

香港舞蹈概述

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香港舞蹈概述2017

Hong Kong Dance Overview 2017

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After the Festival— Insights for Hong Kong's Dance Sector from the 1st City Contemporary Dance Festival (CCDF)

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‘Yet, being at these international arts festivals always left me with the impression that most of the groups came and went, their sojourn brief. As if a shop owner has put up a new show window. People browsed, took a picture with the owner, and left. You won’t get to know the artists better.’
(Suzuki Tadashi, 2011)¹

Introduction

In his 1999 publication, British scholar John Tomlinson described the relationship between globalisation and culture as, ‘Globalisation lies at the heart of modern culture; cultural practices lie at the heart of globalisation.’² As a matter of fact, globalisation has developed out of local culture where globalisation begins only for the seepage of its immense influence. Prominent and much-discussed examples are McDonaldisation and Starbuckisation, among others. Subsequently, due to commercialisation, capitalism and cultural specificity, globalisation fuses with local culture and engenders ‘glocalisation’.³ ‘In the marketing context, glocalisation means the creation of products or services for the global market by adapting them to local cultures.’⁴ There is a shift to emphasise the heterogeneity in homogeneity, and to innovate out of hybridity. While the impact of globalisation has lasted in many parts of the world, glocalisation is gradually taking over as the new trend

of contemporary culture, drawing considerable attention. Apart from the international, large-scale integrated art festivals (Hong Kong example being the Hong Kong Arts Festival), there is a rising trend is for festivals to underline their heterogeneity by focusing on the promotion of local artists and their works, which are inevitably being graded and compared with those taking place in nearby countries and cities. Comparison and competition are not necessarily negative. It would be beneficial if we learn and put one to the test through exchanges, from which practitioners discover space for multi-dimensional thinking and innovation and development opportunities.

Before writing this essay, I have interviewed three important stakeholders of CCDF: Raymond Wong, Managing Director of City Contemporary Dance Company (CCDC), Karen Cheung, then Programme Director of CCDF, and Kevin Wong, Director of CCDC Dance Centre. I have also interviewed, by random selection, Practitioners 'A' and 'B' who respectively did and did not participate in CCDF (referred to as Practitioner 'A' and 'B' as they declined to disclose their identities). The interviews were conducted to acquire perspectives for in-depth interrogation and analysis.

Between 'Concept' and 'Choice'

CCDC presented the 1st CCDF in November 2017, a contemporary dance festival that aims to establish and provide the Hong Kong dance sector with a platform for international exchange. Artists, curators, dance critics, researchers from all over the world would get in touch,

learn and understand more about Hong Kong’s dance and the scene, and Asian contemporary dance. The description of CCDF on the Home Affairs Bureau website goes, ‘City Contemporary Dance Festival 2017 is an initiative by City Contemporary Dance Company building upon the experience of co-presenting the Guangdong Dance Festival over the past decade. The Festival is a platform showcasing quality dance pieces to Hong Kong audiences as well as to introducing top-notch dance artists from Hong Kong and Asia to presenters of international theatre and festivals. The Festival is made up of three main components: “Dance X” brings cutting-edge contemporary dances from Hong Kong and Mainland China to the international stage, “East Asia Dance Platform” and “Asian Contemporary Dance Company Touring Network” present productions by Korean and Japanese professional dance companies in Hong Kong. Through a series of cultural and artistic exchanges, the Festival enhances Hong Kong’s position as Asia’s cultural hub.’⁵ Three keywords can be found in the above CCDF statement: ‘local’, ‘Asia’, and ‘international’. They position CCDF’s objective as ‘strengthening Hong Kong’ by covering the global and the local. It is, therefore, reasonable to attribute the definition of ‘glocalisation’ to CCDF.

