

# The Differences in the Mentalities between the East and the West Evident in Dance

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## I. Foreword

It is widely assumed that there are intrinsic differences between the East and the West inasmuch as they lie on opposite sides of the globe. However, there has been to date inadequate study on the exact differences between the art, culture, ideology, and mentality of the two. It is also difficult to deny that in the modern era any such discussion on art and academics has been centered around prevailing Western ideology, and that Western art theory and mentality has been regarded as the most advanced or even as the only legitimate. Accordingly, a review of the Eastern mentality and perspective towards the world and art in contrast to the Western paradigm appears to be a convenient way of making a comparison between these two spheres of influence. The Western framework has been selected as the basis for comparison not to subordinate one into the other, but rather because it is considered more appropriate to scrutinize opposing perspectives through a single viewpoint and by doing so to seek common

principles which transcend the discrete paradigms at a higher level of analysis. Moreover, for those who have initially become familiar with Western thought, this type of equivalent comparison of characteristics is desirable in explaining the Eastern identity.

The purpose of this study is to identify the differences between the conceptual framework and mentality of the East and the West toward the world and art, and to indicate and explain the differences in ideology between the two as evident in dance. This writer has previously written a paper on the characteristics of Korean dance and the differences between dance in the East and the West as they pertain to their respective paradigms and perspectives. In the process, she discovered wide discrepancies in a number of facets and came to be convinced that the cause therein were those very differences in paradigm and perspective. This study is intended to be an extension of that initial probe.

To those who have studied Western philosophy, including this writer, Eastern mentality is not always easy to fathom. The Eastern mentality is epitomized by Confucianism, Taoism and the Buddhist mentality. The reason that such ideologies as Confucianism, Buddhism, or Taoism are not always easy to approach is that while they individually appear to be based on a grand scheme of thought, they are not always easy to grasp logically and lack conceptual links to one another. Curiously enough, it appeared that overviews of Eastern philosophy written by Westerners which were attempted summaries appeared to provide a more comprehensive picture. However, the knowledge of such authors on Eastern cultures was limited and lacked depth at best and to this writer, their discussions were often marred with exaggerations of particular aspects or excessive generalizations, a result of the application of the Western perspective.

This writer was then fortunate enough to come across *The East and the West, and Aesthetics* (1994) written by the Chinese philosopher Chang Fa, which stipulated the differences in the cultural mentalities between the East and the West and undertook a

comparative study between their respective aesthetics based on such differences. The term “cultural mentality” devised by Chang Fa refers to the ideology and mentality which pervades a culture. The framework selected by him to highlight these differences were such concepts as harmony, tragedy, sublime, form, inspiration, and other aesthetic subjects and aesthetic appreciation which are common in Western aesthetic discussion, and a summary of Chinese aesthetics in light of these concepts. This writer could draw many parallels between her own comparative study of dance characteristics and Chang Fa’s explanation of the differences in perspectives which used such concepts as nothingness and Being, identity of whole and form, and unintelligibility and lucidity, and which was based on literature as the main artistic model, and also found a degree of self-justification for her earlier studies and findings.

Accordingly, this study will examine the differences in perspectives and mentalities between the East and the West based on dance art, which was not included in Chang Fa’s discussion, and will attempt to apply Eastern discussions on art to dance which have largely been limited to literature and certain forms of painting.

## **II. The Paradigms and Mentalities of the East and the West**

One of the first questions posed by early philosophers as civilizations took shape in the East and the West concerned the identity of the world that they lived in. Such questions logically led to questions on the fundamental essence of the universe, and differences developed between the East and the West in perspective and train of thought on this subject. In regard to the appearance of phenomenon, Chang Fa proposed Tao(origin), divinity (the sky), nothingness, li (principle), chi(energy), and truth, while Western counterparts suggested Being, God, idea, matter, substance, and logos. As it is impossible to discuss all of these concepts in any depth here, this writer purports to show the conceptual differences between the East and the West on the

universe and the world by extracting the concept of Being and Nothing, and comparing the related concepts of substance and Chi(energy), and the identity of whole and form. Thereafter, she will examine the inevitability of the differences in mentality stemming from the discrepancies of the main thought processes employed in explaining the effects and developments of the Universe and Nature, the Yin-Yang theory in the East and dialectics in the West, and go on to briefly summarize these differences in creative perspective as most clearly exemplified by the concepts of the imitation of Nature and harmony emulation based on Chang Fa's observations.

### **1) Being and Nothing**

'Being' and 'Nothing', or the concepts of somethingness and nothingness, are core terms which most clearly show the differences in perspectives on the universe. Being implies "is" or "exists" but is commonly translated as existence, and is an indispensable concept throughout Western philosophy. Aristotles, following in the footsteps of Parmenides who first assumed this term to be the essence of the universe, equated philosophy with study of being(1). Thereafter, being continued to be a central problem in Western philosophy up until Hegel and existentialism. In contrast, in the Eastern metaphysical theory of the universe and the world, the core concept is Tao(origin) which signifies the essence of being and the essential laws of the universe. 'Tao' does not manifest itself as an object or a quality but may be directly experienced(2), with nothingness as its essential and metaphysical characteristics. Tao is neither something nor nothing and thus may said to share the characteristics of nothingness. Accordingly, all objects are derived from being in the East, but being is derived from nothing. Therefore, it is clear that from the very beginning, the two sides started out from the opposite ends of the spectrum, with the West basing its inquiry into existence on a limited being and the East assuming that all objects were derived from an unlimited being which did not manifest itself in a graspable form.

