

**DANCE IS AN ART OF
TEAM SPIRIT**

Lau So-kam



Lau So-kam is an overseas Chinese from Burma. In 1957, she moved from her hometown to study in Guangzhou. In 1960 she was transferred to join the Committee of Overseas Chinese Affairs (COCA) Arts Troupe in Beijing by official arrangements. In 1962 she received professional dance training at the Department of Arts at *huaqiao daxue* (the Overseas Chinese University). Since she moved Hong Kong in 1973, she has been devoted to dance-related work. Her involvement has spanned the public sector (such as the Hong Kong Schools Dance Competition and educational institutions), the commercial sector (such as Rediffusion Television), the community (such as the Fukien Athletic Club) and cross-border activities (such as leading local performance troupes on overseas exchanges). Miss Hong Kong Pageant 1979 winner Olivia Cheng and internationally renowned dance artist Mui Cheuk-yin were students of Lau, who has been mentor to many outstanding students.

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Location: CCDC Dance Centre

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Location: The residential clubhouse of Aqua Marine

Recorded and noted by: Joanna Lee Hoi-yin

A patriotic soul who loved dance

I was already an avid dance lover during my student days in Burma. In junior high school, I saw a live performance by the China Arts Troupe, and I was awed by the beauty of dance. At the time, patriotic sentiments ran high among overseas Chinese, many of whom endeavoured to return and contribute to the motherland. I was no exception. My parents were opposed to my return to China, saying there was “nothing to eat but potato”. Yet I insisted. Guangzhou was my first stop in China. In the 1950s, there were preparatory schools for overseas Chinese students in

Beijing, Guangzhou and Shanghai. I enrolled in the *Shipai huaqiao buxi xuexiao* (the Shipai Overseas Chinese Preparatory School) in Guangzhou in 1957.

In 1958, warfare broke out between the People’s Liberation Army of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the National Revolutionary Army of the Kuomintang near Kinmen. The CPC organised a Fujian provincial goodwill delegation to visit and perform for the troops. A group of us at the overseas Chinese preparatory schools formed a student-led troupe and joined the delegation. I think we were a competent group, as our performance caught the eye of Liao Chengzhi from the COCA.¹ Recognising our talent, he wanted to bring us together in an official unit for carrying out the COCA’s cultural diplomacy initiatives. Liao

1. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, Liao Chengzhi successively held the posts of Deputy Director of the International Liaison Department, Deputy Director of the United Front Work Department, Deputy Director Foreign Affairs Office of the State Council, Deputy Director and Director of the Committee of Overseas Chinese Affairs, President of the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute, and Chairman of the China-Japan Friendship Association. See the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China website: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/wjrw_674925/lrfbjbzl_674933/t218698.shtml. Accessed 27 February 2017.

recruited artistic talents from overseas Chinese preparatory schools in Beijing, Guangzhou and Jimei for selection assessment, and founded the COCA Arts Troupe Preparatory Office.² After the goodwill delegation performance, I returned to Guangzhou from Fujian. I was selected for the COCA Arts Troupe without going through the assessment, and I was transferred to Beijing.

The COCA Arts Troupe (the Arts Troupe) was officially founded in 1960. A year later, China fell into famine. Zhou Enlai ordered the dissolution of all units that did not directly engage in economic production. The Arts Troupe was on the list. However, Liao Chengzhi thought we were a group of rare talents and looked for ways to retain us. He set up the *Beijing huaqiao buxi xuexiao gewuban* (the Beijing Overseas Chinese Preparatory School Song and Dance Group) and sent us down to labour at the *Ganzhuang*

2. According to Lau So-kam, details about the establishment of the Arts Troupe can be found in “*yishuxi xiaodangan—liao chengzhi zhuren yu huada yishuxi*” (“A Profile of the Department of Arts—Director Liao Chengzhi and the Department of Arts of the Overseas Chinese University”) in Wu Jianghong ed. *zuji—Beijing huaqiao daxue yishuxi jianxi sishi zhounian zhuanji* (*Footprints—the 40th Anniversary of the Founding of the Department of Arts of Beijing Overseas Chinese University Commemoration Publication*), August 2002.