To a certain extent, CCDF is an expansion of what CCDC has been doing in Hong Kong for many years—to ‘promote’ Hong Kong’s dance works and the sector. Since 1985, Willy Tsao, founder of CCDC (hereafter referred to as Tsao), has been hosting contemporary dance classes and its promotion on the invitation of the organisations from Mainland China. Consequently, CCDC has made plans for the ‘China Dance Development’

project since the mid-90s of the 20th Century.⁶ One of the aims of the project was ‘to promote international dance exchange and help to build a new, international, modern cultural image for Mainland China and Hong Kong’. One therefore reads CCDF as the extension of CCDC’s role as the ‘promoter’, or, an alternative extension of China Dance Development. The international dance exchange platform built-in Mainland China in the past is thus introduced to Hong Kong through CCDF.

As aforementioned, the launch of CCDF and the responses from the interviews with its three important stakeholders show one thing in common, namely Founder Tsao has wanted to introduce to Hong Kong certain activities and formats of the Mainland’s dance festivals. Karen Cheung and Raymond Wong explained in detail.

Karen Cheung said, ‘CCDF did not come out of the blue in 2017. It is backed up by over a decade’s reflection. Why do we need a platform-style festival? We have to go back to CCDC’s China Dance Development in the Mainland.’ Raymond Wong was more direct with his explanation, ‘The origin of CCDF is closely related to Guangdong Modern Dance Festival, an important activity during the planning stage of China Dance Development. Back then we did not think much (about exchange). We had only wanted a platform to promote China’s modern dance, an intensive festival. It was not on our mind to bring this (exchange) over. Mr. Tsao had been very kind to introduce it, to leverage on Guangdong Modern Dance Company as a platform. The initial idea was simply to bring some (Hong Kong) companies there to promote modern dance and

attract audiences. Over time we found that Hong Kong has benefited from exchanges of this nature, after the locals had learned about Hong Kong and her dance companies. CCDF truthfully follows the 2015 Guangzhou experience (on the one hand it was an exchange, on the other an invitation to foreigners to watch and experience the programmes so they were kept abreast of local development). Hong Kong followed suit.'

The increasing number of annual dance festivals and exchange platforms all over the world has to do with technological advancement. The Internet allows one to unlatch geographical frameworks, copy the dance festival format from one another and turn it into a globalised product. Following that, considering the cultural characteristics and differences across geographies and the need for audience development, the turn from homogeneity to heterogeneity sparks personality and style in festivals in different places. This explains why localised dance festivals are in the trend. By introducing a dance exchange platform, CCDC has undoubtedly built bridges for Hong Kong dance. Arguably, when a 'mature' opportunity for horizontal expansion comes along after many years of similar operation, rather than one for vertical exploration, will CCDF limit itself to be the 'power-up duplicate' of CCDC, the promoter of dance, and of Guangdong Modern Dance Festival? Do there exist operation approaches that go deeper: to draw the interest of not only the dance sector but also the public who concerns the relationship between contemporary dance and society?

A Platform? An Opportunity? Or an Obstacle?

As CCDC and Tsao have been behind the planning of CCDF and Guangdong Modern Dance Festival and the stress of both falls on being a 'dance platform', their formal and stylistic similarities are understandable. Nevertheless, should the organiser and artistic director consider how the culture, social practice and people's habits have been formed in Hong Kong and the Mainland? Dance artists nurtured in distinct historical and cultural soil have different airs and uniqueness. Even for dancers who have been trained under the same professional curriculum, due to the variation of local culture and context, it is natural for the creative concepts, dancers' bodies and movements, performance format and styles to come across with different textures. When globalised dance festivals are implemented in different cultural soil, will they materialise what the planners have hoped for: an opportunity to help the local sector's development?

