

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: *EQUINOX & SOLSTICE*

Allen Chunhui Xing, Master of Fine Arts, 2018

Thesis Directed By: Patrik Widrig, Associate Professor, Dance

This paper documents Xing's research and creative process of building *Equinox & Solstice*, an abbreviated evening-length dance production performed in the Dance Theater at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center March 9-11, 2018 as requirement for the Master of Fine Arts Dance program at the University of Maryland's School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies.

With a foundation in Chinese classical dance, new found freedom of modern dance, and a drive to create his unique aesthetic that would appeal to many by building bridges and connecting individuals, Xing incorporates movement research, technique training, and social evaluation to define a vision. He then chronicles his creative process from concept to performance, defining his thought process and interactions with designers and dancers, weaving his personal story to provide context and insight for his decisions and thought processes.

EQUINOX & SOLSTICE

by

Allen Chunhui Xing

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
2018.

Advisory Committee:
Professor Patrik Widrig, Chair
Professor Sara Pearson
Professor Alvin Mayes

© Copyright by
Chunhui Xing 2018

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The opportunity to produce *Equinox & Solstice* has been so meaningful to me as an artist who has been working to define myself in America. The support and encouragement I have received is beyond words. From the day I auditioned, through the realization of this project, I have learned so much from so many. Thank you to my family and friends for never questioning my time in the studio, to the dance faculty for challenging me to try new things, for the dancers, designers, and production team for making my vision a reality.

Thank you to the TDPS team for creating a program that allows artists of different disciplines to learn together and create together. Thank you to the Clarice team and the Smith Family for your continued support. And finally, thank you to my thesis committee, Patrik, Sara, and Alvin, you have provided mentorship and guidance that is a model for who I hope to be as a teaching artist.

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
THE IMPORTANCE OF CHINESENESS.....	3
BACKGROUND	7
MOVEMENT RESEARCH.....	11
MODERN DANCE.....	11
CHINESE CLASSICAL DANCE	13
CHINESE CLASSICAL + MODERN = MY AESTHETIC	15
REVIEW CHINESE CLASSICAL DANCE	17
COMPARE MODERN DANCE TECHNIQUE	17
WEIGHT SUPPORT IN FLOOR MOVEMENT	18
BALANCE	19
SHAPE	20
MY THEORY OF DIFFERENCE	21
SOUL.....	23
WHERE IS MY VOICE.....	23
CREATING A STORY LINE.....	26
PERFORMANCE CONTENT	29
CREATIVE CONCEPT.....	51

CASTING AND REHEARSAL PROCESS	59
GROUP DANCERS.....	60
INDIVIDUAL DANCERS	61
CHINESE CLASSICALLY TRAINED DANCERS	62
DUET DANCERS	63
SOLOIST DANCER	64
COLLABORATION.....	65
SOUND DESIGN	65
ABSORBING SOUNDTRACKS	65
INSERTING CHINESENESS INTO MUSIC	66
SOUND DESIGN	67
LIGHTING DESIGN	68
PROJECTION DESIGN.....	70
SCENIC DESIGN.....	72
COSTUME DESIGN	77
BLACK THEME	78
WHITE THEME	84
RED THEME	86
A NEW BEGINNING.....	88
BIBLIOGRAPHY	90

Introduction

Equinox & Solstice was a culminating production leveraging comprehensive research and study over the last three years as I pursued my MFA in Dance at the University of Maryland, College Park. The research was comprehensive because it encompassed multiple projects that could be evaluated on their own accord, but when done so cohesively, the result became something much more.

- It was a movement research project to determine how I could combine Chinese classical dance and modern dance to create my unique aesthetic.
- It was a collaboration project with my designers, dancers, and production team.
- It required an understanding of how the theory of the afterlife is perceived through the circle of life of Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism.
- It was a research project to engage the local Chinese-American community through dance.

I recall conversations as I began my journey at UMD where the merit of a two versus three-year master curriculum was debated. As my time in the program comes to an end, I attest that three years is needed. To determine a valid area of research takes time. To cultivate the research takes time. To formulate the hypothesis and test the results both take time. I began the research in my first year, focused on processing the thesis production in my second, and defined movement creation in my third. The program builds in a systematic way that reminds me of an old saying, “it takes one woman nine months to give birth to a baby, but that does not mean a group of nine women could ever give birth in one month.”

