

Producing a cross-cultural dance production for young people and promoting the globalization of Taiwanese folk songs for localized audiences

Su-Ling Chou

Director, Tso's Dance Association

Tsoying High School, Kaohsiung, Taiwan

email: dance@mail.tyhs.edu.tw

Ting-Yu Chen, Associate Professor of Dance

Shenandoah University, Winchester, Virginia, USA

email: tchen@su.edu

Erica Helm, Associate Professor

Dance Division Chair, Shenandoah University, Winchester, Virginia, USA

email: ehelm@su.edu

Abstract

In 2007, "Living Matter," a full evening dance concert of Ting-Yu Chen's choreography, produced by Tso's Dance Association, presented a suite of five "globalized" Taiwanese folk songs in both Kaohsiung and Taipei in Taiwan. These songs, representing Taiwanese local art, took on a new cultural identity reflected in the Euro-American musical tradition through the new arrangement and instrumentation by Shenandoah Conservatory musicians (U.S.A.). After this globalizing process, the Taiwanese songs, which are normally perceived as "lower class" when compared to Mandarin songs in the music industry, gained sophistication and significance. The dance production brought together a community of creative artists and reached out to a broader audience. Building upon the establishments of the first production, Tso's Dance Association will produce another dance concert in 2012, with Ting-Yu Chen as the artistic director.

The convener of this panel, Su-Ling Chou (director of Tso's), shares the cultural significance of the 2007 production and goals for 2012, aligning with Tso-Pai's mission to enrich the lives of the localized people through fine dance programs. The second panelist, Ting-Yu Chen (artistic director), discusses the cross-generation collaboration and cross-cultural artistic expression through music and dance that builds communities of artists, promotes collective artistic growth, and attracts a broader audience base. The third panelist, Erica Helm (coordinator for American cast members to be joined with the cast of Taiwanese dancers), provides insight on the educational value for Shenandoah dancers involved in this inter-cultural and interdisciplinary project. The panel also discusses the power to preserve and promote old Taiwanese folk songs as cultural treasures across generations and cultures through dance.

Keywords: dance, Taiwan, music, cross-cultural, collaboration

The seed of this project was planted in the home of Liong-Shan Hiah, a well-known Taiwanese singer and established radio show host in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Shenandoah University professor Ting-Yu Chen (Liong-Shan Hiah's daughter) and her colleague, Erica Helm, were guest teaching

and choreographing for Tsoying Senior High School at the invitation of Dance Program Director Su-Ling Chou. After dinner one night, Professor Chen's mother expressed her wish for Chen to produce a collection of Taiwanese songs to be sung by her father. His storytelling ability and rich life experiences, coupled with his beautiful vocal quality, would be captured through such a project. Discussions with Director Chou about this project provoked tantalizing questions: could this music be used to create a series of dances to express cross-generational and cross-cultural themes? How could such a project explore humanity, personal identity, and the conflicts and acceptance between cultural traditions and new influences? In 2007, the production "*Living Matter – the Culture of Exploration*" was realized and sponsored by Tso's Dance Association, an organization composed of Tsoying alumni. The second part of this performance featured *Longing*, a suite of five Taiwanese songs performed by Liong-Shan Hiah. The songs, *Recalling the Past*, *Evening Rain at the Harbor*, *When I Open My Heart*, *Willing*, and *An-Ping Reminiscence*, were completely "re-envisioned" through contemporary musical settings by Thomas Albert, Professor of Composition at Shenandoah Conservatory. Liong-Shan Hiah's expertise in the musicality of Taiwanese folk songs, as well as his sensitivity to their historical and socio-political context, greatly enhanced the artistic depth of the work. His expressive vocal performance, coupled with contemporary music and dance rooted in both Asian and Western aesthetics, produced a unique cross-cultural art form, a simple and purified "living matter." The overwhelming success of this project led to the creation, choreography, and production of a second suite of Taiwanese songs in 2012. The cross-generational and cross-cultural aspects of both of these projects made concert dance accessible on intellectual and emotional levels to an audience widely diverse in gender, education, socio-economics, and age. This paper offers an overview of the creative processes involved in these productions, as well as the authors' reflections on the artistic and cultural significance of the work, addressing both audience impact and the expansion of cultural sensitivity for the artists involved.

Origination of the Taiwanese songs

The Taiwanese songs of both the first and second suites were written in 1930s-1950s, a period that encompasses the Japanese colonization of Taiwan through the Taiwan Liberation by Kuomintang, led by General Chiang Kai-Shek. The dominating themes of these songs are pursuits and defeats of love and life aspirations. The often-implied, socio-political discontent that runs as an undertone through these songs led to them being forbidden during the Japanese colonization and the liberation.