### **2) Substance and Chi(Energy)**

After Parmenides established that an understanding of the being amounted to an

understanding of the universe, Aristoteles developed the problem into one of substance, substance being the essential and basic “something”(3) which determines its essence and qualities. To Westerners, the universe is a universe of substance and the essence of the world also has substance. In this manner, the underlying assumption on all beings which exist and are visible require an opposing assumption on nothingness and void, but Westerners appear to have largely ignored the latter and concentrated mainly on the former. Their understanding of being and substance was one which was independent of void (or nothingness), and the void which envelops being could not be comprehended. Yet this void and the unknown, which cause fear and hardship in men, later become subjects to be overcome. Such reasoning resulted in a dualistic viewpoint which allowed only those objects which could be seen or understood as substance, led to the conflict between substance and void, subject and object, man and nature, and the known and the unknown, and caused Westerners to continually pose questions on subject and object. However, just as being and nothing cannot exist without each other, the universe and the void are one. Yet Westerners have thought that the object may be separated from the whole, and have sought to deepen their understanding of the peculiarity of objects by viewing the world in terms of substance, while emphasizing the incomprehensible nature of the whole and the void.

In sharp contrast to the West where the question of the universe was delved into from the concept of being, this question was examined with nothing as a basis in the East, which led to the concept of Chi. Chi is that which explains the creation, operation, and changes of Tao and is a concept tantamount to substance. Unlike the dualistic Western perspective which differentiates substance and void, being and nothing, or substance and void are viewed merely as different manifestations of chi which are indispensable to each other from a wholistic point of view. Chi flows throughout the space of the universe, which is understood as nothing, and substance or form takes place when this energy gathers, while the formed object disappears when its component energy is dispersed. In the Chinese paradigm of the universe, emptiness

does not refer to the space or site occupied by substance as understood by Westerners, but rather full of the Chi which reproduces, changes, and creates. If the world and the universe are full of substance in the Western view, then the Eastern world is one of chi within a universe of chi. In such a world, the Western concepts of being and object are merely clustered forms of chi. The different perspectives on the world, based on being in the West and on nothing in the East, thus led to different explanations of the universe in terms of substance and chi.

### **3) Form and identity of Whole**

The Westerners' search for the essence of substance bore the concept of form, while the profound study of the Chinese on chi led to the concept of the 'identity of whole'. The concept of form was the objective expression of the rationalization and analysis on substance. While form has significance as the objective and intelligible recognition of the essence of objects, it also indicates the arrangement and relationship of their parts, and not only signifies the external appearance of objects, but also explains their conceptual essence. The concentration on form as the essence of phenomenon led to the generalization in the Greek Era that form was itself the essence, and thus naturally form was also understood as the essence of beauty and art. To Westerners, the concept of form allowed chaotic nature to manifest itself rationally and to be understood by endowing complex phenomena with order, and mystical and unintelligible objects with reason.

On the other hand, to the Chinese the chi of the universe attains form through the identity of whole, and theories on Chi have continuously been discussed in conjunction with Yin-Yang school. It was only natural that discussions on chi, which could be found in both substance and void, took on a comprehensive, organic, and relational characteristic. According to Chang Fa, identity of whole refers to the relationship between the whole and the part which manifests itself when the organic whole cannot be broken down any further, and in this perspective, the part cannot be discussed without the whole and nor can the structure be discussed without the identity of whole.

The existence of the part thus depends on the existence of the whole, and the identity of whole implies that the whole explains the part rather than vice-versa(4). This wholistic and comprehensive perspective also views a part which has been separated from the whole as having lost its essence and thus as no longer being part of the whole, or anything for that matter. A more important fact is that the presence of all objects is the result of the injection of the chi of the whole, so that the substantial structure of the part is relatively subsidiary. This compositional situation of the whole is not only limited to individual objects but also extended to the entire universe. The identity of the object(or its energy) cannot be separate from the whole of the universe - the chi of the heaven and earth. Man and nature can be no exceptions, either. This kind of wholistic search into essence at the universe level cannot have a concrete or intelligible character as it rejects analytic and empirical dissection and experimentation, while Western studies into substance based on form, structure, and laws attain a degree of clarity. The difference in perspectives thus causes discussions on being in the world to be either clear or unintelligible, and leads to differences in the way discussions are developed, as epitomized by dialectics in the West and Yin-Yang theory in the East.

#### **4) Dialectics and Yin-Yang theory**

Herakleitos was the first to propose a dialectic perspective in Western civilization when he said, "All things flow. Nothing stays in one place forever."(5) Thereafter, the viewpoint of Westerners such as Hegel and Darwin on the developments and events within the universe were one where opposing forces continually sought progress and renewal through conflict, denial, and eventually, creation of something new. Hegel considered the positive, the negative, and the denial of the negative to be the three laws of development of the universe. In explaining the structure of the universe with the conflict of opposing forces, the focus becomes squarely placed on the power of the actual objects. Under such a structure, the relationship of opposing objects varies with their substance, so that the objects themselves become the main factors of history.

In contrast, the theory which explains the universe in the East is the Yin-Yang theory.

Yin-Yang theory is a theory which explains creation and extinction of all things in the universe through the interaction of the Yin and the Yang as the conflicting concepts, only they are effects rather than substance. Yin and Yang oppose and interact with each other at the same time, but again, are parts of a whole which can not exist independently. This kind of thinking which transcends concrete objects emphasizes that the universe is linked as a whole and reflects the wholistic Eastern perspective which identifies the universe as a single organic whole. Therefore, while this perspective also views the forces in the universe as opposing elements, unlike in the West where development is the result of progressive conflict and denial, emphasis is placed on preservation and stability through the cooperative harmony of “opposing but not competing” forces.