huaqiao nongchang (the Ganzhuang Overseas Chinese Farm) in Yunnan. We stayed for one year and two months in rural Yunnan. Besides farming, we studied Yunnan Huadeng Opera and ethnic dances (of the Wa people, Bai people, Hani people and Dai people). I remember Chung Ho³ was among my peers who went to Yunnan. He later became an active figure in Hong Kong’s TV industry.

After completing the send-down, I returned to Beijing in 1962. The Huaqiao University in Quanzhou, Fujian, was founded around that time. Since the government was not supposed to dissolve any educational units, Liao Chengzhi incorporated the Arts Troupe into the organisational structure of Huaqiao University. It was called the Department of Arts of *huaqiao daxue* (the Overseas Chinese University), and it was autonomous in terms of finance and administration (Plate 1). My peers and I graduated around the time when the Cultural Revolution broke out in 1967. As Liao was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, students of the Department of Arts went their separate ways. This led to the assumption

3. Chung Ho, Artistic Director of Sing Yuet Dance Troupe, worked as a dance rehearsal master at TVB for many years.

among some people that the Class of 1962 of the Department of Arts, *huaqiao daxue* (the Overseas Chinese University), was the only-ever cohort (Plate 2). In fact, there are the School of Fine Arts, and the Department of Dance that is under the School of Music and Dance at the current Huaqiao University, but they have no connection to the Department of Arts of 1962.

The Arts Troupe was supported by donations from patriotic overseas Chinese, so it had high calibre teachers and ample financial resources. For instance, the Arts Troupe and the China Oriental Song and Dance Troupe⁴ were the only troupes in the country that could afford the expensive *pat waing* (Burmese drum set). When we left Beijing for the send-down to the countryside, our drum set was handed over to the Ministry of Culture. It was proof that the Arts Troupe had better resources than government institutions at the time. We had dance artist Dai Ailin as Artistic Advisor, Li Chengxiang as Choreographer, and ballet dancer Else Tjiok teaching classes for our troupe members. We also had make-up artists from August

4. The China Oriental Song and Dance Troupe is a state-level song and dance troupe founded by Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi on 13 January 1962. See the Baidu Baike website: <http://baike.baidu.com/item/中国东方歌舞团>. Accessed 17 November 2018.

Plate 1: In 1967, Liao Chengzhi (centre) met with the students of the Department of Arts at *huaqiao daxue* (the Overseas Chinese University). Photo credit: *zuji—Beijing huaqiao daxue yishuxi jianxi sishi zhounian zhuanji* (*Footprints—the 40th Anniversary of the Founding of the Department of Arts of Beijing Overseas Chinese University Commemoration Publication*), p. 5.



Plate 2: The COCA Arts Troupe returned to Beijing after the send-down on 5 February 1962. Photo credit: *zuji—Beijing huaqiao daxue yishuxi jianxi sishizhounian zhuanji* (*Footprints—the 40th Anniversary of the Founding of the Department of Arts of Beijing Overseas Chinese University Commemoration Publication*), p. 3.