Liong-Shan Hiah played a key role in selecting the suite of songs for each suite. His musical sensibility and knowledge of the historical background of the songs and song-writers were invaluable to the creative process. Chen commented:

On a personal note, having a cross-generational working relationship with my father, and listening to his voice throughout the creative process, was a special gift. The stories my father told me about the lives of the lyricists and how the songs came about added to my choreographic imagination.

Normally perceived as "lower class" compared to songs sung in the Mandarin language, the Taiwanese songs would take on a new cultural identity as reflected in the arrangement and

instrumentation by Shenandoah Conservatory musicians. The fusion of Euro-American musical traditions with Taiwanese folk music traditions took the songs to a new level of sophistication and significance that appealed to a broader, more global audience than just the localized Taiwanese audiences that embraced their original form.

Creative process: Music-making and recording

The music-making process for each suite of songs was very similar, from the initial conception and dialogues between composer and choreographer, through the actual orchestration, rehearsal, recording, and mixing processes. In Fall 2006, Shenandoah Conservatory faculty composer Thomas Albert was selected as the music director and mentor for the initial project, *Longing*. The nature of the cross-cultural music-making, the selected songs, and possible instrumentation were discussed with choreographer Ting-Yu Chen. Albert pointed out that while the lyrics were clearly Taiwanese, the musical language of both the original songs and his arrangements were strongly rooted in Western traditions. Zhang Xuan Wen (1998), Professor of Music Education at the National Taichung Teachers College (Taiwan), had noted in his article, *Past, Present and Future of Taiwan Minnan Song Writing and Composition*:

Taiwan Minnan songs ... were created after Western music was introduced to Taiwan. Based on the research record, the Presbyterian Church established ... schools in the 2nd year of the Qing Dynasty. These schools adopted the policy of unifying religion and education, which relied critically on music education, sowing the seeds of Western music in Taiwan before Japanese Colonization. (p. 7)

Albert also observed that most of the existing Taiwanese recordings tended to be overproduced. He took the opposite approach, making the music more intimate, with no more than five instruments, so that the vocalist was accentuated. The ensemble of musicians involved in the 2007 recording were flutist Frances Averitt, guitarist Glenn Caluda, cellist Camilo Perez-Mejia, and percussionist Mark Russell.



Image 1. Music Ensemble for *Longing*. Cathy Kuehner, photographer. Winchester, Virginia, 2007.

The second suite of songs, composed in 2011, was performed by clarinetist Garrick Zoeter, guitarist Glenn Caluda, double-bassist Donovan Stokes, pianist Hsin-Yi Chen, and percussionist Earl Yowell. The larger ensemble allowed for even greater musical texture and sound interplay in the arrangements.



Image 2. Music Ensemble for *Chien-Lien, Lien-Chien*. Cathy Kuehner and Lisa Marie Mazzucco, photographers. Winchester, Virginia, 2011.

After the instrumentation was scored for each suite, the team of collaborators was confirmed, and recording and final mixing sessions were scheduled. Faculty recording engineer Golder O'Neill observed:

After hearing the rough versions of the songs, I was excited about the instrumentation and the arrangements that were selected and also the interpretation of Taiwanese music. I wanted to make sure that we captured the feel and emotion of each song and the interpretation of what Albert and the musicians had to offer. Albert used all acoustic instruments (no amplified or electric) for the arrangements, and that left me thinking about how to record them ... to get a good performance especially with this type of recording session.

Liong-Shan Hiah flew in from Kaohsiung to Winchester, Virginia, thrilled to collaborate with the first-class musicians assembled for each project. His daughter, Professor Chen, translated technical procedures during the recording sessions for both English and Taiwanese speaking parties, witnessing the electrifying cross-cultural phenomenon first-hand. When it came to the heart and soul of music-making, art transcended linguistic barriers and creativity flowed effortlessly among all. Percussionist Earl Yowell, engaged as a performer for the second suite of songs, shared that Albert's skillful arrangements were

A most interesting blend of East and West. Hearing Ting-Yu's father sing songs that he has sung so many times before was a thrill. Our main job was to accompany him and not get in his way ... we ended up with a wonderful recording and archive of these songs for future generations.

Albert's Euro-American music arrangements captured Taiwanese cultural sentiments with respect, elegance, and delightful surprises, serving as inspiration for Chen's choreographic imagination, which would soon transform the music into a kinetically dynamic, emotionally illuminating language of dance.