These sharply contrasting views of the universe have led to distinct histories and cultures as the West has seen continuous revolution and innovation based on development through reform and conflict, while the East was able to maintain a feudal system for over 2,000 years by seeking preservation and stability and emphasizing the whole and cooperation. In this context, Western dialectics may be said to have led to development and progress, while Eastern Yin-Yang theory has led to a vicious cycle of stagnation and repetition.

#### **5) Imitation of Nature and Harmony Emulation**

Last of all, art theory of creation, which is considered a core issue in the discussion of art, will be considered in comparing the perspectives of the East and the West on art. The respective views on the universe and the world are inevitably reflected in artistic pursuits such as dance activity. Chang Fa also states that the manner in which man faces himself and the world around him is clearly realized in works of art. Chang Fa compares art theory of creation in the East with that of the West with imitation of nature and harmony emulation. Ancient people universally thought that “Emulation of nature was the principle governing creation of civilization and art.”(6) However, the concept of nature and the method of its imitation was different in the East and the West. The Western theory of imitation, which views artistic and creative activity as the result



of man's impulse to imitate nature, remained the prevailing theory on art until the 18th century and the basic framework of the art theory of creation. To Westerners, "nature" literally referred to the natural instinct which was not artificial and included man as well as animals and plants. Imitation of nature mainly signified imitation of man and his activities as exemplified in the widely regarded Greek sculptures, portraits, and plays depicting man. In the Western concept of nature, objects of substance such as animals, plant, and man were the main subjects. By contrast, the "harmony emulation" explained in Eastern art theory of creation included man but mainly referred to heaven and earth(7). In the initial theory on the universe, the universe was divided into heaven and earth in the beginning and all things in it were created through the merger of the two. Emulation of nature implies nature in both heaven and earth. Most artworks in the Eastern world such as poems on mountains and streams or paintings of flowers and birds depict the harmony of the elements of nature. If harmony is emulated in the mind, harmony may refer to nature but its significance extends to the entire universe and its principles. The basis for the cultural content and differences in "harmony emulation" and "the imitation of nature" may be found in the wholistic perspective of the East which refuses to separate substance from the whole and the partial perspective of the West which views the universe in terms of substance and its parts.

Since the Western concept of mimesis can be traced back to primitive religious rites, it is a concept which strictly speaking may be said to have originated from dance activity. Ancient Greeks thought the priest conducting a ritual imitated something very essential in nature. As discussions on imitation unfolded in this direction and reproduction of the external world came to be considered the primary element of imitation, fidelity and resemblance to the object in nature became important. Taken a step further, imitation meant not only imitation of appearance but also imitation of essence. The quest for essence in this manner led to the pursuit of form on the one hand, and the pursuit of social and mental essence on the other. The process of natural imitation in the West may thus be seen as a search for essence which starts out with

reality.

Meanwhile, “Emulating harmony in the mind” is an attempt to express the harmony in nature as typified by mountains and streams(8). That is, it is an attempt to “live within nature” by realizing the spirit of nature and transposing it onto works of art. Yet the Chinese universe is neither substantial nor formal. Therefore, the resulting form of imitation is unlike the Western one which focuses on a specific object against a background and its proportions and relationships, but rather concerns itself with absorbing a wide range of sceneries, observing its various facets, and engraving it in one’s heart. The method is one where the artist “wanders to his heart’s content and observes with every step” and is not limited by a single vantage point but may be able to look up and down, and from close and from afar. When he has identified the spirit of nature in this manner and “engraved it in his heart”, he can then proceed to “express it from a universal dimension”. The expression of this spirit is logically consistent with the Chinese view on the spirit of nature.

In this manner, the East and the West developed different ways of thinking which led to different views and mentality on the universe, nature, and artistic creation, and accordingly, the resulting artworks were also inevitably quite different. The ensuing chapter will examine the differences in the Eastern and Western mentalities toward dance art by comparing their appearance and methodology.

### **III. The Spirit of the East and the West Evident in Dance**

The form of dance which will be examined in this chapter will be ballet, which is the first historical artform of dance and the traditional dance of the Western world, along with traditional Korean dance as an Eastern form of dance. The reason that traditional dance forms are used for discussion purposes is that in the contemporary era, it cannot be denied that there has been a Western cultural influence on the East, and in the field

of dance, there has been a degree of interaction between the East and the West. The reasons behind the choice of ballet are that it has long been regarded as the only art form of dance in the West, that many other forms of dance have been derived from it, and that even today, it serves as a symbol of Western dance throughout the world. As for the selection of traditional Korean dance as an expression of Eastern ideology, this writer not only is well-acquainted with its structure and spirit, but also feels that it adequately reflects the fundamental elements of dance in Northeast Asia which embody Eastern ideologies such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism commonly shared by Korea, China, and Japan. This chapter will compare the Western and Eastern paradigms manifested through dance in basic posture and movement, movement perspective, and methodology of dance.

