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UNLOCKING THE BODY: APPROACHING ODISSI DANCE THROUGH SOMATICS

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Abstract

As an Odissi student travelling back and forth in Taiwan and India the first stage is to deal with physical barriers. This indicates the fundamental concept of choreographic movement, such as how to use one's body to carry out the beauty of Odissi dance. Odissi is built on various parts of the body to be integrated harmoniously, and its power displays smoothly in the flow, eventually reaching a seemingly effortless dance status. The embodiment of Odissi requires different levels of learning. This article will provide a fundamental view of a foreign beginner who is searching the way to get into the body language of Odissi dance, studying it through different cultural contexts. It does so by borrowing somatic education resources and specific techniques from Taiwan, such as Experienced Anatomy Workshop, Gyrokinesis and Taichi-Dowing, to enhance the experience and efficient use of the body in Odissi, and cultivate an inner view of self-awareness while practicing the dance.

Keywords

Odissi, Somatics, Body-mapping, Neuroplasticity, Experiential Anatomy, Gyrokinesis, Tachi-dowing

Biography

Yu-Ting Huang is currently a Masters student in the Graduate Institute of Dance at Taipei National University of Arts (TNUA). She is currently the Strategic Development Director of Lei Dance Theater. Huang obtained her Bachelor of Anthropology at National Taiwan University (NTU) in 2003, and thereafter worked as a project manager of digitizing Formosan aborigines collections at National Taiwan Museum in 2004–2008. In 2009–2013, she was the Office Manager of Transdisciplinary Education Office at NTU. She has curated a Lazurite project¹ called "Living tradition in the contemporary world—When Taiwan and India meet in dance" which was supported by Ministry of Culture, Taiwan in 2018. She has learnt Odissi at Gandharva Mahavidyalaya in 2015–2019 and obtained the certificate of Gyrokinesis® Level 1 licensed trainer in 2019.

Introduction

Global mobility has become a common phenomenon. The rapid development of images and the Internet technology has led to a fast-paced cultural diffusion, and cross-cultural dance learning and teaching has become more common. Odissi dance has spread out beyond India, while the practice of Odissi dance has many variants in different regions. In her article, 'Towards a Global Community', Sikand (2016, pp.1–2) mentions that the dance critic Leela Venkatarama was anxious about the separation of dance form and content caused by the spreading phenomenon of globalization, but the narrative that dancers outside India created were not as authentic as their homegrown counterparts appeared in her fieldwork conversations often. As a foreign classical dance learner, I did not have the opportunity to hear this argument yet.

From the standpoint of being in Taiwan, this argument that dancers outside India are not as authentic as local dancers can be established with different levels of interpretation. Take Taiwan for an example, when talking about India we focus more on yoga, religion, food, and tourism. Rarely is there any information on the practice of Odissi dance. Only a few Taiwanese earlier went to India to attend dance workshops or courses, and came back to Taiwan to teach the form of dance techniques and basic repertoires. However, the base of its historical knowledge or the meaning of the movement in its cultural aspect remains incomplete. This insufficiency information became my motivation to go to India to research Odissi dance and study teaching methods, thus pursuing the so-called *authenticity* and obtaining more information.

Consequently, I conducted my fieldwork in India from 2015 to 2019, while studying Odissi in the dance institution as an observing participant. I experienced the difficulty of physical learning that relies on conditions such as age, environment, diet, and cultural understanding. My pursuit of the authenticity of dance has turned to the term "thick description", as inspired by anthropologist Clifford Geertz. According to Geertz (1973), anthropologists have to analyze and explain the context of meaning.

Borrowing this concept into studying Odissi dance, I chose to go deep into the movement pattern, to understand and interpret thick description within our body.

Through the analysis of field data, the direction of the research gradually shifted to how to learn this Indian classical dance. While focusing on the experiences and difficulties of the dancing body, I introduced the somatic education resources from Taiwan to propose ways to improve the body condition. The methodology of the research used field notes and body notes as references for changes felt and reflected within the body. Besides the dance institution I stayed at, I also visited other dance institutions of the same genre namely *Srjan* in Bhubaneswar and *Kaishiki Nrityabasha* in Mumbai, the experiences at these institutions provided me with different perspectives and information on body movement such as usage of the torso and the themes of choreography. Another interesting way to discern the bodily details is by using social media and video platforms to keep track of the physicality of dance performances. During the five-year period of my study, I progressed according to the skills and needs of the dance items. My discussion, therefore, has been limited to the form of pure dance (*Nritta*), and has

not yet entered the space of expressive dance (*Nritya*). This limitation allows the research to focus more on the discussion of the physical learning process.