Choreography and production – *Longing* (2007)

In 2007, the choreographic process of creating the first suite of five songs, *Longing*, took place in Kaohsiung, Taiwan.¹ Working with a cast of skilled professional dancers who fully understood the lyrics, as well as the cultural background and subcultural implications of each song, contributed to a process that Chen described as “effortless.” Knowing that her Taiwanese audience would also have knowledge of the songs, her choreographic impulse took on a postmodern, abstract, compositional aesthetic. Chen deliberately chose not to follow the lyrics; instead, she extracted the main themes of the songs and focused on the textures of the music. The cast of five native Taiwanese dancers included two Shenandoah alumni, Yen-Wen Kuo and Ya-Ting Yang, Hsiao-Jou Tang (a graduate of State University of New York at Purchase), and three alumni of Taipei National University of the Arts: Ya-Ting Chang, Chien-Chih Chang, and Bao-Chen Tsai.



Image 3. The cast of *Longing*. Flying Lions Dance Company. Ting-Yu Chen, choreographer. Ren-Hau Liu, photographer. Kaohsiung, Taiwan, 2007.

¹ The first suite (five songs) includes *Recalling the Past* (Folk Song); *Evening Rain at the Harbor*, by Shan-Lung Yang; *When I Open My Heart*, by Chen-Shen Liu; *Willing*, by Ching-So Liu; and *An-Ping Reminiscence*, by Shi Shu.

Each member of the cast had international performance experience and graduated from a professional conservatory training institution. Each moved in their own unique way, offering distinct performance qualities that evolved from the differences in their technical training systems. Chen quickly established strategies to harmonize each dancer's individualism, yet showcased their uniqueness in the creative process. She led the dancers to explore the depth of their authentic bodies through trust and sharing, guiding the dancers to hear the music beyond the melodic line, and identify the texture of each instrument. As the director of the Tso's Dance Association, Su-Ling Chou commented:

What I found interesting was that the dancers had different connections to the music due to their age differences, and that affected how they chose to interpret the music in their performance expressions. Chen's choreography skillfully connected their differences to create a dynamic and complex whole.

Owing to the widespread popularity of Liong-Shan Hiah in Kaohsiung and his senior status in broadcast media, as well as the diligent marketing of Chou and the Tso's Dance Association, the premiere production of *Longing* was greatly publicized in major Taiwanese newspapers and global TV news. Four performances, including two at Tsoying Performance Theater in Kaohsiung and two at the Crown Theater in Taipei, were received with great enthusiasm, and a favorable review in the Taiwanese *Performing Arts Magazine* was published that fall. Chen commented:

Longing ... premiered during the celebration of the 20th anniversary of Taiwan Liberation. Using forbidden songs to "liberate" my artistic vision took on another layer of significance. An unexpected phenomenon that I observed was that audiences over the age of 30 commonly reported [that] they were moved to tears, especially those of my father's generation who grew up hearing those folk songs in an era of socio-political repression.

Audiences enjoyed the beauty and sophistication of Albert's new arrangements of the Taiwanese folk songs while witnessing the choreography unfolding by the expressive dancers, an artistic accomplishment that transcended the boundaries of culture, space, and time.

Choreography and production – *Chien-Lien, Lien-Chien* (2012)

Following the 2007 success of the *Living Matter* dance production, which featured Chen's five song suite, *Longing*, Tso's Dance Association invited Chen to develop a new, evening-length project in the same spirit, once again engaging the creative team of composer Thomas Albert and singer Liong-Shan Hiah. This new work, *Chien-Lien, Lien-Chien*, was slated for a summer 2012 premiere in Taiwan. Twelve Taiwanese songs were selected.² This new suite, more ambitious in

² The second suite (12 songs) includes *An Adorable Flower*, by Jin-Huai Wu; *Faint Heart Flower*, by Jin-Huai Wu; *Half Moon*, by Jin-Huai Wu; *Sea Bird*, by Mu-Yang Chen; *Bride's Sad Song*, by Takashi Kikutarou; *Recalling Life* (folk song); *Nostalgic Young Man*, by Jin-Huai Wu; *City of Sadness*, by Saeki Takao; *Where Is Spring*, by Yu-Shian Deng; *Flower in the Rainy Night*, by Yu-Shian Deng; *L'Amour*, by Jin-Huai Wu; *Last Train Out of Taipei*, by Chun-Lin Yeh.

length and scope, included some older and lesser-known songs, and took on a more narrative and theatrical storytelling approach. In addition, under the artistic leadership of Chen, three members of the cast, Ya-Ting Chang, Chien-Ji Chang, and Li-Chuan Lin, would also serve as co-choreographers on the project, each contributing at least one song in the suite. The significance of involving younger choreographers in this project was to encourage new, creative forces to become engaged with the forgotten cultural treasure of Taiwanese folk songs. By studying the historical and biographical backgrounds of the songs and lyricists, these young choreographers would ideally gain deeper insight into the richness of their own Taiwanese history, reflecting on the sadness, helplessness, and despair of the Taiwanese people during this particular socio-political time.