### **1) Basic Posture**

An underlying supposition of this study is that views on the universe and the world and man's mentality on his relationship with nature are reflected in his artistic activity, and that differences in thought between the East and the West may be discovered in dance activity. In this context, basic posture is the starting point of such relationship and views. The basic posture in ballet starts out with the knees, ankles, and toes turned unnaturally outward. This turned-out posture makes the body face forward in an open posture, and may be said to be the basic foundation on which all ballet movements are designed. Such a highly formalized foot posture endows the dancer's body with tension as it requires tremendous strength, makes the dancer's body take on a confident attitude, and allows the body on stage to be seen large and clear. The turned-out leg not only expands movement scale by allowing legs to be extended further upward, but also facilitates rapid movement in all directions without the dancer turning his face and body away from the audience. Moreover, this posture creates an extended linear appearance of bodily design in space based on a solid vertical axis. Along with a stiff torso, this posture creates such a linear design so that the vertical axis of the lower body may be maintained while the direction of the posture is upward. When the arms and legs are lifted straight

from this posture, it clearly expresses denial of the gravity, a desire for open space, and an orientation toward the sky. This turn-out posture is impossible without the continuous effort of the dancer to resist gravity and pull the center of body weight upward. The basic posture of ballet may thus be summarized as one of upward-oriented linear design in a stiff stance that strongly resists gravity, which allows outstretched limbs to conquer the surrounding space and lifted arms and legs to leap into the sky. This desire to challenge the earth's gravity and approach the sky may also be found in ballet shoes(toe shoes) which enable one to stand up tip-toe.

In contrast, in the basic posture of Korean dance, the knees, or the hollows of the knees to be precise, are bent and with inhalation slow unfolding of the body takes place; the limbs, however, are not fully extended in the linear design of ballet which demonstrate the desire to conquer surrounding space, but take on more of a curve. This kind of extension facilitates contraction. At the moment of extension, the dancer steps a foot on the ground so that the other may push off, but the legs do not produce forward progress and rather the viewer focuses on the line of the shoulder and the rhythm of dance it creates. The stepping of the foot is not intended to be a support for release from gravity or movement toward a certain direction, but more of a walking-in-place, or a union between the sole and its stepping space, implying an emphasis on harmony. Rather than focusing on the design created by the leg in space as in Western dance, Korean dance pays more attention to the manner in which the feet touch the ground and the relationship between the two. As the limbs and torso are stretched and contracted in conjunction with breathing, the body appears to be strongly bound by a rubber band of gravity. Korean dance thus gives the impression that it is deeply rooted in the ground. Moreover, any leaping motion in Korean dance is intended for a return to the ground rather than upward progress, with attention being paid to the manner in which the feet touch the ground. A good example of this is the jumping see-saw, a Korean folk game. In this game, the purpose of the leap is to attain height, but the strength and timing of the feet's position and posture during the landing is much more important than the

strength of the upward leap. Bilaterality(9) is the common denominator in the composition of breathing, energy flow, and leap motion in Korean dance. While in ballet breathing and energy flow are continuously pulled upward in one direction and the jump motion from the plie is an explosive propulsion into the air based on accumulated strength and energy, in Korean dance the bent limbs and energy are extended outward from within the dancer along with inhalation but then pulled back in before the final posture or moment and breathing also reverts to exhalation. Even in the leap motion, preparation for landing is made even before the peak height is reached.

It becomes clear that Korean dance accommodates the earth's gravity but considers movement space and the ground to be cooperative rather than conflicting elements, and seeks a harmonious relationship between the two through bilateral unity. There is a sense of unity and stability as complete contact is made with the ground, and the bent body moves slowly in a curve within the surrounding space rather than attacking it in a linear manner so that movement is spatially more passive or accommodating and accompanied by breathing, and is oriented more towards harmony rather than conflict in terms of the relationship between the space and the ground. Unlike the Western perspective which views the world in a dualistic manner by dividing it into substance and void, subject and object, man and nature, the known and the unknown, and considers the unknown, void, and nature as objects to be overcome, the Eastern "chi" theory takes a mutually dependent view of the universe where being and nothing, and substance and void can not be considered separately, and likewise man can not be separate from the nature and universe he lives in and his chi is connected with the chi of the universe - the resulting dance is merely a reflection of this mentality. In other words, the substance manifested as dancer and the void that surrounds him are variant forms of chi. In the Eastern view of the universe where all things were created through the merger of heaven and earth and thus the personal universe of the individual can not be separate from the entire universe, the dancer can not be in conflict toward the ground and space he is in as they are an extension of himself, and are objects that he

must harmonize with within the country, world, or universe that he lives in. Under this perspective, the earth's gravity or the surrounding space that affects on the body are not objects to be conquered but rather objects to be accommodated or cooperated with, and are naturally considered as objects within which one's chi may be transmitted and conversely, whose chi may be absorbed.(10)

The basic posture of ballet emphasizes the substantiveness of the dancer in space, which is an objective presence attained as he continuously resists gravity, while the freedom achieved by the open turn-out posture which allows thrusts into all directions is also attained through continuous efforts to discard man's natural posture and take on a highly developed and formalized posture. This kind of movement method reflects the Western ideology centered around the individual and its cultural characteristic of progress through denial. In this manner, the dancer can travel freely in space and make that space his own by conquering it. His existential substance and rights are strongly emphasized in this hostile perspective, which is consistent with that of Western philosophers who equate substance with knowledge of the universe, and consider the unknown void as something to be feared and conquered. As they have conquered nature and the universe with logical and analytic reasoning, so must space and ground be conquered as hostile objects. In order to emphasize the person's presence on the ground and confirm his existence, the rights of the hostile objects, that is the space and the ground, must be ignored and conquered, and the space which threatens his presence must be developed from a fearful space of void into a space of substance. The confirmation of individual existence and the pursuit of freedom which punctuates that existence is a reflection of Western renaissance humanism(11) which emphasizes personal development through freedom and achievement. In contrast, Eastern humanism places more weight on camaraderie and personal relationships rather than individual development, and social empathy, whose characteristics may be found in the aforementioned basic posture of Korean dance where the body forms a cooperative relationship with the ground and space, becomes the foremost issue.