Let us make an analogy to a farmer who buries the seeds in the soil. He waters and fertilises them, grows them with his heart. Years go by and the plants are growing well. They even bear fruits. They look nice indeed. Then the farmer walks to the other side of the mountain. He sees some trees growing strongly on a field, but they do not bear fruits like those in his field. He thinks, 'Maybe I should stem-graft these with my fruit-bearing ones so they would bear nice fruits as well.' He goes back to his field. While he is about to cut a few stems, he pauses to think, 'Why not just stick them in the soil. The soil on this side looks more fertile. Fruits may grow even faster and better.' So, into the soil the stems

go, taking in the nutrients which belong to the neighbouring tree. It shoots up a bit, stops growing, and shows signs of shrivelling. Different kinds of trees require different types of soil and nutrients. Undesirable transplant leads to unsatisfactory results. Even if the same organisation and artistic director have planned CCDF and Guangdong Modern Dance Festival, I am of the opinion that CCDF should take the Hong Kong culture, social condition, dance style, the quality of local audiences, etc., as its departure points for deeply connecting the Festival, society and local culture, constructing an impactful glocalised dance festival. This will highlight the characteristic and style of CCDF and enhance its creativity and uniqueness. It should not have been a transplant of the implementation and style of Guangdong Modern Dance Festival.

As aforementioned, Tsao was the artistic director of CCDC, CCDF and some of the performing companies. During the programme selection process there was no committee to play the 'check and balance' role. Inevitably it invited suspicion of role-conflicts and the excessive authority of the artistic director, who had the last words on selection. CCDF found itself playing an 'embarrassing role' as the dance sector speculated that it was and only was the artistic director's decision of whether a dance work has been selected or not. Practitioner B, who did not join CCDF, said, 'I'd call CCDF a Tsao's dance festival. Hence, from the onset, I had no intention of participating or paying it any attention. Nor did I know which companies, artists and curators joined because I have no interest in his taste and preference of programming. I won't even join as an audience member.' While it is a personal preference to participate and buy tickets or not, here is a voice from the dance sector that needs to be heard.

There exist dance festivals of all formats and scales around the world of which the programme and artist selection are at the discretion of the artistic director. 'Dance Umbrella' (hereafter referred to as DU)⁷ is a dance festival in England with a long history (over 40 years). Since 2013, Emma Gladstone has been DU's artistic director and chief executive. One can imagine to what extent her authority goes. After taking up office, Emma sets the goal for DU (which is also for herself) as 'to take dance out and bring audiences in'. She is particularly eloquent in how to establish the relationship with the people and community through dance. Hence her elaboration, 'By reaching out to new audiences through commissioning new work, developing partnerships with non-dance venues (e.g. Young Vic, Unicorn), and forming an orbital touring network with arts centres in outer London boroughs. A creative force that can develop artists, audiences, and the art form itself.' Dance festival presentation platforms which connect new works and dance artists with peripheral areas, while making new and refreshing old friendships with the people, are going to be welcomed by worldwide and local dance artists. It is because the sustainability of the development of performing arts requires the support and participation of the society and its people. The above shows that Emma is aware of the close relationship between the artists, the place and its people, and she insists on the deployment of dance as the fixative. Even the direction, programming and selection decisions are in the hands of the same person, the suspicion of the excess of authority can be avoided.

On further contemplation, with the presence of over 100 presenters and Japanese and Korean collaborators who have been presenting dance festivals for over two decades, CCDF is no longer limited to a ‘promoter’ platform. When explaining the mission of CCDF, Kevin Wong said, ‘Since the Guangdong Modern Dance Festival, all the festivals presented by CCDF have an arts market component. Our role is to open the door for different dance artists. We pay for the trips of a group of presenters. That is an arts market concept. They come here to check out the samples.’ I propose that besides being international exchange platforms, dance festivals are events built on the trilateral relationship of ‘place, organiser, local audience’. Should there be in-depth exploration and effective use of resources, it is likely that the afore-mentioned objective, namely, to develop further relationship between contemporary dance and the development of Hong Kong society instead of merely being a dance arts market, will be gradually met.