In preparation for the extended length of the *Chien-Lien, Lien-Chien* project, choreographer Ting-Yu Chen selected 14 American dancers at Shenandoah University on which to create a shorter, preview work, *Lost Edge*, in the Spring of 2012. Using just five of the planned songs, Chen took a more literal approach to the music and lyrics, creating a script and a cast of characters for the dance. Although the lyrics inspired the script, they did not exclusively dictate the full development of the story and the characters. Working in collaboration with Jonathan Flom, Professor of Musical Theatre at Shenandoah Conservatory, Chen interwove the stories and lyrics to create dramatic surprises. The dance was choreographed in a similar approach to ballet, where characters move the plot along through movement and acting in order to highlight the stories.

During the choreographic process, while communicating a script full of underlying cultural and historical subtexts to an all-American cast, Chen experienced a creative and personal sense of awakening. The script was created based on her personal observations of growing up in Taiwan, yet the work would undoubtedly become enriched by the personality traits and personal experiences of her cast members. The dance exposed difficult issues of unspoken (yet socially acceptable) alcoholism and domestic violence in the male-dominated Taiwanese society of the 1970s and '80s. The cross-generational and cross-cultural artistic exploration that occurred during the rehearsals was, at times, uncomfortable for Chen and her dancers, because the work represented real-life situations and exposed universal truths of the human condition.



Image 4. The cast of *Lost Edge*. Shenandoah Dance Ensemble. Ting-Yu Chen, choreographer. Tony Miller, photographer. Winchester, Virginia, 2012.

For the March 2012 premiere of *Lost Edge* at Shenandoah Conservatory, Chen intentionally left out the translations in the program to engage the audience on a universal humanistic level, free of cultural barriers. Knowing that her American audiences would not be able to understand the Taiwanese lyrics, instead relying on the integrity and honesty behind the dancers' movements and actions, made it even more critical for Chen to fully engage her cast in the multi-leveled understandings of this work. After only 10 weeks of work together, Chen's American cast successfully delivered the poignant stories of *Lost Edge*, sung in Taiwanese words and completely capturing a humanistic relevance that engaged viewers on intellectual and emotional levels. Joan Walker, who attended the premiere performance, echoed the feedback of many audience members when she commented:

This whole evening of dance was extraordinary! The dances were heavily influenced by Ting-Yu's heritage, the music was Taiwanese, the choreography was brilliant ... all told, it was fantastic! The dancers were gifted, and the stories they "told" through their dancing were wonderful. The program far exceeded my expectations!

For both the 2007 Taiwanese cast of *Longing* and the 2012 American cast of *Lost Edge*, the common theme was the universal humanity that underlies the stories being expressed in each song's lyrics. Chen commented:

While only my Taiwanese cast had direct knowledge of the cultural specifics spoken of in the lyrics, both casts were able to deliver the stories organically and artistically. I witnessed American audiences responding to *Lost Edge* despite the lack of direct English translation of the lyrics, and all of the associated cultural

knowledge behind the songs. I am interested to discover what will happen this summer with a cast of both American and Taiwanese dancers.

The successful embodiment of cultural nuances and the communication of a story that has relevance across historical and socio-political periods in two distinctly different countries lies at the heart of the successful *Lost Edge*. During the month of July, this work will be expanded into an evening-length work, *Chien-Lien, Lien-Chien*, to be premiered in Taiwan in August 2012.

Reflections and relevance: The musicians

From the initial success of *Longing* in 2007 to the American premiere of *Lost Edge* in 2012, and in anticipation of the 2012 premiere of *Chien-Lien, Lien-Chien*, the impact of this extended work by choreographer Chen and her colleagues has been far reaching. The cross-cultural collaborative aspects of the music-making processes alone were deeply felt by all of the musicians who have been involved in the recordings. Composer Thomas Albert stated:

It was a fascinating experience (twice) to work on songs for which I had only a general idea of meaning. It was a joy to work with Ting-Yu's father on both of our projects, and it always delighted me that we seemed to understand, without a common language, each other's sense of the music. I'm reminded of a comment Richard Rodgers made when he was working on *On Your Toes* in the 1930's. The show was choreographed by George Balanchine, the Russian ballet master. Rodgers commented that it didn't matter that he [Balanchine] spoke very little English, because "he spoke a lot of dance."

The strong emotional impact was intensified by the artistic contribution, transformation, and accomplishment for all people involved in the creative and producing processes.