First Film Studio as our make-up mentors.⁵

In 1962, the China Oriental Song and Dance Troupe (the Oriental) was founded. It was intended as an important vehicle for cultural diplomacy, as it frequently performed for visiting guests from overseas. The Department of Arts had close ties with the Oriental, and we learnt from one another. When we were in Beijing, we were nicknamed “The Little China Oriental Song and Dance Troupe”. While the Oriental had highly skilled dancers, our group of overseas Chinese had studied native dances like Burmese dance and Thai dance from a young age in our hometowns. That brought us many performance opportunities (Plate 3). When there were overseas organisations visiting China for cultural exchange, we got to take part in it because of our ties with the COCA. Once my fellow troupe members and I went to the Beijing Dance Academy for a dance class, but we arrived late. Since it was a rather small venue and the lesson had started, the person in charge told us to stand on the side and observe. I ignored his instruction; I got changed, stood behind the other students and started learning the figures by following the teacher’s instructions. I still remember the teacher

5. See footnote 2.

Plate 3: Lau So-kam (top centre). The Department of Arts of *huaqiao daxue* (the Overseas Chinese University) performs the *Guerrillas’ Song*. Lau So-kam is the performer at the top centre of the photo. Year unknown. Photo courtesy of Lau So-kam.



came from the Congo. In the second half of the lesson, he prompted me to come forward to the front of the classroom. What I took away from this encounter was that even if we were not students from Beijing, others would still be moved by our sincerity if we truly wanted to learn.

As Liao Chengzhi was being persecuted, the students of the Department of Arts dispersed to Xiamen and Hainan. After the situation stabilised, Liao was concerned about our well-being; he instructed those of us who had Beijing connections to return to Beijing, and made arrangements for the rest to join local dance troupes. To this day, I am grateful for his affection for my classmates and me. I was relocated to Fujian, Xiamen. As my family were still in Burma, and my husband and my mother-in-law were overseas Chinese, we applied to move to Hong Kong. It took over a year for our applications to be approved, which was not such a long time. While I was waiting in Xiamen, I joined the Xiamen Song and Dance Troupe for one month. The people around me said to me, “Don’t do anything that makes you stand out. Act like you didn’t know anything at all.” I waited for time to pass. In my mind, I was prepared to part way with dance forever.

Reunion with dance in Hong Kong

After arriving in Hong Kong in 1973, I received an invitation from “Mr Chan”,⁶ the founder of Tick Shing Hong, through Lam Choi-lan who worked for the *Economic Times*,⁷ to join the Fukien Athletic Club to oversee its dance activities. I did not know Mr Chan, but I accepted his offer as we were clansmen and it was a dance-related job. Fukien Athletic Club is not a clansman association but a sports club; its membership is open to everyone rather than only Fukienese. At the sports club I met Olivia Cheng, Mui Cheuk-yin, Alan Yu, Becky Lau⁸ and others (Plate 4). Starting with my position at the Fukien Athletic Club, my dance career in Hong Kong has encompassed teaching, artistic creation, and commercial choreography.

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6. Lau So-kam was not able to recall the full name of “Mr Chan”. According to research findings, the founder of Tick Shing Hong Industrial Co. Ltd. was Chen Dian-zhen (1874-1939), who had passed away before Lau moved to Hong Kong. Therefore, it would have been the offspring of Chen Dian-zhen who invited Lau to teach dance at the sports club. See the knews.cc website: <http://knews.cc/zh-hk/history/46mo32.html>. Accessed 28 February 2017.
 7. This reference to the “*Economic Times*” was transcribed from the interviewee’s verbal account. It does not refer to the *Hong Kong Economic Times* that was founded in 1988, and which is still in circulation today.
 8. Alan Yu and Becky Lau are founders of Alan & Becky Dance Group.

Throughout the 1970s, I had many performance opportunities in Hong Kong. After the Hong Kong City Hall was completed in 1962 and the Festival of Hong Kong was launched in 1970, I got frequent work assignments as a choreographer and dancer (Plate 5). I still have the house programmes and newspaper clippings from back then. In November 1976, the Urban Council presented the *Performances by Hong Kong Dance Groups* at the Hong Kong City Hall. For the showcase, I choreographed the Dai dance *The Shepherd Boy and the Peacock* for the dancers of my youth folk dance troupe which was founded in the same year. We also performed the Tibetan dance *Delivering the Good News*, choreographed by Hui Sik-kam. On 7 August 1976, the youth folk dance troupe performed four folk dance pieces in the *Oriental Folk Dance*, held by the Urban Council at the Concert Hall of Hong Kong City Hall (Plate 6). On 8 January 1977, the troupe performed the entire programme at a performance presented by the Urban Council, also held at the Concert Hall of Hong Kong City Hall. From 8 to 11 June 1978, the Hong Kong Experimental Ballet Theatre presented the *Stone Girl* at the Academic Community Hall. Chung King-fai and Lau Siu-ming were artistic directors of the production, and I was one of the choreographers.