Different Contexts for Cross-Cultural Dance Learning

Starting in 2005, a few Taiwanese began to study Indian classical dance in India and later followed it up by beginning to teach Odissi dance in Taiwan from 2007. In 2012, I learned the Odissi dance in Taiwan from a Taiwanese teacher. The format of training in *Chowk* and *Tribhangi* of Odissi technique was arranged in twelve courses within three months. The Odissi dance repertoire was also arranged in the same pattern. Follow-up practices were organized by the students autonomously to familiarize themselves with steps and hand movements. The teacher was not involved in these follow-up practices, and only came in when the following new course began. Besides the steps and hand movements that followed the music, students actually didn't have much to practice. In 2015, in order to compare the differences in Odissi dance instructions between Taiwan and India, I went to Gandharava Mahavidyalaya, a classical art institution in Delhi where Guru Madhavi Mudgal supervised Odissi dance training. The Odissi style there is described as a 'contained style', related to the usage of torso, cultivated for simple and clean lines of Odissi dance movement (Tandon, 2017, p.35). From 2015 to 2019, I spent two to three months in a one-on-one class with Mudgal's disciple, Shobha Bisht.

Gandharava Mahavidyalaya, has nurtured many excellent Odissi dancers and teachers. Formal students who enroll in a longer course need

to audition for it. I observed the class, which took place three times a week and was taught in Hindi. The program also includes the historical contexts of Odissi dance, such as the role of the various masters in the revival of Odissi dance, the gestures mentioned in the classic texts, and the Odisha Hindu temple dance sculptures associated with the dance movements. For the techniques, students are introduced to the terminology of gestures and concepts of music. Through this continuous and long-term study, students gradually absorb the entire system, embodying the culture of the dance.

Becoming a formal Odissi dancer requires a lengthy training process. Take my Indian teacher for example; she had been studying in Gandharava Mahavidyalaya for at least 16 years to embody the dance style of her guru, Madhavi Mudgal.

The teacher usually scheduled my one-on-one session before the group class. I spent my first year in reviewing my basic techniques in *Chowka* and *Tribhangi*; the second year comprised learning the dance repertoire item, Manglacharan; the third year was *Battu*; the fourth year was *Vasanta Pallavi*, and the fifth year was *Kalyani Pallavi* (unfinished). According to my teacher, the learning sequences instructed in my sessions were similar to those in the formal group class. Compared to the group class, my one-on-one class mainly focused on teaching/learning detailed movements and did not provide much cultural knowledge and terminology of the dance. Group classes had a planned curriculum and schedule that needed to be completed within a fixed timeline and the teacher could hardly provide in-depth advice on each student's movements. To me, each program has different advantages: The learning process in formal

courses is through a lengthy period of repetitive practicing, and students can gradually embody their teacher's movements by themselves. For non-Indian students like me, one can learn many movement details within a short period, but the condensed teaching method also requires one to find a way to adapt oneself to the highly intense sessions.

Comparing the teaching methods between India and Taiwan, an Indian teacher first establishes the concept of *tala* (a special rhythmic cycle system in India) and *laya* (speed), and uses *bols* (a variety of sound-words related to percussion-based music) while dancing. An Indian teacher uses *bols* to demonstrate movements, and asks students to recite and remember. Reciting *bols* helps marry the dance movements and rhythm to create a better muscle memory, which in turn helps executing each movement segment more accurately. A Taiwanese teacher rarely use *bols*; instead, they conduct their teaching movements in a Chinese single word or count the beats. In the teaching process, a Taiwanese teacher will directly enter the dance item after the basic techniques, but an Indian teacher will teach *arasa*, a combination of movements by using different *tala*, making basic techniques become a dance phrase, and then enter the longer dance item. In India, the techniques and *arasa* are usually practiced alternately at the beginning of a course to help students familiarize the skills.