Reflections and relevance: The Taiwanese dancers in *Longing*

Dance as an art form itself explores culture in many ways, spanning the gamut from tiny glimpses to deep investigation, and ranging from an insistence on absolute authenticity to the creation of complex works that interweave technical, stylistic, and theatrical elements from multiple sources. At its most superficial, the addition of costume details or the use of songs in a foreign language can create an air of "exoticism," hinting at culture the way that spice adds the fragrance of foreign lands to an otherwise simple dish. Unfortunately, many young dancers never move beyond this initial level of exploration, satisfying their interests (and their audiences) with only a "taste" of another culture.

The Taiwanese dancers who were involved in the creation of *Longing* (2007) were presented with songs from their cultural and historical past that they may have heard in their youth, and yet it was their parents' or grandparents' generation to whom the music would speak most directly in terms of personal experience. To find the underlying truths about human experience that would bridge the years between generations was a critical element of the creative process. The dancers had to assume individual responsibility to discover where and how the works had personal relevance to their own experience.

To prepare herself for the project, dancer Ya-Ting Chang studied the songs and lyrics. As the rehearsal process progressed, she realized that the lyrics functioned as shadows in the background, almost as whispers. One did not need to know Taiwanese to understand the dance and its message. For example, the three dancers in *Evening Rain at the Harbor* each had a message to communicate. The first male dancer was pursuing a job ad, saying, “Boss, I’m looking for job; I will do anything!” Later, the second male dancer was having a conversation with his father in the distance, saying “Dad! I’m doing fine. You? You need to take care of yourself!” The female dancer, who appeared to have moved to a foreign country, was calling to comfort her parents in Taiwan, saying “Don’t worry, he (the boyfriend) treats me well.” Chen captured the essence of each dancer’s different life experiences in their movement, beautifully illustrating the loss and desire for belonging expressed in the lyrics.



Image 5. Ya-Ting Chang in *Recalling Life*. Flying Lions Dance Company. Ya-Ting Chang, choreographer. Tony Miller, photographer. Kaohsiung, Taiwan, 2012.

Reflections and relevance: The American dancers in *Lost Edge*

To perform a role with sensitivity requires an artistic depth that goes far beyond simply knowing the steps, sequences, and spatial design of the choreography. To fully communicate the choreographer’s message demands that a dancer understand the context of their material: what is the history that informs the story? What is the subtext behind the song lyrics? What are the social nuances of the relationships depicted? The importance of this became acutely clear for Shenandoah dancers working with Professor Chen on *Lost Edge* in 2012. Rather than treating the folk songs that inspired this work as abstract accompaniment for purely contemporary movement, Professor Chen’s project dug deeper, drawing characters and scenarios from the fabric of Taiwanese culture, which then had to be communicated to, and fully understood by, the cast of American dancers. The story of an arranged marriage, *Lost Edge* explores the conflicts of family and friends torn between following their hearts and accepting the plans outlined for them

by society and circumstance. These cultural differences, at first foreign to the American dancers, eventually found resonance as the age-old themes of love and betrayal, jealousy and despair, obligation and rebellion were viewed through new lenses and connected to the dancers' personal experiences with family and friends. Sophomore Kelley Reid commented:

Being in Ting-Yu's piece really opened my mind. Dance became more than just movement to me ... it became a story of life and the emotions you feel when you go through life.

The profound sadness of *Lost Edge* was more acutely felt, and more honestly danced, when the socio-political context underlying the songs, which express the heart's deepest longings in an era of dark repression, was understood.

Reflections and relevance: Looking ahead to *Chien-Lien, Lien-Chien*

Two dancers from the American cast of *Lost Edge* will travel with Chen to participate in the expansion of the work into the evening-length production, *Chien-Lien, Lien-Chien*. Certainly the Taiwanese dancers with whom they will work will have a different entry point into the material, including the advantage of language with which to appreciate the beauty and nuances of the folk songs themselves. What is particularly compelling about this "next step" is the reinvestigation of the material across generations and between cultures. To bring these songs and stories to the attention of American dancers and the young dancers of Taiwan (who are a generation removed – and possibly more emotionally distanced – from the historical context) has the power to inspire younger dancers to embrace their cultural heritage and access that wealth more courageously for their own creativity.

For the 2012 production of *Chien-Lien, Lien-Chien*, three young Taiwanese choreographers have been invited to create a section of the work with Chen; they must seek connections between the past and present to create personal relevance through the songs they will choreograph. For example, choreographer Chien-Ji Chang has chosen to interpret the sad song, *Flower in the Rainy Night*, by Yu-Shian Deng (composer) and Tien-Wong Chou (lyrist). Published in 1934, this song tells the story of an innocent young girl who leaves her small hometown to seek work in Taipei, and how she is taken advantage of and thus falls into prostitution. Under the Japanese colonization's male-dominated society, stories like this were tragically common. Lyrist Chou used metaphor to tell the story of how the flower, abused by the harsh wind and rain, had fallen and broken from the branch (her family and lover) and been stepped on. "Rain," "evening," and "flower" have been common themes in Taiwanese songs, both metaphorically and figuratively.