## **2) Movement**

Steps are important in all ballet movements. It would not be a gross exaggeration to state that ballet started out as a dance of foot skills. While this is partly attributable to the fact that ballet originated from the court dances of the Renaissance Era which were connected steps danced to music, it is also a result of the emphasis on connecting steps when basic arm and leg postures were being organized and formalized in the French Royal Academy of Dance, the first dance school. As the steps and postures formalized in the academy were developed over in the following centuries, the arms and legs took on decorative gestures in the Baroque Period, and along with the development of toe shoes, the combination of difficult steps and beautiful poses became the essence of ballet movement composition in the Era of Romantic Ballet. Therefore, the basic structure of ballet emphasizes the connection between steps which are decorated by other parts of the body. In movement design, the lower part of the body came to be emphasized and the distinctiveness of individual steps recognized, and priority was placed on connecting them in the most graceful and sophisticated manner possible.

By contrast, the leg is mainly used for maintaining balance in Korean dance, and seldom are there mid-air gestures with the legs in movement design or movements which emphasize just the legs or feet. As in the basic posture, the upper and lower parts of the body form a harmonious relationship with the lower body by maintaining stability against the ground, and rarely are there cases where the two move separately as in Western dance. In Korean dance, the body must move as one along with breathing. In ballet lessons, upper body and locomotive movements are gradually learned after the basic position of the feet and individual steps are mastered first, while in Korean dance, the first practices involve walking with the body as one. It is thus not possible to train breathing, and upper and lower body movements separately. In movement design, while a harmony between the upper and lower body parts is sought, it may be said that Korean dance emphasizes mostly the upper body since the lower body is often covered with a long dress and the noticeable movement design is usually

derived from the upper body, but even then the upper body does not move separately but forms part of a design which is generated by the harmony of the entire body.

Just as Westerners have tried to recognize substance in a concrete and objective manner by concentrating on the arrangement and relationship of objects and concluded that form is the essence of art, so is the form of movement in ballet the result of identifying the essence of movement as the arrangement and relationship of individual body parts. In the Western view of the world based on substance and objective existence, the individual parts of each movement and the movement of each body part may be analyzed separately from the entire movement or entire body. The movement of the feet, arms, and head may thus be considered independently and analytically in terms of their relationship with the overall design. However, in the wholistic Eastern view of the world, not only is it impossible to consider the part independently from the whole, but also the structure cannot even be considered separately from the whole. The application of this wholistic perspective on body or movement design would mean that separating a specific body part from the whole for consideration would be meaningless as it would result in a loss of essence. Therefore, the aspects which are emphasized the most in practice and appreciation of movement are the overall movement and the line or flow which the body creates in movement. The line is made from a series of points and flow refers to perception of the overall presentation. The requirement in Korean dance is that the movement be considered as a whole along with the body, and not as a combination of individual movements or of body part movements.

Moreover, as movements are linked smoothly in Korean dance, it is difficult to distinguish where one ends and another begins. In the case of Western dance, there are clear distinctions between pauses and dynamic movements. The beginning and end of a movement are clear, enabling clear discernment of a movement's progress or completion, the two of which cannot imaginably occur simultaneously. The lack of such distinction would be tantamount to ignoring the distinction between something and nothing, or between substance and void, and would run counter to their view of the



universe. Their explanation of everything through cause and effect, and familiarity in making a choice between concepts lead them to fill the dance space with movements of substance. To them a rest in the movement is a state of nothingness. In Korean dance, however, movements with curve designs and smooth characteristics are linked by instances of so-called “movements within stillness” whereby a sense of rhythm and motion may be felt even in still movements. Thus in Korean dance, static and dynamic elements are smoothly connected without any awkwardness, and as movements are so intimately linked that they are separately indiscernible, even movements with static characteristics sometimes give the impression of being a part of a dynamic movement. As Yin and Yang can switch back and forth, static and dynamic states can also switch back and forth, and may be considered as different variations of the same movement. Such characteristic of movement appears to be the influence of the Eastern mentality which emphasizes opposing but not competing forces and their wholistic cooperation, which is quite unlike the Western mentality which places weight on conflict between opposing forces such as something and nothing, and movement and stasis, and develops into a progressive view of the universe. It goes without saying that the basis of this difference in perspective are the contrasting Western and Eastern views on the relationship between man and nature as one of conflict and one of harmony, respectively.

### **3) Movement Perspective**

Ballet movements have a design which places priority on the audience's viewpoint, although the body is open in all directions with the turned-out feet posture. In many movements, attention is paid to completing the final pose after the preliminary and transitional movements. In other words, it may be said that formality and completeness are emphasized. At the background of this approach is the fact that Western dance started to be performed in theater stages so that there was a clear distinction between the performer and the audience, and a performance environment where the dancer's movements became the subject of concentrated appreciation, but it may also be seen as

the result of the scientific and analytic Western spirit which led to a paradigm based on substance and a view of form as the essence of beauty. Movement is recognized as the substance on the stage, i.e. the object of the dancer on stage as subject, and movement's most complete forms are analyzed in order to identify its essence, which reflects the Western scientific spirit that independent observations must be made in order to recognize an object. Accordingly, ballet movements are composed and trained with the vantage point that would create the most beautiful body line in mind. The optimal way of achieving this is to focus on each instant of movement and to closely examine its order and arrangement. In this manner, the composition principle of ballet may be said to be the creation of an orderly harmony from movement parts. Such analytic attitude toward objects may similarly be focused on art objects and applied at an aesthetic level. In dance, to focus on the art object means that identification of form through projection becomes possible if it is assumed that the viewer of the movement and the object movement are fixed. The optimal point of each fixed instant thus discovered reveals the most beautiful aspect of movement and the movement's appearance is determined.