During my first year of relearning the techniques in India, the basic movements of *Chowka* and *Tribhangi* were quite different. Take *Tribhangi* for example: only *Tribhangi* 1 and 2 have exactly the same movements whereas *Tribhangi* 4.6.7.8.9.10 have completely different

movements. *Tribhangi* 3 and 5 have similar foot movements but are different in their hand positions. Indian teachers teach more about the position of body parts in space. My study notes were full of the directions of steps, torso, head, and eyes. These notes help me simulate similar movement patterns, and rely on such a simulation to gradually establish the details of body movements. In Taiwan, most students learn stepping by moving the lower leg; in India, one learns to lift the thigh to complete the stepping. In Taiwan, I tend to use the strength of my shoulders to perform torso movement, and move my pelvis to maintain my balance. In India, the pelvis should remain stable, and the use of torso is accomplished by compressing the side muscles of the chest. The similarity in the pedagogical patterns of the two countries is that students rely on observing their teachers' movements to simulate patterns, and use repetition to embody the dance movements.

Morass of Learning and the Support of Somatics²

The teaching system in Indian classical dance focuses on the *Guru-Shishya Parampara*, or the teacher-disciple tradition. Rekha Tandon mentions that the standardized process of teaching Odissi techniques involves a guru demonstrating and a student imitating. With the cultural tradition that requires respect for the guru, the guru's movements are regarded as the 'pure style' in the dance. She argues that the so-called 'pure style' stems from an intuitive/aesthetic notion of what felt right to the guru's body, without giving any explanation. Students spend years being apprenticed to a guru, mastering techniques based on particular ideas of embodiment, and not being allowed to modify

any studied movement materials without the guru's permission. While imitation is a necessary component in the initial stage of embodying classical movement, taking this form as the only step robs the process of self-exploration, thus preventing the students from discovering their full potential while learning the dance. (Tandon, 2017, pp.32–38) Similarly, Sen-Podstawska points out that under the *Parampara*, the cultural system has shaped an ideal body of Odissi, which produces “a docile body that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault, 1995, p.136). Although the tradition might hold its own values and ideals, the process of making sense of the training and practice requires the student's individual reflection and agency. (Sen-Podstawska, 2019, pp.146–147) Both of these scholars indicate that the body is objectified through the teaching process, and under the cultural context agreement.

However, for a foreign beginner who is unsure of how to properly comply with the teacher-disciple traditional system, there is no verbal agreement clearly stating whether a teacher should be regarded as the guru or not; it therefore becomes difficult to distinguish the boundaries in interaction. Especially, when there is a difference of age e.g., when a foreign student is much older than the teacher such compliance becomes vague and ambiguous. For example, touching someone's feet is a mark of respect for teachers and elders in India. However, my Indian teacher, who was younger than me, insisted that I do not have to do this to her. In teaching, I agree that a learner's body must be surrendered to become disciplined. It brings us to the following conclusion: Student's personal background is not

paid attention to, and their bodies seem to be same as a machine, regardless of age, nationality, or occupation, and all are taught in the same way. The learning state can only depend on the students' continuous self-adjustments, including both physical and psychological aspects.

While learning the Odissi dance in India, I suffered from three main physical difficulties. The first one was that in the *Chowka* position, formed by a distinctive placement of the arms and feet as the iconography of Lord Jagannath, I was required turn my feet at approximately 180 degrees with a squatting posture, which was usually lower and wider than what I could do. The second one was in the *Tribhangi* position, which represents the temple sculpture in Odisha, formed by three bends in the knees, the torso, and the head. Although the teacher demonstrated the details of the movement, I could hardly find the strength to move the torso and execute the movements correctly. The last difficulty for me was that in a fast-paced practice, my body was very clumsy and I was easily out of breath, especially in the *Chowka 5* technique where the body needs to turn back and forth quickly at ninety degrees. It was hard for me to do it with ease. Most of the time my body seemed to take on a tremendous effort to move and I felt exhausted after the classes. Considering the fact that I started learning Odissi dance when I was nearly forty years old, my physical condition was not nearly flexible and my cardiopulmonary function was relatively lower. When I constantly imitated the external shape in the repetitive training, coupled with the intensive course arrangement, it was difficult for my body to adapt to the Odissi vocabulary. I even began to doubt whether I was suitable enough to continue

learning Odissi. I told myself that I must find other ways to overcome this morass of learning barriers.