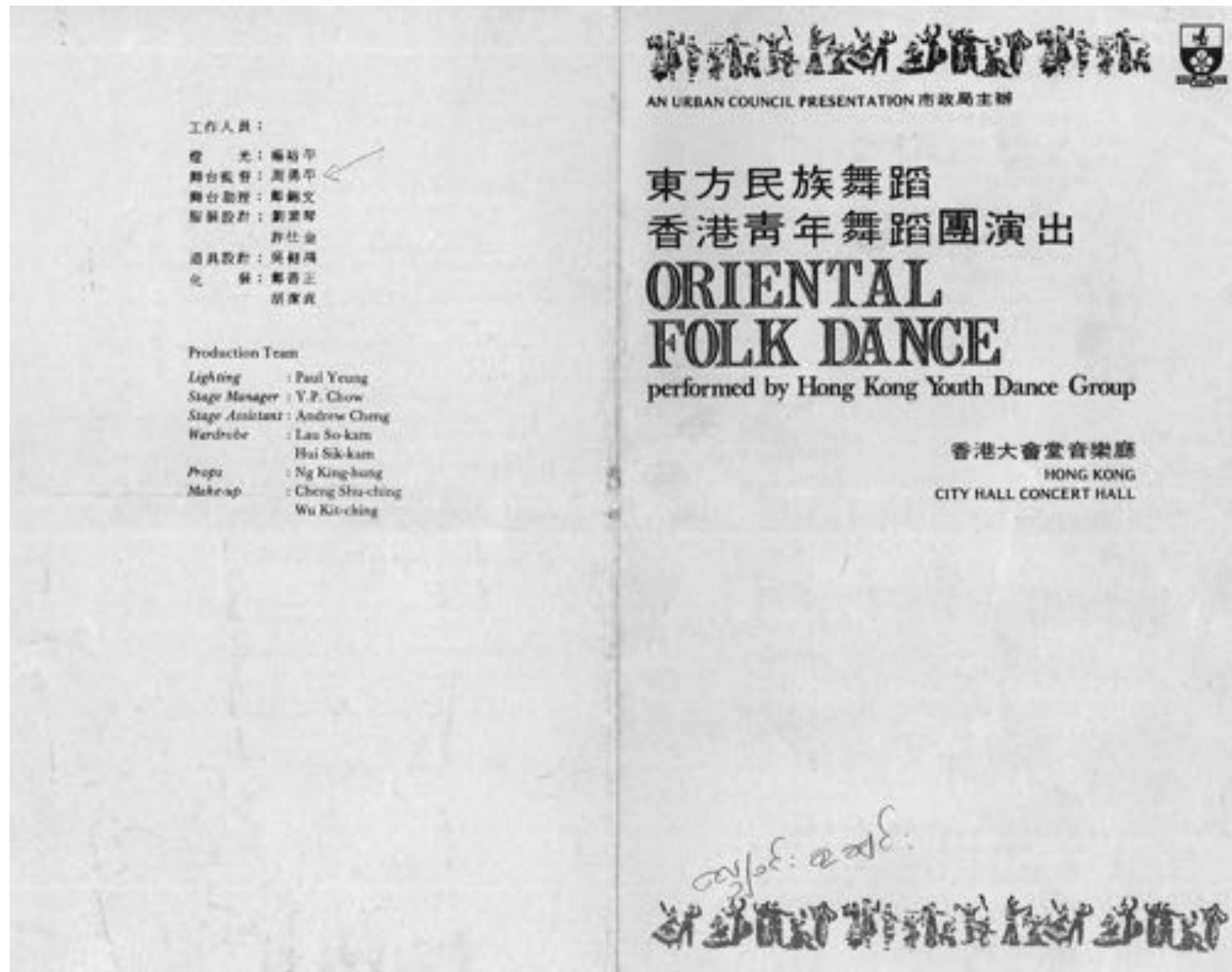


Plate 4: Lau So-kam (centre) coaching Alan Yu in a foundational training class. The rehearsal room has a low floor-to-floor height, where the male students' heads are almost touching the ceiling. Year unknown. Photo courtesy of Lau So-kam.

Plate 5: Lau So-kam (the dancer being lifted up on the left) and Ng King-hung (the dancer doing the lifting on the right). *qiangqin* (*Snatching the Bride*) was staged at the Hong Kong City Hall. Year unknown. Photo courtesy of Lau So-kam.



Plate 6: The house programme of *Oriental Folk Dance* (with unidentified markings). From Lau So-kam's personal collection.



During my time at the COCA Arts Troupe, I witnessed the role of dance in diplomacy. That was why after I had moved to Hong Kong, I readily accepted an invitation to lead a Hong Kong delegation to perform overseas. In September 1980, Heung Yee Kuk N.T. organised “The Heung Yee Kuk N.T. Dance Delegation to the Festival of Hong Kong in London”, which was headed by the then Heung Yee Kuk N.T. Chairman Lau Wong-fat. I was teaching dance at Fung Kai Secondary School in Sheung Shui at the time, and I was invited to be the dance instructor for the delegation. The delegation had planned to perform *The Butterfly Lovers* with Olivia Cheng playing the role of Liang Shanbo, but she could not join the delegation after her win in the Miss Hong Kong Pageant in 1979. Mui Cheuk-yin replaced her in the role, though she was not a Fung Kai student (Plates 7, 8 and 9).⁹

In 1982, the Fukien Athletic Club performing arts team visited Xiaman