Equinox & Solstice begins at death and follows the soul after death through the journey to start a new life. There are four main sections that follow the seasons of Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter in terms of design elements, with the *Equinox & Solstice* representing the lightest and darkest days of the year. The five elements from Chinese feng shui theory – water, fire, wood, gold, and earth – are used to highlight the Chineseness in this piece.

While the thesis concert and this paper are the culmination of efforts in terms of my MFA program, it is important to lay the foundation of how this research project came to be and to understand that this is just the beginning.

The Importance of Chineseness

Dance has power and impact. It has voice and audiences. I have seen choreographers in the United States use dance to represent their voice to direct attention and derive political impact. I feel there is a need for me to use dance as a tool to share Chinese culture and engage the larger community.

I began to process my thesis during my first semester of study at UMD, as I knew that all too soon, I would be producing a thesis concert. In my research class, Professor Miriam Phillips asked me what on the surface seems to be two simple questions. "What things are important to you? And, why are they important?" I could have easily responded in a cavalier way, as anyone could quickly list things they found important, but when coupled with the follow up question of "Why?", I contend the responses should be much more thoughtful and even thought-provoking! Phillips not only opened a door but she opened every door and window that had been closed for years. I felt I wanted to embrace this fresh air, this new thinking.

In 2011, I arrived in the United States to continue my education. While as a young student in China, I had English classes, once I chose to attend a dance focused boarding school at age 14, English quickly faded as there was no time in a schedule that began at 6 am and often did not finish until 10 pm. Over the last seven years as I established my life in the United States, I not only learned the vocabulary and grammar of English, the culture and spirit of Americans, but also, I have learned the words of racism, exclusivity, and intolerance. I have also seen love, acceptance, and support. I have come to realize the two polarizing ideologies are not mutually exclusive.

The first weekend after arriving in the United States I went to a local Chinese Christian fellowship church in Salisbury, MD with my new Chinese friends from school. When I entered the church, there were about twenty-five Chinese and Chinese-Americans already in attendance. Half of them were not Christian regardless of the fact it was a Christian church. The leader of the church contacted the community each week to join in fellowship. The church provided food and hosted a bible study session. Some of the people had lived in the United States for decades. Some of them only a few years. Or like me, a few days.

The fellowship was conducted in Mandarin because most attendees did not speak English well or at all. A middle-aged couple sat next to me. I asked them, "Where are you from?" They shared their story which was very interesting to me. They came from Shanghai. They had a small company and had made enough money to immigrate to the United States. After a long application process, they had finally received their green cards. They had moved to Salisbury earlier that year, a decision they made because a friend was already living in the area. I asked them, "Are you Christian?" They answered, "No." I then asked them, "Why do you come to this fellowship?" They said, "Because there is free food and there are other Chinese people to meet." They did not have many friends and they could not speak English well. This was the only time they met Chinese people, made friends, and built community. I asked, "Why did you come to the United States?" They replied, "Everybody in China said America is a great country. We saved all our money and finally got green cards and came to the United States."

Many Chinese people have come to the United States to pursue their own American dreams most likely choosing to live together for support. In 2015, there were over 4 million

Chinese-Americans living in the United States. This number did not include the Chinese people living in America without a visa. Although the identity of Chinese-Americans has been promoted, most of the Chinese-American population still lives solely within their American Chinese society. The isolation is still there. There is a huge need for Chinese traditional and spiritual culture in this population. I am one of these four million Chinese-Americans living in the United States.

I realized that this large and growing immigrant population from China, living in the United States, integrating into American life, was challenged due to both isolation from their cultural roots and the lack of awareness in the communities where they lived.

As my English improved, I gained a better understanding of my daily interactions. Some of these interactions were innocent enough, some were based on ignorance, and still others due to hatred. I have always journaled, and what I realize now in reviewing these entries, is every race, every generation, every socioeconomic class, has equally engaged in behavior that reinforces isolation.

- “OMG, look at your Asian eyes.” A white woman I met in Ocean City.
- “You look just like the people who work at the Chinese Restaurant.” A white man who I thought was a friend.
- “My mom will never let me date a Chinese because she will never accept a mixed baby.” A white woman who I thought was a friend.
- “I don’t like Chinese food or Chinese people. The food is disgusting and people cannot be trusted.” My friend's friend, the first time I met her.