In order to reduce the above difficulties, I tried to get help from Taiwanese resources, mainly for the basic knowledge of body movements. In 2015, I enrolled in the M.A. program at the Dance Department of Taipei National University of the Arts. In addition to the courses in academic theory, the graduate institute also offered body-related research and technical courses. The somatic research course such as Laban Movement Analysis and Body Awareness, taught by Professor Wang Yun-yu, included the Bartenieff Fundamentals, body structure and dance kinetics, and somatic methods. I also took the Introduction to Somatics course at the Dance Department taught by the Professor Liu Mei-zhu. Her class included the Gyrotonic Method, Continuum Movement, So-tai Technique, Body Rolling, and Body-Mind Centering. The absorption of these several aspects of somatic knowledge opened another window for me in dance training. Several important concepts related to body and movement gave me a number of novel experiences and inspirations. First, every movement has an internal drive, and there is no movement without intention. Secondly, each body is unique, so knowing oneself is important. Thirdly, being aware of one's movement is critical. Fourthly, breathing can improve movement and relaxation. Fifthly, movement pattern can be changed. Finally, one can expand the inner space of body structure with the strength distributed evenly.

So far, there has been extensive research on somatic methods applied to dance training, or dancers in Taiwan. *Learning from Practice: Applying*

Experiential Anatomy to Nine Dancers at Taipei National University of the Arts, a thesis written by Hsiao-Fan Tai was published in 2019. Tai proposed that the integration and application of Somatic Studies in the field of Dance Education includes three aspects: cultivating body awareness, learning anatomy with soma experience, and providing support for dancing techniques through somatic movement approaches. Tai in her thesis suggests that “through experiential anatomy courses, dancers’ awareness can be enhanced in their body positioning. There can be more detailed distinctions in the movement process, which effectively facilitates the rethinking and review of movement strategies.” (Tai, 2019, p.159) Additionally, there are other reports showing that by integrating somatic movement approaches into the Graham techniques and ballet instruction, students are no longer limited to imitation of appearances in learning movements. They are more concerned with exploring the "process", and the teachers will respond to the students’ conditions, constantly trying and changing teaching methods in time (Wen-Ju Hsieh, 2006; Chia-Wen Lin, 2010). Somatic movement approach can help dancers to find a more suitable way to achieve their desired form or results based on their own body condition. Additionally, there are studies on how these methods improve the movements of athletes, young children, and the elderly. Somatic education covers a wide range of fields; people and participants can continuously improve themselves and unleash their physical potential by following these methods.

Changing the Perception of the Body

Elena Catalano (2014) has pointed out that the Odissi dance vocabulary is very complicated, and the movements of various parts of the body must be executed correctly and merged into one so

that dancing is aesthetically attractive. The acquisition of the dance techniques is based on the practitioner's enhanced ability to perceive and control the body position and movement from within. However, this ability of proprioception is complicated by the emphasis of dance aesthetics of the visual appearance. She proposes using a scientific approach, identifying certain points of vertically and horizontally embodied lines as reference, and building up the kinetic rules that lie behind the aesthetics of the dance. In order to perform, the movement must be conducted in an aesthetically correct way. (Catalano, 2014, pp.191–201) Similarly, Tandon also mentions that Choreological Studies, science and the logic of human beings' movement and dance, provide an external point-of-view to re-examine the internalization process of the Odissi dance technique (Tandon, 2017, pp.49–50) Both studies indicate that the conversion of passive learning into active learning requires assistance of other methods, and is the main key to progress to the later stages of performance. The experiential anatomy courses mentioned in the above research also inspired me to understand a change in the concept of physical learning, especially the understanding of how the habits of body movements are developed and in what ways can those habits be changed.

In 2017, I took part in a one-year workshop on experiential anatomy at the Somatic Education Society of Taiwan, taught by the Professor Liu Mei-zhu. Experiential Anatomy derives from the concept of *Body Mind Centering*³, an integrated and embodied approach to the movement, the body and the consciousness in Somatics. Unlike the understanding of anatomy in the medical sciences, experiential anatomy emphasizes on recognizing

body structure and function through one's own internal experience. The curriculum of the experiential anatomy workshop includes 1. Spine and Cavities. 2. Shoulder girdle and upper limbs. 3. Pelvis and lower limbs. 4. Nervous system. 5. Endocrine system. 6. Fluid system. 7. Embryology and space. 8. Organ support. 9. Body connections. 10. Exploration of development movement.