9. For detailed coverage of the visit of The Heung Yee Kuk N.T. Dance Delegation to the Festival of Hong Kong in London, see “*liu huangfa, liao runchen yaowu lundun*” (“Lau Wong-fat, Liu Yun-sum and Dance Delegation in London” in *mingliu (Celebrity)*, issue 25 (Hong Kong: Wing Chak Publishers Ltd.), 10 October 1980.

Plate 7: The Heung Yee Kuk N.T. Dance Delegation to the Festival of Hong Kong in London in rehearsal in Hong Kong in 1980.





Plate 8: Lau So-kam (third right in the back row). A group photo of The Heung Yee Kuk N.T. Dance Delegation to the Festival of Hong Kong in London taken prior to the delegation's departure. Mui Cheuk-yin is the person wearing a school coat in the front row. Although she was not a student of Fung Kai Secondary School, she was dressed in the school uniform in order to signal her membership in the delegation. Photo courtesy of Lau So-kam.

Plate 9: Lau So-kam (dressed in a skirt and with her back to the camera). The BBC filming the delegation to the UK. Photo courtesy of Lau So-kam.



for a cultural exchange. I was the artistic coordinator. I invited Helen Lai to choreograph *yan* (*The Geese*) and Willy Tsao to choreograph *honghuang zaji zhi yi: nu wa* (*From Sketches of Chaos: Nu Wa*). Early dancers of the City Contemporary Dance Company, Wong Oi-ling and Ringo Chan, took part in the performance (Plate 10). I invited Helen Lai to come on board, since we had worked together at Rediffusion Television (RTV). Ever since I saw her performance at the Festival of Asian Arts in 1976, I had hoped to bring new-style dance to Xiamen. There were not many people who had seen modern dance at the time. A local newspaper in Xiamen even ran a feature article about our works (Plate 11).