In Korean dance, the bent body basically only faces forward in direction so that the movement perspective is towards the front of the dancer. However, since it is difficult to distinguish individual movements from the whole in Korean dance and the completion of a movement or form is directly connected with the next movement as already mentioned, emphasis is placed on the relationship with the preceding or ensuing movements. In contrast to the turned-out posture of the ballerina which does not readily allow prediction of the direction of progression, Korean dance basically proceeds toward the front of the dancer and as a result, attention is placed on the flow of movement (rather than direction) and linear flow becomes emphasized. In the context of claims that relationships between movements and movement flows are observed in dance rather than individual movements, it becomes entirely appropriate to explain the beauty of Korean dance from the perspective of its linear beauty or linear flows.

The emphasis on continuous progression rather than complete forms or movements

at a given moment is a natural result of the Eastern wholistic view of the universe, and a logical extension of the thought that discussions on an object can never be limited to just that object as the universe is linked as one. Accordingly, any remarks or discussions on individual movements cannot be linked to just the movement but must lead to a perspective on movement flow as an organic whole and the connection between the chi of the performing dancer and the chi of the universe.

Just as the viewed object is not a distinct movement but a continuous movement flow, the view itself cannot be a fixed one. The movement perspective must move with the object, and Chang Fa explains this as “scanning and spanning” in referring to the appreciation method of Eastern paintings. He explains that the typical Chinese method of art appreciation calls for a scanning and spanning from both upper and lower viewpoints, and from both removed and close viewpoints.(12) While the body may sometimes be stationary with only the eyes moving, there is also a “thorough scanning” method where the viewer literally moves about. This method of appreciation was referred to as a kind of “scattered or wandering projection” which is required in the Eastern theory of chi because the recognition of an object calls for observation which is not limited to that object but to that of all related objects, and usually involves scanning and spanning from up and down and from close and afar. This scanning must ultimately be connected with the universe. If Westerners sought to find the most beautiful aspect of an object at the optimal point, then the Chinese sought to find the “spirit” of an object by looking around.

In applying this method of art appreciation to Korean dance, it is evident that viewing a movement apart from the overall movement flow is impossible because movement flows so continuously. Therefore, rather than singling out individual movements, the relationship between movements and their flow, the method, procedure, manner of dancing, the ability and energy of the dancer, and even his artistic depth and spirit may be read by scanning and spanning. Dance movement is not merely regarded visually but the artist’s spirit, mind, energy, and rhythm, which do not

physically reveal themselves, may be appreciated and realized. By viewing dance movement as being one with the dancer's artistic spirit, the whole and the part are regarded at the same time. A good example of this is the saying in Eastern literature that "The writer's work is that person."; in dance, whereas ballet has traditionally stressed the beautiful ballerina and visual spectacles such as dancing skills and scenic designs, Korean dancers are evaluated based on their human qualities and depth rather than movement skills or beauty of appearance. Dance not only becomes a measure of his artistic skill, but also of his spirit and style, and artistic and human inclinations. Even in rare solo Korean dances such as Salpuri(scarf dance) or Seung-mu(buddhist monk dance), artistic value or highlight is not placed on eye-catching skills that are often only possible with a youthful body. The peculiar characteristic of Korean dance may be found in the generalizations that the most prominent Korean dancers are fairly old, that the dance of flexible and elastic young dancers are considered shallow, and that the dance of the elders are considered to be of greater value. The importance of the dance is found not in its visual elements but in depth and artistic spirit, as dance is not merely an object to be visually seen but to be read, with the desired discovery of not just a viewing of the external beauty but a reading into the artistic spirit and humanity within the dancer.

If Western ballet is an object of "seeing" which captures the most beautiful aspect of movement at an optimum instant, Korean dance is an object of "reading" which seeks out the artistic spirit of the dancer through scanning and spanning. Such differences in perspective inevitably lead to differences in the methodology of dance.

#### **4) Methodology of Dance**

Differences in perspectives on movement result in different relationships between the dance and the dancer, and also great differences in the way movement is learned and executed. The aforementioned focus on "seeing" and "reading" implies different points of emphasis and different relationships between the dance, the dancer, and the audience. Since the manner in which the dancer views and accepts movement is

considerably different in the East and the West, the methodological approach to dance is consequently different. In the case of ballet, arm and leg postures were first designated by the French Royal Academy of Dance, and the method of their execution was developed and sophisticated over centuries so that it may be said to be quite systematic in terms of methodology. As a result, ballet movements have a clear and objective method of execution which may be measured like the straightness of paper edges. In other words, the angle and position of all the parts of the body from head to toe, limbs and torso, as well as the line of vision, and the relationship of all these parts are clearly analyzed. This is similar to the efforts of Western scientists to conquer nature with logical and analytic reasoning and to organize knowledge into a scientific system of theories, as in the case of ballet the composition of movements have been analyzed and organized over hundreds of years and passed on as knowledge. As Western scientists have sought objective explanations to the existence of objects, Western artists have likewise recognized ballet movements objectively and sought to explain their essence in a visual manner.

On the other hand, a notation of Korean court dance reveals pictures of the formations of various scenes while the names of movements are designated with hieroglyphic or poetic terminology. While there are accurate descriptions of costumes and props such as their size and color, there are no detailed descriptions of the movements and their execution, and only suppositions may be drawn from their names. In the case of Salpuri, which is included in many traditional Korean dance repertoires, there are three main styles by region and these vary greatly in composition and movement quality. In light of these facts, it may be concluded that Korean dance emphasizes overall formations more than individual movements, and due to the hieroglyphic characteristic of Chinese characters, the same set of characters may be interpreted freely according to the reader's inclinations and as a result there is great variety in the ensuing style. From this characteristic of Korean dance in which there are no detailed descriptions of dance methodologies and various manners of dancing the

same movement are acceptable, it may be said that Korean dance has a wholistic perspective on movement which places more emphasis on the relationships between movements and dancers than individual movements, and which stresses the personal style of each dancer rather than efforts to organize and execute movements in an objective manner based on a universal vocabulary. The method of performing a particular traditional dance thus varies with the dancer, such as the so-called “human cultural asset” in the case of Korea, with no particular variation being right or wrong. While ballet movements are organized by body part and limb into method and name, no such classification exists in Korean dance and each dance is handed down from teacher to student with peculiar characteristics.