- “Where are you come from? Please go back your country or go to learn your English. Don’t make my work so complex.” A black man working at Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore Customer Service Center.
- “You are not a normal Chinese; they are all short.”
- “I don’t like Chinese people because they eat dogs. Do you?”
- “Your face is red; you are so chinklish.”
- “I didn’t know Chinese people could dance.”

More and more, I could list pages of things people have said to my face... but that is not the point. After experiencing the negativity and feeling disappointed, I was depressed and questioned my decision to come to the United States. I did not want to go out and interact with people. I did not want to be the laughingstock for people, especially if I was too naive to realize it. I stopped making new friends. Instead, I stayed within a small group of Chinese students where I felt a sense of security. I was one of these people living in a small group in isolation. There were and are many of these small groups that individually create the Chinese American social fabric. I did not know then what I have come to learn through this project: my role, my responsibility, my voice.

Background

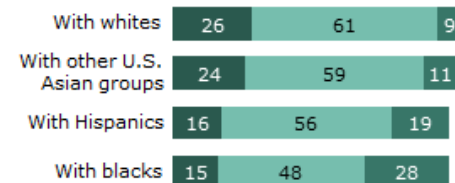
Dance has been an essential part of the social fabric in China for thousands of years. This history, however, does not exist at the same level today for Chinese immigrants and Chinese-Americans. I would like to use dance to build cultural bridges. Much research has been done defining the journey of many immigrant populations. In some cases, studies have progressed to capture valuable insight into the second and subsequent generations of immigrants. As would be expected, the results have shown differing perspectives and challenges face native born and foreign-born populations.

The Pew Research Center published a 2013 study, *The Rise of Asian Americans*, which created a framework for defining the primary audiences of this paper. The research indicated that overwhelmingly most United States Asians felt they got along with other groups in the United States. So why is it that there is isolation?

Getting Along across Group Boundaries

% saying their U.S. Asian group and each of the following get along ...

■ Very well ■ Pretty well ■ Not too/Not at all well



2012 Asian-American Survey. Q49a-d. Responses of "Don't know/Refused" not shown.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The Pew research pointed those researching this topic into many directions for additional clarification and detail. It also questioned how assimilation could be achieved. Could groups get along across boundaries, but still be segregated?

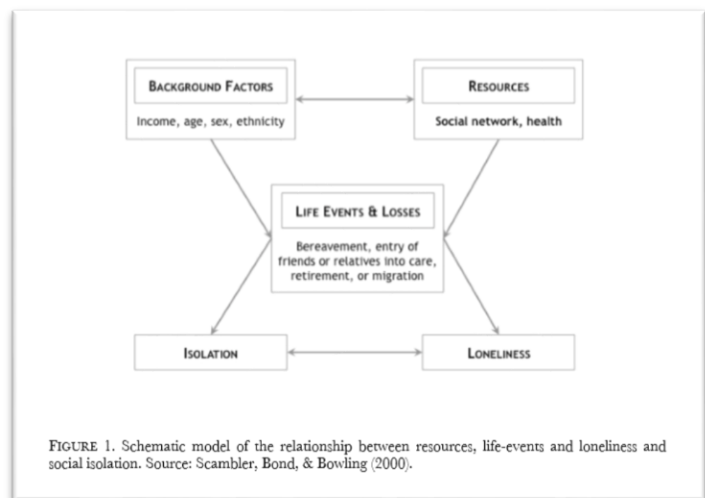
Tamara Lutz and Wilma D. Kuhlman's article in the *Early Childhood Education Journal*, referenced the value of using dance as a method of instruction, especially as it related to culture. "Research on the importance of dance to a child's education can be found as early as the turn of the century." They continued to define the world as "pluralistic and diverse" and that dance helped to create understanding and respect for others. Dance

provided opportunities for learning about one's "inner-self" and demonstrated how they feel about others. This reinforced my charge to use dance to bridge gaps and grow communities. (Lutz 2010, 36-37)

I had the opportunity to meet with faculty and students at the Baltimore International Academy and saw first-hand how dance has been incorporated into their curriculum and how barriers could be removed. This is a K-8 charter school that has language immersion as its foundation. All students learn English as well as Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Russian, or French. Because the arts had been so instrumental in fostering cultural understanding for their students, I was asked to provide a special dance performance at their graduation ceremony. Dance to me was not just something that people watch for entertainment value, but dance was becoming a vehicle to educate people.