The limited contribution of TV dance programmes to artistic dance

Following its 1975 performance, my youth folk dance troupe attracted a lot of attention. RTV invited me to join their company as the choreographer (Plates 12 and 13). To be honest, I felt disheartened during my early years at the TV station. Although I was the choreographer, everything that happened on and off screen was dictated by the producer and director. The camera engaged with the audience but not the dancers. Also, the choreography was

often fragmented by the editing. I remember working on the shoot of a film directed by Tsui Hark, with Nancy Sit as the lead actor. With the sets and the cameras ready, someone decided on a whim that they wanted to have a dance routine, and asked me to choreograph one on the spot. Yet the “dancers” were extras who had no training in dance. It was bemusing to me how dance was only seen as décor or backdrop in the TV industry. I insisted I could do the choreography, but they must use the dancers I picked. On another film shoot, the director asked me to choreograph a Korean dance routine. As for the necessary Korean costumes, he said if they were not available in the wardrobe department, I should just pick something. I was infuriated. I said to the director that in that case, we could do some random choreography rather than Korean dance. The director could not understand my insistence. As my work was not valued, I did not always get to work with talents who met my expectations. For instance, I only had modern dance dancers for Chinese dance routines. As I watched them dance, I could only lament how awkward it was. Yet people are always more adaptable than they imagine. Although the conditions for dance were not ideal in the film and TV industries, I adapted to them over time, as I learnt to be flexible and quick-witted. There were always unexpected challenges,



Plate 10: The house programme of the Fukien Athletic Club performing arts team's performance at the Xiamen Theatre in Xiamen City in February 1981. The exact performance date is unknown. From Lau So-kam's personal collection.



Plate 11: Yang Yang. "jiajie ying xianqin yiyuan bo youqing" ("Welcoming our fellow countrymen on festive occasion Fostering friendship through art") in *Xiamen Daily*, 11 February 1981. The article introduces an adaptation of classical dance by Lau So-kam, and modern dance works by Helen Lai and Willy Tsao. Photo courtesy of Lau So-kam. From Lau So-kam's personal collection.

like when there was no time for preparation, or when I saw there were stairs on the stage after I had created the choreography, or when I had to take care of the costumes and props as well. Those were difficult and vexing moments, but they helped me to develop from being just a dancer to becoming a producer of dance performances.

While TV became vastly popular in the 1970s and presented a way for the public to watch dance performance from home (Plate 14), I believe that the dance segments of TV programmes did little to foster the development of dance in Hong Kong, mainly because dance only played a supporting role in the TV industry. I remember working on a programme where we had to include a dance routine, but the lead performer could not dance at all. The other dancers were fairly skilled, so I created the choreography around them. Later the director said to me that the lead performer should be the focus, and the dance was only supposed to be a gimmick. Whatever I did with the choreography, it had to centre on the lead performer. For the dance segment of *Miss Asia Pageant* in 1988, the director specified that the choreography should spotlight a particular contestant. The other contestants complained about it to me, but I had to comply with the director's order. For



Plate 12: Lau So-kam (centre) on the day she signed her contract with RTV in 1975. Photo courtesy of Lau So-kam.

Plate 13: Lau So-kam (third right in the front row) and Helen Lai (fourth right in the front row). Lau So-kam with her RTV colleagues. Year unknown. Photo courtesy of Lau So-kam.



music programmes featuring performances by singers, we needed to have a few back-up dancers for the singers. The dancers learnt the choreography quickly, and forgot about it once the show was over. There was little time for dancers to rehearse and refine their techniques. In the early years of the dance department at RTV, dancers like Mary Hon and Ho Hau-ye were the more professional ones since they had studied dance from a young age.

The biggest takeaway of my RTV job was that it introduced me to the teachers of Fung Kai Secondary School, when they took part in a dance competition organised by RTV. They invited me to teach dance at their school, and I have been doing that ever since.