Participants, however, do not have to go through the curriculum in this order. These courses usually begin with body mapping, an efficient procedure of building up one's body image in the mind. From the beginning, participants draw pictures to construct the images of the body structure or organ placement, and then use hand cues or assistive devices to observe the position of their bones, muscles or organs to experience their inner structure and function. Through the body mapping process, one can gain a better understanding of different parts of one's body and the corresponding relationship between them. Practicing this process directly changed the habits of my body. I figured out how to move my body parts to form a movement, and how to support the movement so that they perform in a more complete way. For example, I understood the corresponding position when the scapula connects the arm to torso, and re-experienced the change of the scapula while the arm is raised; this process can enhance the expression of *Tribhangi* movement. Furthermore, through the experiential anatomy courses, one can identify the weaknesses or injured parts of one's body. For example, my right side is the preferred side, and the force used for stepping on my feet and raising hands will be greater than that of the left side of the body. Over time, it will cause an uneven distribution of muscular tension. By sensing the difference in the output on both

sides, I adjust the use of my body, strengthening the left hand to make the *mudras* (hand gestures) more obvious.

The nervous system courses directly changed my concept of movement learning. They eliminated my worries about the lack of flexibility in my body due to aging, and the inability to perform Odissi dance aesthetically. Exploring the nervous system, I realized that all actions and behavioral responses are related to the nervous system, which is also linked to the fascia system, and almost dominates all the movements. When it comes to the establishment of movement habits, the nervous system is responsible for recording our movement patterns. Repetition makes body movements gradually become a habit and gradually one can complete the movements without thinking, such as brushing our teeth, or drinking water from a glass. This also explains the reason why long-term repetitive training in the Odissi dance is workable. On the other hand, being a senior Odissi beginner, it is also necessary for me to consider the existing physical inertia that might hinder the learning of Odissi movements. My experience in learning Flamenco from 2002 to 2011 has made my footwork powerful. However, my upper body continues to be stiff. My old habit of focusing on the footwork and using too much energy on my limbs remains, and I thus cannot develop my upper and lower body strength evenly. To solve this problem, I need to take on additional movement training to enhance my body connection and coordination, such as Taichi-Dowing⁴ and Gyrokinesis⁵, to re-pattern my nervous system.

The concept of re-patterning comes from the research on neuroplasticity in neuroscience. In his book *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal*

Transformation of Personal Transformation, Siegel writes,

...experience activates neural firing, which in turn leads to the production of proteins that enable new connections to be made among neurons, in the process called neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity is possible throughout the lifespan, not just in childhood. Besides focused attention, other factors that enhance neuroplasticity include aerobic exercise, novelty, and emotional arousal.” (2010, p.190)

Once a deficient movement becomes a habit, it is necessary to recalibrate the strategy of the movement. It is worth mentioning here that the nervous system are bidirectional. When information enters through sensory neurons, it transmits to the motor neurons through synapses to make the muscles react. However, awareness can interrupt this process. When there is too much information from outside constantly entering the body without rejection, the nervous system will be over-stimulated in the end, consequently paralyzing the normal ability to respond and losing the dual elasticity of body muscles and the mind. In Laban/Bartenieff fundamentals, a key terminology is “exertion and recuperation”. It is believed that the recuperation does not have to be an opposite action, but a change of action. If a person continues to dance without rest, s/he will eventually experience fatigue. If one works all day in the office, lying in bed and spending time on their smart phone, s/he will not achieve physical recovery, and dancing might be a better option. (Studd & Cox, 2020, pp.21–22) All of these reminded me that I did not relax my body enough after dance courses or practices, causing

my muscles to be in tension for a long time and leading Odissi dance to become a tiring activity.