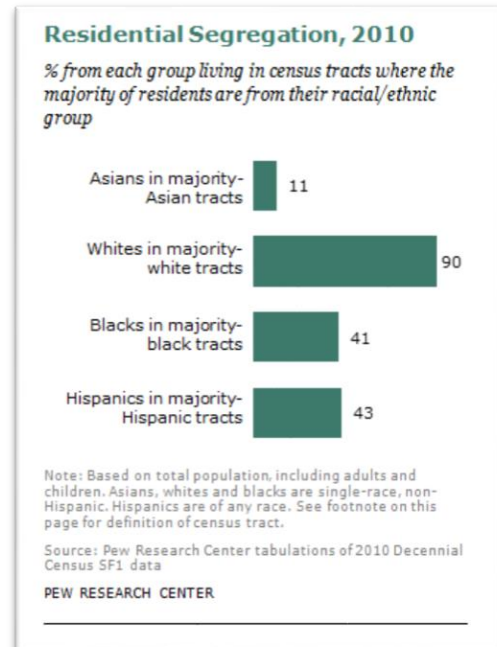
In the article, Social Isolation and Loneliness among Elderly Immigrants: The Case of South Asian Elderly Living in Canada, Abul Hossen argued the paradox of individual

and communal views of one's situation, and more so individualism vs collectivism. Using this model, Hossen traced the changing roles of the family unit and defined why different generations struggle more with



isolation and in summary outlines a few key things that are policy oriented solutions to this problem, of which social activities, education, and training were all mentioned. (Hossen 2012, 3-7)

According to Pew, language fluency was an area of challenge for those who are native born (95%) vs foreign born (53%). As solutions are defined to help assimilate immigrant populations, this will continue to be an important issue to address. *The Chinese were among the first to immigrate to the United States during the California gold rush and today are the largest population (23%) of Asian Americans.* (Pew 2015)



Assimilation did not go too well with the first wave of immigration and the resulting Chinatowns are a clear indication. However, today we do not see the same level of residential segregation for Asians, with the mass majority living in integrated communities. In some cases, this integration reinforces the isolation, especially if the community lacks the infrastructure to support immigrant populations, and the immigrant is not sufficiently capable of assimilating to the community.

This brings us to the crux of the challenge: we need to find a common language to bridge communities, and educate in both directions. It is through this mutual understanding and earned respect, that deeper and more meaningful ties can be developed.

Why is this important to me? Dance has power and impact. It has voice and audiences. Having seen choreographers in the United States use dance as their voice to direct political impact through differentiation and shock, I wanted to do it differently – to use dance as a tool to build awareness and commonality.

I chose not to make dance to present issues faced by Chinese-Americans. Instead I directed my voice to represent my background as a Chinese dancer and to engage both the Chinese-American and non-Chinese audiences. I wanted to show my culture and allow this to be present in my dance. I wanted to produce strong dance shows incorporating the foundation I learned through Chinese classical dance, folk dance, and dance drama, to **earn respect** from people instead of merely expecting, or more likely in today's world, demanding respect.

As we earn respect for who we are, we share our story and ignorance gives way to understanding. Involving the local Chinese-American community in my thesis project was a cornerstone of my plan from the very beginning.

Movement Research

Modern Dance

One important thing I learned through my modern dance studies at UMD is that modern dance has a very broad meaning. It is a theory and concept of dance, unlike Chinese classical dance which is a specific dance form. Modern began to develop into a dance form in the United States and Europe in the late 19th century. The viewpoint of aesthetics is against the disconnect in real-life and the formalism of simple pursuit of technique in classical ballet. Liu contended that modern dance was difficult to define because in modern dance history, people created their dance and did not all follow the same rules or even a common model. (Liu 2004, 5-6) They followed the development of the times, continuously breaking away from traditions, discovering new meaning and function of dance in a contemporary view. This process challenged the traditional western dance culture to create modern dance. Furthermore, Liu argued that the concept of modern dance was not important; what modern dance artists did by the concept of modern dance was important. (Liu 2004, 5-6)

In China, more and more modern dances have included traditional Chinese culture. And more and more traditional Chinese dances have included more modern elements beyond what would have been found in the traditional Chinese dance order. (Xu 2014, 1)

Modern dance evolution in China has been a slow journey. In the early 20th century, Xiaobang Wu and Ailian Dai introduced modern dance based on training from the west and established a new modern dance theory in China. However, during that time, Chinese dance development was mostly influenced by the Soviet Union and eastern Europe; the

main dance forms in China were Chinese traditional dance (folk dance) and ballet. It was not until the more recent times that American modern dance theory formally entered China's dance world. In the past 30 years, modern dance has developed into a unique dance form in China but is still not the mainstream dance form.