Deep bonds and affection in the community

Since 1974, I have served as a judge for the Hong Kong Schools Dance Festival.¹⁰ It has given me an in-depth understanding of dance development in the Hong Kong community. By watching the performances of the participating teams, I see not only the students' dance techniques, but also the teachers' flair for artistic creation and choreography. I have been

closely connected with many open dance competitions of different scales in Hong Kong. In around 1974, when Ng Chu Lien-fan¹¹ and I both lived in Kwun Tong, she invited me to be Artistic Director of the Kwun Tong Arts Festival Dance Contest. I held the post for over 30 years, until I was succeeded by Sek Sing-chor. During the same period, I also worked as an instructor for the Kwun Tong Dance Troupe (Plate 15). In 1980, the North District Arts Advancement Association set up the North District Dance Troupe and invited me to be an instructor for the troupe.

10. 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]

11. Ng Chu Lien-fan is a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Chairman of the Hong Kong Commerce, Industry & Professional Associations Limited, and Honorary President of the Hong Kong Dance Federation.

The Kwun Tong District Dance Contest¹² held by the Kwun Tong District Culture & Recreation Promotion Association and the Hong Kong Schools Dance Festival held by the Education Department (now the Education Bureau) became exemplary community dance activities, and they have both enjoyed a long history with numerous participants over the years. In the light of the success of these two contests, the Home Affairs Bureau and Urban Council extended their support to other districts such as Shatin, Yuen Long and Kowloon City, where new district contests have sprung up and blossomed. The Kwun Tong District Dance Contest is the largest in scale; the number of participating teams has risen from over 20 to more than 700, and the number of participants has hit close to 20,000. As for the Schools Dance Festival, the number of participating schools has increased from over 200 to more than 700, which include a few thousand teams consisting of tens of thousands of participants. While quantity does not equate to quality, these figures indicate extensive public participation. The Schools Dance Festival is targeted at students, while the open contest is oriented around the community including students,

12. The Open Dance Contest. See the Kwun Tong District Culture & Recreation Promotion Association website: <http://www.ktrcpa.org/>. Accessed 28 August 2018.



Plate 14: The advertisement for RTV's dance programme. From Lau So-kam's personal collection.

Plate 15: The members of Kwun Tong Dance Troupe during a lesson at the dance studio at the Ngau Tau Kok Municipal Services Building. Some of them were later admitted into the first cohort of The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, such as Chan Tak-ming (first left). Year unknown. Photo courtesy of Lau So-kam.



adults and the elderly. In the past, there was no ballet category in the open contest. I advocated for the introduction of the ballet category, and invited ballet teachers in my network to mobilise their students to join the contest. The ballet category was almost scrapped at one point because of an insufficient number of participating teams; fortunately, it was retained in the end. Since then, the number of participants in the ballet category has grown exponentially.

Dance has been an inseparable part of my life since I was a teenager. As I mentioned, I thought my dance career would come to an end when I moved to Hong Kong. In reality though, I have never departed from dance here. By the time I arrived in Hong Kong, some pioneers like Lau Siu-ming, Ng Sai-fun and Cheng Wai-yung had endeavoured to promote dance development for close to two decades. The left-wing schools achieved excellent results in the Chinese dance competitions, while Pearl Chan¹³ also made great contributions to Western dance in the city. I joined the dance profession around the time when the community started to actively participate in dance, and many students took up learning dance. Some school principals have noted that students in the dance team tend

to be the most well behaved at school. I think that is the result of group training: The students learn not only how to dance, but also how to be congenial and helpful with one another. Dance has a lasting impact on them as individuals and on the community. I place the same expectations on my students: They should not seek to stand out in the group, but to make the group stand out.