In *Culture as Body* (2011), Suzuki Tadashi discussed the diversity of human existence. Individuals as unique entities explain the existence of different races. He holds the view that these differences are being ignored as systems to increase economic efficiency and raise profits have taken roots in all corners of the world. The value of the individuals is undermined. ‘The globalised contemporary society has vastly deviated from the one which has been carefully built (at least until the mid-20th Century) by human beings, in which communication had been fuelled by “animal energy”. We have thought that these systems, during the fabrication process of “globalisation”, would have developed out of

different value bases. In fact, the opposite happened. “Standardisation” becomes the target and prerequisite of these systems, which in turn “homogenised” human actions and mental states.’⁸ With a presentation platform, exchange, arts market, CCDF as a large-scale Hong Kong contemporary dance platform does provide the dance sector with a considerable variety of support. Hong Kong and Japan are affected by a similar crash of globalisation. Is it possible for the meaning and value of a localised dance festival to go beyond exchange and sampling? Can it exercise its impact and turn itself into a festival that is visionary and filled with Hong Kong’s rare quality, so that it will be visible to the world and Hongkongers? Even Hongkongers should be allowed the chance to learn more about their dance. This is an area worthy of further exploration.

The value of seeing and to be seen

The remarks by Tsao, artistic director of CCDF, in the house programme went, ‘... over a hundred influential international curators are invited to attend a diverse range of performances at the Festival and to attend various exchange activities such as seminars to deepen artistic exchanges during the Festival.’ CCDF made an effort to become an international exchange of the arts of dance. Another way to put it is that it has been a dance presentation platform for the minority.

While there is nothing wrong with such a direction and mode of operation, should not a dance festival subsidised by government funding consider how to raise social consciousness through art, to build

relationships with the place and the people, so that it becomes more significant and influential? On the funder’s website, CCDF is described as ‘the Festival is a platform showcasing quality dance pieces to Hong Kong audiences as well as to introducing top-notch dance artists from Hong Kong and Asia to presenters of international theatre and festivals.’⁹ While going through the CCDF house programme in detail, one finds that many of the concert time, day and venue deviate from what the arts and cultural consumers are accustomed to. For example, of the 16 concerts, three started at 2 pm on weekdays, another three at 4:30 pm. These six concerts makeup 1/3 of the total. Most arts and culture consumers are students or the employed, and they usually prefer to attend concerts between Friday evenings and Sunday afternoons. If not, weekday evenings are better options. How many practitioners could possibly attend a concert between 2 to 6 pm? The schedule is telling of the insufficient ‘local’ consideration and its inclination to service the registered practitioners. CCDF is a large-scale event, the realisation of which relies on the subsidy of the HKSAR Government. As a condition of the subsidy, the glocalised festival should open its doors to local audiences. In cases of its programme scheduling fails to benefit the larger public, the organiser should be obliged to review. Meanwhile, the government should not shy away from its obligations and needs to face the problems: insufficient venue supply and inappropriate resource allocation. Its duty should be creating the right condition, which enables an international localised dance festival such as CCDF to be effectively implemented. It is probably high time the related governmental departments of Hong Kong, a metropolitan and a cultural hub, reviewed and evaluated.

In nearby Taipei, a local dance festival called 'Want To Dance Festival' has significantly influenced the dance sector, community and its people in recent years.¹⁰ The Festival is supported by government subsidy and runs on a co-curator model: by Chung Po-yuan, Artistic Director of Shinehouse Theatre and Keng Yi-wei, Dramaturg of National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts-Weiwuying. A call for international programme submission has been announced on the Festival website and social media.¹¹ A selection panel has been set up to review and make selection of performing artists and teams together with the co-curators. Such an operation model might address the stakeholders' concerns about whether the impartial selection. Meanwhile, many of the concerts of Want to Dance Festival take place in the public space of Wanhua District of Taipei City. The public as the audience follows the dancers to roam between roads and buildings, instilling in them more profound knowledge of their society through dance. To understand the body, and the convention in which the body sits, is a meaning for the society which a glocalised dance festival will bring.