The Importance of Spine and Breathing

Through the Spine and Cavities workshop in experiential anatomy, I further understood the importance of the spine in movement. The spine is an important supporting structure that connects the upper and the lower part of the body, distinguishing the left and right sides and the direction of movements. Movements are divided into the sagittal plane, frontal plane and transverse plane, which are all controlled by the spine. Odissi dance uses much of the frontal plane, and the torso and head need to balance and coordinate with each other. The finer the control, the better the aesthetic presentation. The spine includes the cervical, thoracic, and lumbar vertebrae. The cervical vertebrae are responsible for head movement; and the thoracic and lumbar vertebrae make up the torso and cover all human organs. When the body lacks elasticity due to aging, it means that the movement of muscles, tendons, and bones are restricted, resulting in a very limited angle of extension. This leads to imperfect performance of the Odissi techniques, such as side bends in dance. I used the Taichi-Dowing and Gyrokinesis to resolve these issues. The core of these two methods is to exercise the spine, and the movement guidance will have a clear intention while moving. By using the imagination to achieve the quality of body movement, along with stretching, flexing, and twisting can reach the maximum of the body and release the spine and inner space of the body, which helps to perform the Odissi torso movement in a better way.

Releasing the inner space of the body is an important concept I have learned from Somatics.

The body that I understood before was a fixed and unchanging whole, but there are layers of muscles serving different functions inside the body. The dorsal muscles covering the spine include superficial, intermediate, and deep muscle groups. Superficial and intermediate groups belong to the extrinsic muscles, in which the former control the upper limb movement, while the latter are attached to the ribcage and are related to breathing. The deep muscle group belongs to the intrinsic muscle and is related to spinal column and head movement, which are responsible for sustaining posture. When obtaining more body details allows us to generate a clearer image in the brain, it also helps in the choice of movement strategy. The use of extrinsic muscles can also form the shape of Odissi dance; once the movement starts from deep muscles to the superficial muscles, the dance posture looks more complete.

The process of entering a cell's perception is called somatization. We can use this process to enhance the perception of specific body parts by using assistive devices. In order to perceive our spine, we can lie on the floor with our legs bent, and then place the floating bar directly below the spine to maintain a certain distance from the ground. This way one can feel the pressure on the spine caused by gravity and body weight. The floating bar is then removed after thirty seconds to let the body lay flat on the floor. The perception of the central axis of the spine will now become more obvious. It is worth mentioning that in the course of Embryology and Space, the embryonic development process forms notochord space in the middle of the body from the pituitary to the center of the pelvis, which can provide a highly stable support for the body. The central axis of this body

is not attached to the spine and needs to be felt by the body. We can sit on chairs, relax ourselves first, and then ask another person to put a heavy book on our head. One needs to then find a way in which the trunk aligns completely with the head, and can easily and freely rotate without the book falling off; this would be the central axis of the body. One of the concepts in Somatics is that the enjoyment of the process is more important than the outcome. The excessive pursuit of dance to achieve its goal may lead to ignoring the process of sensing the body, although somatic approach can enhance one's own body perception. Breathing also has an important connection with the spine. Ideally, breathing can expand the inner space of the trunk, but most of us rarely take notice of our breathing process because we have been breathing since birth, and our body is used to the automatic action of breathing. It is related to the movement of the diaphragm which separates the trunk into the thoracic cavity and the abdominal cavity, which passes through our esophagus, trachea, and aorta in the middle. Our heart and lungs are in the thoracic cavity, and the other organs are in the abdominal cavity. According to research on anatomy of breath, our daily breathing mainly uses our diaphragm and intercostal muscles, the diaphragm contracting downward and our thoracic cavity expanding. When performing active expiration, we mainly use internal intercostal muscles and abdominal muscles to stimulate the transverse abdominis, which is a deep layer of abdominal muscles. The diaphragm located in the center of body is closely related to other muscle groups that support our core, especially the Quadratus Lumborum and Iliopsoas that connect and stabilize our spine and pelvis, and bridge the upper and lower body. The crura of diaphragm and the upper end of the iliopsoas

connect at the lumbar spine. When the diaphragm relaxes, it is easier to stretch to iliopsoas muscle. Awareness of breath can reduce stress and increase energy. Conversely, not aware of possible patterns of breathing will restrict the full potential to move, to feel, to respond, and to be (Studd & Cox, 2020, p.30–32). Sports training also emphasizes the coordination of breathing: when the core is activated, the stability of the body increases. Even when not exercising, the same method of exhaling can be used by the elders as it can massage the internal organs and stimulate the deep fascia.