Image 6. Chien-Chih Chang in *Sea Bird*. Flying Lions Dance Company. Chien-Chih Chang, choreographer. Ren-Huar Liu, photographer. Kaohsiung, Taiwan, 2012.

Entering this project initially presented several obstacles to a young man who has mainly been listening to popular music sung in Mandarin and English. Taiwanese folksongs were not part of his daily life, and Chang could not find the connection between his movement and the songs. The Taiwanese songs sounded like a foreign language, and he was completely missing the content and meaning of the lyrics until his father guided him in understanding the cultural significance of the songs. For Chien-Chih Chang and his youthful generation, Taiwanese songs and soap operas were considered “low class.” In Chen’s rehearsal process, the dancers were guided in the development of contemporary movement through improvisation focusing on visual design and dynamic variation. This work has created interesting juxtapositions to the songs and broken through the “low class” expectation for many of the dancers. Chen utilized Taiwanese folk songs to awaken personal histories; as a result, dancer Chien-Chih Chang wrote beautiful movement poetry with his body. To him, movement is often abstract and does not carry much warmth. By allowing the music’s lyrics to move him, Chang hopes to bring new life to the dance he will choreograph with a rich physical and emotional language.

Reflections and relevance: The audiences

The premiere performances of *Longing* in 2007 were attended by many elderly audience members in Taiwan, including Ya-Ting Chang’s parents. When asked how they felt about the work, Chang’s mother, an out-going woman who enjoys singing and dancing, said, “I loved it. I was singing along while watching the dancers perform.” Chang’s father, an introvert, said, “I used to think that I [didn’t] understand modern dance. But I think I get it this time!” When elderly audiences have such a response, it is because the choreography engaged them in a symbolic communication enhanced by the essential messages in the songs and lyrics. The audiences for *Longing* found relevance to the messages in their lives; they resonated with the

dance, and the historical and socio-political undercurrents of the songs, which were known to have been repressed for so many years, moved many to tears. Without being dictated by the lyrics, the dance itself offered plenty of room for imagination and personal interpretation. It was as though the audiences were given drawing paper and a few old photos, and they took the inspiration of the photos and wrote their own stories. This method resolved the “I do not understand modern dance” myth for many in the general audience. Choreographer Chen commented:

Witnessing the Taiwanese audiences’ emotional response to the contemporary music and dance interpretation of these familiar tunes and sentiments was overwhelmingly encouraging. It will always be a highlight of my life recalling the moment when my father joined us on stage to take the final bow at the 2007 concert. It is gratifying to know that my creative team and I have contributed to the body of work in Taiwanese songs and dances for future generations.

Taiwan audiences were profoundly impacted by the performances of *Longing* in 2007, so much so, that there is great excitement and anticipation building for the premiere of *Chien-Lien, Lien-Chien* in August 2012. Audiences have appreciated the new artistic interpretations of their Taiwanese folksongs, which also (it is hoped) have reawakened distant cultural memories in the youth population in Taiwan. These productions invite the older generations to treasure their personal histories, and the new generations to take this cultural heritage into the future.

Reflections and relevance: The university dance community

The impact of projects like *Longing* and *Lost Edge* has been profoundly felt by the many artists who have shared in Chen’s creative processes, as well as the diverse audiences who have experienced the productions. Placing this incredibly rich creative work within the context of Shenandoah University’s efforts to promote a globalized education serves to illuminate the long-term impact of the cross-cultural and international experiences being facilitated by Chen and her colleagues at Shenandoah University.

Shenandoah Conservatory, located in Winchester, VA, has graduated 153 dance majors since 1983. A school of Shenandoah University, the Conservatory has 495 undergraduate students (22% of the University’s undergraduate population), of which 42 are dance majors. Only 163 of the University’s 4,000 undergraduate and graduate students are from outside the United States, representing 40 different countries (Fall 2012 October 1 Census Snapshot). The mission of the University states, “Shenandoah University educates and inspires individuals to be critical, reflective thinkers; lifelong learners; and ethical, compassionate citizens who are committed to making responsible contributions within a community, a nation and the world” (<http://www.su.edu/about-shenandoah-university/>). With a substantial number of first-generation college students (many of whom have little, if any, international experience), the institution is particularly concerned with supporting their first steps toward intercultural competence.