Nowadays, the general view is that one must receive professional training at the institutional level in order to achieve a certain level of artistry. I think we should evaluate conservatoire-style dance training in two respects. Compared to the study of dance in the Mainland, Hong Kong people believe that one must enrol in The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and start with foundational training, and that a dancer should only perform on stage after they have learnt dance for five to six years and

13. Pearl Chan graduated from the London College of Dance and Drama in 1961. She then became a Fellow of Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing, and received a diploma from the Royal Academy of Dancing. She was responsible for introducing the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing National syllabus into Hong Kong. She is a founding member of the Hong Kong Ballet Group, Hong Kong Dance Federation and Hong Kong Dance Alliance. Since 2011, she has been an advisor to the Chinese Dancers Association. She is currently an Associate Professor in Dance of the People's Liberation Army Academy for Arts in China.

acquired excellent techniques. I am not opposed to conservatories, since their programme curricula are extremely helpful to dance teachers and beginners in Hong Kong. The teachers can teach their classes based on the programme syllabi. Back when I just started teaching dance in Hong Kong, some of my students had only learnt how to pose. When I asked them to practise the fundamentals of stage performance including hand gestures, the glance, body movements, steps and the rules of these techniques, they asked me what those fundamentals were about. On the other hand, conservatoire-trained students may have excellent techniques, but they have limited stage experience. A dancer's career is short-lived; one must keep up with both learning and performance in order to cultivate the experience and temperament that are essential for a dancer. Some dancers are highly skilled, but their performance lacks heart and feels mechanical. To my mind, a dancer who moves the audience with their passion is a better dancer, even if they are technically less competent. To be honest, I prefer amateur dancers to professional dancers. The amateurs have a positive learning attitude; they are attentive in class and pay close attention to my instructions, and they learn everything properly. On the contrary, conservatoire-trained students are rather slack at times.

To me, dance is an art. However, I place just as much value on the team spirit that one cultivates through dance. When I am teaching, I am particularly mindful about being impartial towards my students. I believe many people have the potential to become outstanding dancers, if they have the patience and a good memory. Even if one falls short on technique, one must stay determined and strive. I also pay attention to students who have strong initiative and a good memory; I invite them to teach other students in class and train them as “little teachers”. I think the most crucial thing is to keep students' passion for dance alive. As long as everything is well planned, I believe people from different generations could share the same stage, as we can transcend boundaries in dance. For the 60th anniversary of the People's Republic of China parade, I choreographed a piece featuring various participants ranging from 15-year-old girls to 70-something-year-old mothers and grandmothers. It was not some plaza dancing routine for middle-aged or older women either, but a work of artistic dance that required genuine technique. Some of my former classmates at *huaqiao daxue* (the Overseas Chinese University) have also moved to Hong Kong and joined some clansman organisations or groups. They have been organising dance teams for taking part in the

adult categories of dance competitions since the 1970s, and they insist on performing only completed works of artistic dance.

Before moving to Hong Kong, I never thought I could continue my dance career here. I left behind a lot of the music and dance materials I owned like Burmese dance and Indian dance routines, the works I created during my school years, and my dance shoes. My family was sending me money, so I did not have to worry about my livelihood. Yet I was ready to quit dance and go to work in a factory. As luck would have it, I joined the dance profession once I moved to Hong Kong, and I have not left it ever since. I have particularly deep bonds with the students at the Fukien Athletic Club and the Kwun Tong Dance Troupe. The girl students I had in the early years of teaching grew up into young women. While they were in dance classes, their boyfriends would wait for them at the troupe's studio. There were also troupe members who became married couples, like Chong Chan-po and Tam Yuk-fong, and Alan Yu and Becky Lau. Some female troupe members put their dance study on hold as they became mothers. Yet they had felt a deep love for dance as well as gaining a sense of belonging from it from a young age, and they returned to the dance

troupe once their children had grown up. I am grateful that my students have always stayed with me, and we are as close as family.

(Translated by Nicolette Wong)