An interesting phenomenon has been the growth in how Chinese modern dancers have incorporated Chinese dance and culture into modern dance creation. At the same time, more and more traditional Chinese dance works have included modern dance theory in movement creation, music choices, costume and visual design. Because of this, the need to distinguish modern dance and Chinese dance became more evident and a new set of terminology was created. This new terminology was neither modern dance nor Chinese dance but a mix of undefined dance forms, Chinese contemporary dance. It is not a dance form per se but is used to define the undefinable dance forms. I found the similarities of Chinese contemporary dance and modern dance interesting.

The definition of Contemporary Chinese dance, which here refers to the range of forms recognized and practiced by the professional dance community in the People's Republic of China, is usually divided into two large categories: First, there is Chinese dance (中国舞蹈, or sometimes 民族舞蹈), which includes Chinese classical dance (Zhongguo gudianwu 中国古典舞), Chinese folk dance (Zhongguo minjian wudao 中国民间舞蹈), Chinese ethnic minority dance (Zhongguo shaoshu minzu wudao 中国少数民族舞蹈¹¹), Chinese military dance (Zhongguo junli wudao 中国军旅舞蹈), and Chinese revolutionary ballet (Zhongguo geming baleiwu 中国革命芭蕾舞); second, there is non- Chinese or "Western" dance (西方舞蹈), which includes ballet (baleiwu 芭蕾舞), Western character dance (xifang xingge wudao 西方性格舞), modern dance (xiandaiwu 现代舞),¹² international-style competitive ballroom dance or dancesport (guobiaowu 国标舞), jazz (jueshiwu 爵士舞), hip-hop/street dance

(jiewu 街舞), and so on.¹³ In 1957, the first and most lasting disciplinary division took place at the Beijing Dance School. Known as fenke (分科), or “dividing the disciplines,” this division broke the school into two separate programs, one called Chinese National Dance-Drama (中国民族舞剧科) and the other European Ballet Dance-Drama (欧洲芭蕾舞剧科).¹⁴ In 2009, these distinctions still existed at the Beijing Dance Academy and its affiliated professional dance secondary school. (Wilcox 2012, 213)

Chinese Classical Dance

Wilcox wrote about the beginnings of modern style dance in China through a narrative about the life of Sun Ying. Sun pushed the boundaries of dance during a time of change in China. With the installation of the Communist Party following the People’s Revolution, there was a national effort to create a new form of dance, that in some ways suppressed the Chinese dance that was known to so many. From this sprang a drive to create a Chinese nationalistic dance experience. Wilcox quotes an early teacher in this Chinese nationalistic movement, Xiong Jiatai, in a way that helps to define a connection to dance that is very real for many Chinese people today, especially middle-aged individuals who lived through the changes during the 50’s and 60’s in China.

Wilcox further defined the concept of Chineseness, a connection between dance and culture in China in a way that might be hard to understand in a society that for years claimed to be the great melting pot of cultures. *Chineseness serves as an inherent part of the creative logic of all dance forms in China, since it is the most basic categorizing principle used in contemporary Chinese dance.* (Wilcox 2012, 213)

Zhongguo gudianwu (Chinese classical dance) was created in the 1950s as a national dance form that was meant to be a Chinese alternative to European classical ballet. In the accepted

historiography, the earliest efforts to create Zhongguo gudianwu are attributed to three individuals: Korean dancer Ch'oe Sŭng-hŭi (Chinese name Cui Chengxi 崔承喜 1911–1969),¹⁶ Chinese theater expert Ouyang Yuq-ian (欧阳予倩 1889–1962), and Chinese dance education specialist Ye Ning (叶宁 b. 1919). In 1950–1954, with the support of the Chinese Ministry of Culture, Ch'oe, Ouyang, and Ye helped established and lead gudianwu research groups at major performing arts institutions in Beijing, including the Beijing People's Art Theater Dance Troupe, the Central Drama Academy, and the Beijing Dance Academy. Members of these groups conducted research on indigenous Chinese performance and martial arts with the goal of developing a unified and distinctively Chinese system for dance training and choreography. (Wilcox 2012, 214)