Citing research by Pusch, Gudykunst, and others, and building upon educational models by Kirrane and Freeman, Dr. R.T. Good, Associate Dean of the Harry F. Byrd, Jr. School of

Business, has articulated Shenandoah’s intentionally designed short and intermediate term study abroad programming (2010). Striving to “dismantle barriers that inhibit participation rates in traditional study abroad opportunities,” Shenandoah’s tiered approach meets students at a variety of experiential levels, introducing the excitement of international learning while supporting them through logistical challenges and allaying their fear of the unknown (p. 49).

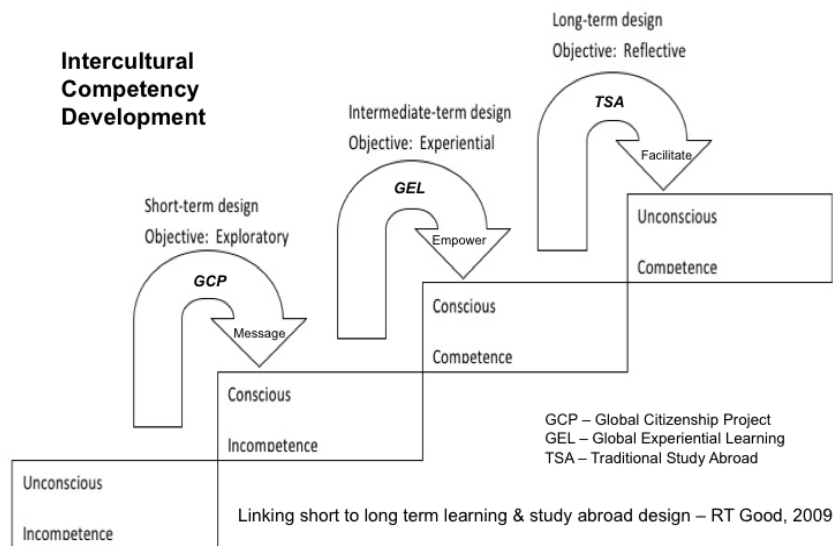


Figure 1. Linking short to long-term learning and study abroad design – R.T. Good, 2009.

Three education-enriching initiatives are now in place to encourage students toward a deeper understanding of, and greater sensitivity toward, the world in which they will live and work. In 2009, the University launched a First Year Seminar (FYS) program to engage incoming freshmen in globally-focused study. Childhood Across Culture, Violence Against Women, and Media Trends Around the World are only a few of the 20+ courses offered on campus each fall. The next “level of immersion” is Shenandoah’s Global Citizenship Program (GCP), which sends 60-70 members of the University community on a free interdisciplinary experience each March. The educational component of GCP spans the majority of the academic year, and 489 travelers have visited 40 different countries since 2004. Dance Division alumna Rebekah Nickerson (B.F.A. in Dance, 2009) moved to Costa Rica after graduation, a step she never would have considered had it not been for her GCP experience in Ghana:

GCP taught me that just because a country is at a different economic level, it doesn't always mean that the people are suffering and going without. Living in Costa Rica [and] not speaking the language taught me to rely on observations and to listen to my intuitions ... a skill set so important in teaching. Costa Rica ... forced me to breathe, go with the flow. That has really helped me in the dance world where you have to be flexible and willing to make the best of whatever opportunities you are given.

Discipline-specific in nature, Global Experiential Learning (GEL) trips are two to three week immersion experiences that wed professional practice with cultural study under the guidance of

Shenandoah faculty and hosts in the country being visited. To date, GEL trips have been used to enrich the training of health care practitioners in underserved populations, to expand knowledge of international business models, and to bring arts students in contact with international opportunities for study and performance. These three major initiatives (FYS, GCP, and GEL) “bridge the experience gap” for Shenandoah students, building their confidence to engage in more traditional study abroad programs.

Dancing across the oceans

The Shenandoah Conservatory Dance Division’s commitment to facilitate international opportunities for students began in 1998. Since that time, the Dance Division has offered 10 tours to Spain, Russia, Ireland, Macedonia, Greece, England, Scotland, and Taiwan. About 55 dancers have participated in one or more trips, the majority of which were organized through the Global Experiential Learning (GEL) program. Each group has returned from their travels with a new appreciation for difference and greater confidence in their ability to negotiate unfamiliar territory. Joshua Chambers (B.F.A., Dance Education, 2007), who participated in the 2005 trip to Taiwan, shared:

The individuals we came into contact with over that period were so selfless and concerned about our welfare that it was moving. In my opinion, [the Taiwanese] culture should be idolized for its emphasis on morals, family values, and giving. Above all, to dance beside these amazing athletes and artists is humbling. I have never met such respectable, hardworking people.