This disregard for methodology be attributed to a difference in the way artists learn and train, which is the result of the Eastern appreciation method of viewing art as an object of “reading”. As the artwork is the same as its creator or performer, it is often regarded as an aesthetic object with a human characteristic. Thus when viewing dance, an attempt is made to “read” the chi of the movement in relation to the chi of the universe and to “meet” the artistic spirit or human energy of the dancer rather than to “see” the appearance of movement. In the world of chi substance or form are not important and can only be ignored. This is because something and nothing, and substance and void are all different manifestations of chi. In this kind of wholistic view of the universe, the artwork and the artist cannot be separated. If the chi(energy) of the dance is connected with the chi of the universe then dancers feel that they cannot reach a desirable level of dancing by merely approaching movement in terms of its form. They thus seek to understand dance with their mind as well as their body, and rather than viewing dance in terms of its form, attempt to fathom its imagery. Here, form is the substance and imagery the abstraction. As evidenced in I Ching(the book of changes) where it says that “Imagery is realized in the sky and form is realized on the earth”, the Chinese did not think much of actual form but thought that only imagery could be connected with the energy of the universe. Likewise, the dancer can only

depict the spirit of the dance which can convey the spirit of the artist by determining the movement's imagery rather than its form. Only when the dance and its spirit are "engraved in the heart", that is only when the imagery and the spirit of the dance fills the heart, can a dance be performed which conveys the dancer's artistic spirit and be transformed into a dance connected with the energy of the universe and emulates nature's harmony.

A dancer who has attained this level does not perform a dance as an object but becomes one with it, and the dancer as well as his movements become artistic objects. The movements of the dance and the dancer are the extensions of a single expression and are mere differentiations of a whole. In explaining the Taoist spirit evident in Eastern art, Northrop points out that unlike the Western dualistic separation of subject and object, Eastern art regards the aesthetic object and aesthetic self as one and the same, only different manifestations of a whole(13). Therefore, the dancer must be recognized not as an aesthetic object but rather as an aesthetic self which becomes one with the dance. The movement of the dance should not be considered as an object separate from the self, but as a part of the self whose imagery must be felt so that dance may not be learned in a particular order nor conveyed in a particular order. For this kind of dance to be possible, mere analysis of the formal visual aspects of movement cannot be an appropriate methodology of dance. Moreover, for the dancer to become one with the dance, not only must he stop regarding movement as an object, but he must also fall into a state of selflessness where he is unaware of even himself. Korean dance masters are often said to "fall into their dance" or be "engrossed in their dance", which indicates a state where they follow wherever the dance goes or takes them. Korean dance is also often characterized by 'Shin Myung(a state of being enraptured)' or 'Heung(ecstasy)' where the dancer becomes unaware of himself, becomes one with the dance, and moves according to the Shin Myung or ecstasy(14). Only when the master has identified the imagery of the movement from within can he reach a state where he feels the artistic emotion of ecstasy, and as the state of ecstasy is related to chi, such dances

reach a level which is at the same time devoid yet infinitely complicated.

Therefore, while ballet placed its priority on movements that were planned beforehand, smoothed artificially, and endowed with practical form, Korean dance sought to achieve a state where the dancer followed his emotions in a state of ecstasy, dispensing with prior planning and introducing the element of coincidence.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The first major difference between the mentality of the East and the West, as manifested in ballet and traditional Korean dance, that was discovered in this study was basic posture and its relationship to the ground and the surrounding space; a hostile posture could be found as a result of the Western mentality which regards nature and the world to be in conflict with man, while an accommodating and cooperative posture was the result of the Eastern mentality. If an upward-oriented progressive spirit could be discovered in the attempted resistance to gravity and the leap to the sky as a result of the Western view, a more of a bilateral accommodating spirit could be discovered as a result of the Eastern view in the character of Korean dance which seeks to maintain harmony with nature and the surrounding space, and to be receptive to their energy based on the view that the chi of man and universe cannot be separate. In this manner, the Western spirit emphasizing substance and object and the Eastern spirit emphasizing the whole and harmony were contrasted.

The characteristic discovered in ballet movement, which emphasizes individual steps, their connection, and the completeness of individual poses and forms, was the analytic Western perspective which regarded individual steps and poses as important objects and a spirit which pursued completeness of form by considering the essence of movement in terms of body parts and arrangement of steps, which are all reflections of the Western perspective's emphasis on substance and object, identification of the



essence of the world and art as form, and analytical studies thereof. In contrast, the wholistic Eastern view of the universe where the whole and the part lose their identity without each other is reflected in the fact that the body or parts of movements are seldom separated from the whole and are together considered as a whole. As for movement characteristic, ballet movements have definite beginnings and endings so that movements and pauses are clearly distinguishable, while movements in Korean dance are so intimately connected that it is difficult to distinguish the movement from the overall flow, and static and dynamic instants are so harmoniously combined so as to require the peculiar phrase “movements within stillness”, clearly the result of a perspective where Yin and Yang interchange with each other. In other words, stasis and motion are two different manifestations of movement which contrast but do not conflict or compete with each other, but co-exist cooperatively as an example of the state of the universe.