Another dance festival worth mentioning is i-dance Taipei (hereafter referred to as i-dance).¹² Organised by Ku & Dancers, it is a biennial dance festival that takes place in Taipei. It held its 5th iteration in 2019. Among the missions of i-dance is 'to present an international improvisational dance festival in Taipei which will establish a connection with similar-minded people around the world, so that Taiwan's improvisational dance integrates with the international. The Festival

will present the humanistic culture, and core values cultivated on this piece of land to every visiting participant, and deepen the understanding, acceptance and recognition of the cultures of different communities.’¹³ International dance artists who come to i-dance encounter participants of all ages, backgrounds and social status in workshops, participants of which may have come with sheer enthusiasm and curiosity and no dancing experience at all. In a casual conversation with Christopher Chu, executive director of Ku & Dancers, I asked the reason for accepting those without any dance experience to the workshops. Chu said, ‘The most important reason for presenting i-dance is to show the public what is “improvisational dance.” If Taiwan people are deprived of the chance to approach and understand what improvisational dance is, no one will support the festival and it will not survive.’ i-dance gradually expands Taiwan professionals’ and people’s appreciation of dance into a global perspective. While assisting the participants in understanding their bodies, it also highlights Taiwan’s humanistic culture. It is undoubtedly a fine demonstration of glocalisation. Ultimately, the Festival connects with local culture while responding to topics of global concern, preserving its characteristics while keeping abreast of the trend. It is suggested as an essential reference for CCDF in the future.

The Festival and Beyond—Imagination in Future Tense

In ‘Unimaginable “Asian dance”: on “Chatbox” of CCDF’, Lee Hoi-yin Joanna noted what Professor Pawit Mahasarinand, then Head of Drama Department of Chulalongkorn University, said about Asian dance, ‘In Asia, the training of dance is separated from other art forms while they

come together as one integrated “art education” in Europe. The difference in pedagogy results in the European artists’ ability to handle cross-disciplinary art-making. Their artworks do not fall into the boundary of any existing art form. This is how they break away from conventions. Unboundedness is a feature of contemporary arts.’¹⁴

What is a dance festival to a city, a country? Is it a representation or reputation of one city’s and country’s cultural image, or a response to the society and the people with bodies, movement and dance? To practitioners, the function of a dance festival is most likely to be a platform to show off or a contact zone for exchange and relationship-building. Yet, what is the dance to a city, a society, and the mental and physical development of humans? Dance is probably more than just an exchange platform and a cultural product of globalisation. It is an inquiry of the times and a response to the environment and its people through personal awareness and the sense of place constructed with the body, on both realistic and consciousness levels.

Even to the dance sector, CCDF should, besides promoting cultural economic values, artists and their artworks, and international exchange, I propose that its true meaning and value of being there is to develop deeper links with Hong Kong and her people so that there will be long-term benefits for the societal and cultural development of Hong Kong (including that of CCDC being the presenter of the Festival). As CCDF has positioned itself as a dance festival for the locals, the trilateral relationship of ‘place, presenter and local audience’ is implied. Judging

from the information available, my observation and analysis so far, CCDF has not integrated these aspects, especially in the case of ‘audience’. There is a fracture in their relationship, rendering a negative impact on the Festival’s attractiveness, popularity, and recognition. It cannot be the wish of the presenting organisation, Festival participants and the Hong Kong dance scene to find the image of CCDF (and even that of the organiser) being jeopardised. Having said that, I see the light coming through the fracture. It is time for CCDF and the dance sector to contemplate, identify problems, review, and ameliorate.

Liu Chun-liang, a critic of *PARreviews Taiwan* and resident critic of CCDF, pointed out upon the completion of CCDF that it lacked inquiry into ‘contemporary’ in its planning and programming. She wrote, ‘It is mandatory to have a good handle of the complexity of contemporaneity, especially in the local and global situation of dance, the relationship and creation context of choreographers and dancers, and even political and economic influences. Only by rejecting simplistic answers and making sense of how genres have been defined, we could then be absolutely clear about how to comprehend or make “contemporary” dance.’¹⁵ I would like to see the next CCDF exploring the future, backed by its achievement so far, so that it promotes contemporary dance and becomes a stabler international exchange platform. More importantly, there should be exploration of the Hong Kong society, the uniqueness of Hongkongers’ bodies, and the relationship of dance, space and people, so that Hong Kong’s dance will imagine its future in its distinctive way.

