers. Nowadays the competition is much more popular, and all students who are members of dance teams are qualified to enter. I think this is a positive development. The competition categories have also been expanding. For instance, the “Children Dance” category for Primary 1 to 3 students was introduced a few years ago. The goal was to encourage children to exercise their creativity through dance as a reflection of their everyday life, and to stimulate their thinking. The significance of the competition to the children’s intellectual development goes beyond that of the study of dance. Unfortunately, when I served as a judge for this year’s competition, I saw that the intention behind the introduction of this category had not been fully understood. Instructors and parents entered students in the Children Dance category only because their schedules conflicted with other dance classes, or because the students did not perform well in Chinese dance. They paid little attention to the aspect of artistic creation, which was one



Plate 13: The Hon Wah Middle School dance team at the competition venue at the Clementi Secondary School. The team’s competition entry was *nanling zhi ge* (*The Song of Nanling*). Year unknown. Photo courtesy of Cheng Wai-yung.



(From left to right) Plates 14, 15 and 16: The cover and inside pages of the *baihua zhuankan* (*The Hundred Flowers Special Issue*) of *Wen Wei Po*, vol. 94. Years unknown. From Cheng Wai-yung’s personal collection.

of the judging criteria for this category. I hope the children will have the chance to do what they truly want to do.

In recent years, among the solo/duet/trio categories, the solo category has recorded the biggest increase in the number of participants. That is because most parents would like their child to have the trophy to her/himself rather than share it with another. Yet they overlook the importance of ensemble dance to cultivating a sense of community in children. After all, society is a community.

### **Regard for dance is the regard for ideals**

At present, the number of male dance learners is in decline. In the 1950s and early 1960s, there was not a sharp difference between the number of female dance learners and the number of male dance learners. For instance, the Tibetan dance *Celebrating the Bumper Harvest* featured an all-male cast. At Hon Wah, we would even borrow the boys from the gymnastics team to take part in dance competitions. Apart from general trends, I think training methods also have an impact on whether males are inclined

to take up dance. Hu Jun, who was a dancer with the Hong Kong Dance Company, never went to dance school. The first dance he learned was the dragon dance, and he later developed an interest in dance. Hu Jun's experience reflected the state of Chinese dance teaching in Hong Kong: In those days there were no proper programmes or teaching materials, and we would study whatever that was available out of the desire to learn. Hu Jun gained an understanding of body movement through the dragon dance, and he went on to study dance. If he had started with foundational training, he might have given up before he developed a real interest in dance.

In 1954, the Beijing Dance Academy was founded, and Li Zhengyi<sup>8</sup> and her colleagues established a classical Chinese dance training curriculum.

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8. Li Zhengyi (1929-), renowned Chinese dance educator and the founder of the teaching system of classical Chinese dance. In 1949, she joined the Department of Dance at the Central Academy of Drama, where she served as a classical Chinese dance instructor and the Director of Ethnic Dance. She was the President of the Beijing Dance Academy between 1983 and 1987. In 1995, she was awarded an honorary fellowship by The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. Her works include *zhongguo gudianwu shenyun* (*The Essence of Classical Chinese Dance*) and *zhongguo gudianwu jiaoxue tixi chuangjian fazhan shi* (*The Founding and Development of the Teaching System of Classical Chinese Dance*).

It featured an integration of movements and techniques in traditional Chinese opera, martial arts and ballet, as well as a vast amount of ethnic folk dance materials. The teaching materials were designed around the physical and intellectual development of students from different age groups. As they catered to students of varying physical and mental capabilities, they made for interesting and effective learning materials for students. Since I have used the classical dance curriculum in my teaching, I see how much it has helped students to improve their techniques. As social values have changed, however, so has the meaning of this excellent set of dance teaching materials to learners. Personally, I am partial to Mongolian folk dance and Tibetan folk dance. I like the former for its bold and spirited movements. As for the latter, there is a unique rhythm to its movements; as a dance that originated from slave labour on the farm, it is a reflection of a particular way of life. It is a pity that students today are not interested in the humanistic background of dance, while teachers do not always include this subject in their teaching. People do not seem to care much about the pursuit of knowledge; they focus on obtaining the necessary qualifications, so that they can teach dance classes and make some money off it. While these dance practitioners have more sophisticated dance techniques than

their predecessors, this change in values calls into question how we should approach our lives and our ideals.

(Translated by Nicolette Wong)