Dance seldom mentions the relationship between breathing and movement. In Somatics or Sports Science, practitioners pay more attention to this area, as it affects physical performance and recovery. The additional body training method I chose, i.e., Taichi-Dowing and Gyrokinesis, both pay attention to the coordination of breathing and movement. In the process of Taichi-Dowing, the first step is to relax the body by thinking of your body from head to toe according to the traditional Chinese acupoints, and then adjusting breathing before the movement starts. The breathing focuses on deep, long and light breaths, combined with a slow circular movement and being aware of your body condition. A teacher always instructs that during the movement, if one notices any tightness in any body part, one can use the breathing method to relax their muscles and open up more inner body space. Gyrokinesis method also has several special breathing methods, such as “squeezing breathing”, which is to use deep exhalations to squeeze out the air of the body. When the air in the body is fully exhaled, the chest will automatically inhale deeply, and the body will have a deep sense of release. After Taichi-Dowing and the movement training of

Gyrokinesis, I found that my body became lighter and I no longer felt breathless while practicing Odissi. Moreover, I could adjust my heart frequency through breathing with an entire dance number, effective from the positive changes in my body.

Conclusion

From the perspective of a foreign beginner, this article compares different contexts of learning the Odissi dance in Taiwan and India, and provides the scenes of practicing the dance in two regions. When I was learning the dance in India from 2015 to 2019, having faced the physical difficulties of learning the Odissi body language, I proposed a plan to assist its learning with different regional resources; in Taiwan, I tried the Somatics to improve my practice. Understanding the body from the start, I revisited and experienced the body structure and function from within. Sensing the state of each body part and coordinating them effectively, helps re-examining the use of movement strategy. In addition, by the guidance of breathing with movement and intention, one can expand the inner space of the body, unlock the stiffness of body structure, and loosen muscle tension. All of these have positive benefits for entering the highly coordinated Odissi dance.

At the World Dance Alliance Asia Pacific Branch Annual Meeting held in Bangladesh in 2019, I performed an Odissi dance item, “Battu without ornaments” which was related to my thesis and paper presentation at the “Ocean Dance Festival” for the first time. Through the process of preparing for the performance, I found that my body could enter the Odissi vocabulary, and the previous physical difficulties were no longer obstacles. In my opinion, the communication

between eyes and face in dance performance is a new topic. How to show the emotions through the combination of movements and facial expressions will be the next research direction. It’s an endless path in Odissi dance, and every step is a fresh experience in life.

Endnotes

1. See, <<https://samataipei.wixsite.com/lazurite2018?fbclid=IwAR1efKoy9EVC-6Q8-6UnsP1KzVth8PWAYd6_RZ_Vmh5jorU96UfDZJOaJ3E>> for the Lazurite project in 2018.
2. Somatics, then, is a field of study dealing with somatic phenomena: i.e., the human being as experienced by himself from the inside. See, <<<https://somatics.org/library/htl-wis1>>>.
3. Body-Mind Centering® is an integrated and embodied approach to movement, the body and consciousness. Developed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (1993), it is an experiential study based on the embodiment and application of anatomical, physiological, psychophysical and developmental principles. It utilizes movement, touch, voice and mind in doing so. Its uniqueness lies in the specificity with which each of the body systems can be personally embodied and integrated, the fundamental groundwork of developmental re-patterning, and the utilization of a body-based language to describe movement and body-mind relationships. See, <<<https://www.bodymindcentering.com/about/>>>.
4. Taichi-Dowing was created by Xiong Wei, who had established a deep relationship with performing arts in Taiwan. In 1996, the world-famous Cloud Gate Dance Theater introduced Taichi-Dowing as one of the major body practices for dancers, and created the famous

work “Water Moon” in 1998. Taichi-Dowing is based on the rotating principle of Chinese Taoist concept of Yin and Yang, and includes extracts from the essence of Chinese traditional Taijiquan movements. It emphasizes the internal training of the movement, Mind and Qi, and breathing integrates the three.

5. The Gyrokinesis Method is a movement method that addresses the entire body, opening energy pathways, stimulating the nervous system, increasing a range of motion, and creating functional strength through rhythmic, flowing movement sequences. It is an original and unique method, which coordinates movement, breath and mental focus. See, <<<https://www.gyrotonic.com/about/gyrokinesis-method/>>>.

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