Endnotes

- ¹ Suzuki Tadashi, *Wehua Jiushi Shenti* (Culture as Body), trans. Lin Yupin and Liu Shouyuo (Taipei: The National Chiang Kai-Shek Cultural Centre, 2011): 190.
- ² John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- ³ Globalisation is defined as 'a situation in which available goods and services, or social and cultural influences, gradually become similar in all parts of the world' in the *Cambridge Dictionary*. See <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/globalization>. Roland Robertson, a renowned scholar who pioneered the study of 'globalisation' and 'glocalisation' explained that the term 'glocalise' has primarily been derived from Japanese *dochakuka*, meaning 'global localisation', or, more accurately, 'indigenisation'. See Roland Robertson, 'Glocalization: Time–Space and Homogeneity–Heterogeneity', in M. Featherstone, S. Lash & R. Robertson (Eds.), *Global Modernities* (London: Sage, 1995). In an essay on glocalisation from 2006, Robertson pointed out that 'Glocalisation processes have significant implications for consideration of "the local"'. See Giulianotti, R. and Robertson, R., 'Glocalization, Globalization and Migration: The Case of Scottish Football Supporters in North America,' *Sage Journals* (1 March 2006). <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0268580906061374>.
- ⁴ Joachim Blatter, 'Glocalization In A Two-Level System', *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/topic/glocalization>.
- ⁵ CCDF 2017 is a project on the 'Contestable Funding Pilot Scheme for the Major Performing Arts Groups in 2016' of the Home Affairs Bureau, Hong Kong. See https://www.hab.gov.hk/en/policy_responsibilities/arts_culture_recreation_and_sport/funding_pilot_scheme.htm#2016.
- ⁶ 'China Dance Development', <http://www.ccdc.com.hk/en/site/p/151>.
- ⁷ Dance Umbrella, <https://www.danceumbrella.co.uk/about-us/>.
- ⁸ Suzuki Tadashi, *Wehua Jiushi Shenti* (Culture as Body), trans. Lin Yupin and Liu Shouyuo (Taipei: The National Chiang Kai-Shek Cultural Centre, 2011): 47.
- ⁹ 'Contestable Funding Pilot Scheme for the Major Performing Arts Groups': https://www.hab.gov.hk/en/policy_responsibilities/arts_culture_recreation_and_sport/funding_pilot_scheme.htm#2016.
- ¹⁰ Want to Dance Festival, <https://www.wantodancefestival.com>.
- ¹¹ Culture Express, '2020 mengjiaguojiwudaojie gongkaizhaomu wudaozhitijuchangzuopin' (Want to Dance Festival 2020 calls for submission of dance and physical theatre works), *Culture Express*, Department of Culture Affairs, Taiwan. 13 January 2020.
- ¹² i·dance Taipei, <https://www.idancetapei.tw/zh/about>.
- ¹³ The English version of i·dance website does not always mirror the Chinese version. What is shown here is the translation of the Chinese version instead of the English site content.
- ¹⁴ Lee Hoi-yin Joanna, 'Nanyixiangxiangde Yazhaowudao Jixianggangchengshidangdaiwudaojiezhicdfuntan' (Unimaginable 'Asian dance': on 'Chatbox' of CCDF), *Performing Arts Review* Issue 301 (Taiwan, January 2018).
- ¹⁵ Liu Chun-liang, 'Yazhouxiangxiangdeweixian Yu Dangdaiwudaodeweilai' (The danger of imagining Asia and the future of 'contemporary' dance), in *IATC Artism*, December 2017. http://www.iatc.com.hk/doc/101963?issue_id+101951 http://www.iatc.com.hk/doc/101963?issue_id+101951.