The substance-oriented Western view of the universe and the scientific spirit, which views objects analytically as independent and objective objects, may be found in ballet movements which are arranged with the most beautiful appearance of each movement at the optimal instant in mind. When the dancer recognizes movement as an object and assumes a scientific and analytic perspective to seek its most complete form, the method becomes one of focus through projection. By contrast, Korean dance places more emphasis on the relationship between and flow of movements, and the resulting linear flow rather than individual movements or composition. This is a reflection of the Eastern spiritual world or wholistic view of the universe that discussions on individual objects within the universe should not be limited to just those individual objects. As such, individual movements are universally linked with the preceding and ensuing movements so that a single movement may not be discussed separately from the overall flow or the dancer. A rounded rather than fixed way of observing is needed in order to see the continuous flow of movement and capture the energy of the universe as manifested in the various facets of movement, such as the dancer's depth and artistic

spirit, rather than the visually perceptible movement itself. Dance then becomes not a visual spectacle which shows off the great skills of a beautiful woman but an object to read the artistic and human character, depth, and artistic spirit of the dancer who transcends the external appearance of the dance.

Differences in movement perspective lead to differences in methodology, and in the case of Western dance culture, the objective execution method and systematic methodology of ballet movements may be explained as the result of the dualistic Western perspective as exemplified by subject and object in science and philosophy. In other words, Westerners developed their methodology of dance over hundreds of years by considering ballet movement as an object of the dancer and seeking form as its essence. On the other hand, the Eastern perspective on dance which is aimed at feeling the life of the movement that reflects the artistic spirit or effect of the dancer is the result of the wholistic view which does not see the dance and dancer as being separate. If the dance and the dancing object are not separate and merely different manifestations of the same identity, then it becomes meaningless to separate movement from the dancer and seek out its form. When the imagery of the movement, which is connected with the energy of the universe, rather than the form of the substance, is sought, the ideal dance can not only express the spirit of the artist but also emulate the harmony of nature and represent the Eastern view on nature which unites dance with man.

In this manner, it is evident that the different perspectives on nature, the universe, and the arts in the East and the West have led to differences in basic posture, movement, movement perspective, and methodology in their respective dance forms. However, external differences aside, fundamental aspects shared by both dance forms confirm that dance as a human activity within the world and the universe can not remain unaffected by paradigms in neither the East nor the West, and that dance is indeed the most human activity which expresses man's view of his world through movement.

## ■ Notes

- 1) Chang Fa(1994), *The East and the West, and Aesthetics*, translated by Jung-Hwa Yu et. al. Pureunsup publishing. p. 39.
- 2) F.S.C. Northrop(1946), *The Meeting of East and West*, The Macmillan Company, p. 331.
- 3) Chang Fa(1994), p. 41.
- 4) Ibid., pp.62-63.
- 5) Ibid., p.142.
- 6) Ibid., p.370.
- 7) Ibid..
- 8) Ibid.,p.374.
- 9) Unlike in ballet where the body energy and breathing is continuously directed upwards and the spatial orientation is also centered on the upward direction, Korean dance uses both directions in body and breathing, and spatial orientation, with equal emphasis on both directions. In other words, bilaterality of direction may be found in the composition and the execution of the dance in both the inhalation and exhalation, both the flow of body energy from within to the ends of the limbs and then the flow back in again, and the surrender of the body to the earth's gravity which contracts the body, forces the limbs to be bent, and orients the body in a downward direction and the reverse motion of the body unfolding upwards.
- 10) The differences between the East and the West in their sense of space and views on the universe which are found in the basic movement of dance works may also be found in their language expression. In the case of the West which basically emphasizes leaps into the sky or upper space, stress is felt when the desire for upward progress is not fulfilled. That is, stress refers to a force from above to below. Thus the expression "under the stress" refers to being under the pressure of

this force. In the case of Korean dance, however, stability is felt in the contact with the ground as already evidenced from the dancer's relationship with the ground. When Koreans do not feel comfortable, they use expressions such as "thorny cushion" or "sitting on an uncomfortable seat" to indicate that the stress is coming from below. Interestingly enough, such views on space and the universe may also be found in works of dance. Both post-modernist choreographer Twyla Tharp and Korean dancer Hak-Sun Lim choreographed works on the process of women's marriage and subsequent formation of family, entitled 「The Catherine Wheel」(1983) and 「The Heart Flower」(1992) respectively, in which female characters encounter considerable difficulties and obstacles; in expressing such "stress", Tharp's character is buried under a pile of garbage, while in Lim's work, the bride is literally crawling on all fours on a thorny cushions made by dancers. Malborg Kim(1999), *Understanding Dance*, Seoul:Yejeon Publishing, pp.357-358.

- 11) Ray Billington(1997), *Understanding Eastern Philosophy*, Routledge, p.86.
- 12) Chang Fa(1994), p.508.
- 13) Ecstasy is perhaps the most important element of creation in Eastern art. It is a kind of inner burst of emotion; art can only exist in its presence, and in its absence there can be no art. Chang Fa(1994), p.407.

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## **Abstract**

### **The Differences in the Mentalities between the East and the West Evident in Dance**

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The underlying assumption of this study is that difference between the East and the West in perspective towards man's relationship with nature, the world, and art are reflected in dance activity. The comparison is centered around ontological, epistemological, and art theories. Ballet and traditional Korean dance are reviewed as typical dance genres to clarify how different manners of viewing and understanding result in disparities in basic posture, movement, movement perspective, and methodology. Fundamental aspects shared by both dance is the most human expression of man's view through movement.