The challenges Shenandoah dancers have encountered in their travels abroad have provided moments of great amusement and great amazement, but there have also been stories of challenge and compassion. Chelsea Massey (B.F.A., Dance Education, 2011) was engaged by Hope Shines to teach dance in several orphanages in Rwanda during the summer immediately following her graduation. She shared:

One of the days of the camp ... a little girl named Rachel curled up in my lap ... sleepy. I went to rest my chin on her little head, but noticed several white spots on her scalp. For a moment I hesitated and then thought to myself, “this little girl needs a hug and what’s the worst that could happen? Get ringworm? It’s curable ... a little white patch can’t stop me from loving her.” Later that evening, I asked the physician, [who] explained that it was a fungus that grows on the children because they don’t get proper showers every day. The important thing I gained from this moment with Rachel was that sometimes no matter how you feel, as an educator, mentor, volunteer, etc., you have to see the bigger picture ... a child needed a hug and I was lucky enough to be that person.

Chelsea’s international experiences, including two GEL trips to Spain and Macedonia, have targeted her commitment to dance education in a global context, preparing her to make a difference in challenging circumstances.

Creativity stimulated and compassion awakened, Shenandoah’s dancers have learned valuable

lessons, focused their career goals, and deepened their perspectives as artists and citizens. As they move into the profession as performers and dance educators, these dancers remain committed to the belief that international experience can transform the lives of their own students. Julie Pentz (B.F.A., Dance Education, 2000), now the Dance Director at Kansas State University, traveled as an alumna to Taiwan in 2005, and brought three KSU students with her the next year on a GEL trip to Spain. Julie has taken her own students to Ghana to nurture an interest in West African dance, and she is cultivating an exchange program with the University of Ghana for students at both institutions. She comments:

My students at the university always inspire me to create new things, but when I travel abroad, that inspiration is taken to a whole new level. For example, teaching tap dance in Taiwan. Those students didn't have access to tap shoes but they stomped their feet for two weeks in my tap class and they absorbed every last bit of tap dance that I could offer them. My travels to Ghana have changed me most ... there is so much more for me to learn ... working in Africa inspires me to dance and to become a better choreographer.



Image 7. Julie Pentz teaching a tap lesson in Africa. Neil Dunn, photographer. Medie, Ghana, 2010.

Final comments

Shenandoah University is an institution that believes firmly in the potential of a globalized education. Within the Conservatory, the Dance Division actively seeks opportunities to bring young artists in direct contact with the transformative experiences of cultural immersion, whether that is in the classroom, on the stage, or in study and travel abroad. When these three elements come together, as they have in Ting-Yu Chen's *Lost Edge* project, we are indeed blessed. This experience will create ripples throughout the lives of the dancers who work with

her, expanding into the future to inform their creative work, teaching, and daily lives. If they meet new challenges with excitement, encounter new individuals with compassion, and look to their futures with optimistic confidence that they can create meaningful dance in a wider variety of settings, then the authors believe that they have succeeded in transforming their lives through the power of global experience.



Image 8. Chelsea Massey at work with Hope Shines. April Riegler, photographer. Gikondo, Rwanda, 2011.

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Ting-Yu Chen is Artistic Director of Flying Lions Dance Company (<http://flyinglionsdance.com>) and Associate Professor of Dance at Shenandoah University. She has presented choreography, and has performed and taught in Argentina, Canada, China, Greece, Ireland, Spain, the Netherlands, Macedonia, Russia, Taiwan, and throughout the United States. Chen's creative works have been commissioned by Gretna Music Festival in Pennsylvania, InterTOURdansa Associacio in Spain, Tso's Dance Association in Taiwan, and the Taiwanese American Association in St. Louis, Missouri. Chen has served as a board member of the American College Dance Festival Association and is a member of World Dance Alliance - Asia Pacific.

Su-Ling Chou is founder and director of the Dance Division at Tsoying High School, chief secretary of Tso's Dance Association (TDA), and the Taiwan Chapter Head of World Dance Alliance - Asia Pacific. In 2008, TDA's multimedia production, *Chess*, was awarded five stars by The British Theatre Guide at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival on behalf of Taiwan. Su-Ling

served as executive director of rehearsal and production for the 2009 World Games and was awarded the Kaohsiung Culture and Arts Prize for her achievements. Su-Ling has been director of the annual International Young Choreographers Project since 2005.

Erica Helm is the Dance Division Chair at Shenandoah University, where she has been on faculty since 1989. Her choreography has been presented in Trinidad, Russia, Ireland, Spain, Macedonia, Greece, Taiwan, and China. She has been a guest teacher for national and international dance programs, including Tsoying Performing Arts High School in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, and Harvard University in Boston, Massachusetts. Helm served on the Board of the American College Dance Festival Association, and, as a fine arts consultant for the Virginia Department of Education, has chaired the writing and review teams for the Virginia Standards of Learning in Dance.

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