Because of the effort to establish China's national dance and history rejecting foreign dance forms, the adoption and development of modern dance in China has been slow. The mainstream Chinese dance form in China is Chinese classical dance and Chinese folk dance. Most schools mix Chinese classical and folk dance into one major with Chinese classical dance providing the foundation technique classes and Chinese folk dance incorporated into performance practice classes. Chinese classical dance is a specific definition of dance form that has the same training system and terminology. I started Chinese classical dance at Shanxi Drama Vocational College 山西戏剧职业学院 in 2003 after four years of training in ballet technique. The training systems between the two are very similar with strict rules about the quality and level of the technique. Between 2007-2011, I performed in multiple productions of Chinese classical dance and Chinese folk dance that toured over 100 cities and included over 1,000 stage performances. In 2011, after years of studying Chinese classical dance and working for a dance company, I lost interest in dance. It had become monotonous, every day the training was the same, the performing was the same. So, I decided to pursue my Master of Education.

After assimilating and completing my degree in the United States, I realized that something was missing. Dance. I realized that I loved dance, but did not like to do the same thing every day. That I wanted to create dance, not just execute someone else's choreography. I wanted to study modern dance and I wanted to define my own voice in dance.

Chinese Classical + Modern = My Aesthetic

My first movement research project to combine Chinese classical dance and modern dance was *Ink*, which I created during my second semester of choreography class with Sara Pearson, associate professor at the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies. It was a collaboration project with Quinn Dizon, PhD in music candidate at University of Maryland. When I started this project, I had the idea to combine the movement vocabulary from two dance forms. However, at that time, I had limited modern dance experience. I started to review my modern dance experiences through my technique classes and rehearsals at UMD incorporating Chinese classical dance technique as I felt appropriate.

In my first-year modern dance study, I took technique class with Professor Adriane Fang and Katie Sopoci Drake, interviewed other professors and students, and participated in four UMD productions including: 2015 thesis concert *Noam Chiem* by Sinclair Ogaga Emoghene, 2015 faculty concert *rapture* by PEARSONWIDRIG DANCETHEATER, NextLOOK project *Un Castell built for two* by Orange Grove Dance, and 2016 thesis concert *Invoking Justice* by Curtis Stedge. Each professor brought their own unique style and vocabulary into their technique class at UMD. Each choreographer built their movement vocabulary in their production differently.

I have performed *Ink* on several stages in different cities. While it has won accolades and awards, what has been most important to me is the acceptance of this dance, which began with my own unique movement research. The acceptance has come from Chinese and non-Chinese audiences as well as those who have traditional and modern dance backgrounds. This was just what I had hoped to do in creating a dance aesthetic that would bring people together as opposed to divide them. The success of *Ink* launched me deeper into my research.

I decided to study with professor Patrik Widrig, head of MFA dance program at UMD, through an independent movement research class the first semester of my second-year MFA program. This class was the catalyst for my thesis concert movement creation. Meanwhile, I took technique classes with Christopher K. Morgan and Patrik Widrig. In the beginning of my movement research study, my focus was only on movement itself. Both dance forms were too big to study fully in the context of the thesis. I started to find the connection by understanding the difference in technique between these two dance forms. I followed a methodology of defining, reviewing, and studying the elements from the two dance forms through movement experimentation. I conducted movement creation through movement research.

- Reviewed Chinese classical dance.
- Defined the key elements from Chinese classical dance that I wanted to insert into modern dance.
- Took modern dance class, reviewed my learning experiences of modern dance.
- Combined key elements into modern dance by improvisation, movement development, and building a new movement phrase or combination.

Review Chinese Classical Dance

The development of Chinese classical dance was based on ballet, Chinese traditional opera, and Chinese martial art. Ballet and Chinese classical dance have similar barre and floor exercise systems. Even the jumps and pirouettes are the same. The differences are in the details of the body posture. Chinese classical dance has its own hand position and body pose that developed from Chinese traditional opera. The straight alignment is the core of the body but is not always kept straight.

I conducted a Chinese classical dance technique class for myself, reviewed my technique movement, and evaluated myself in terms of technique level. The reason I wanted to review my Chinese classical dance technique was that the process would help me to define more specific Chinese classical dance technique or movement to incorporate into modern dance technique. In this process, I captured things that were interesting to explore and that I did not see often in my modern classes including jumping, lightly landing, and balancing.

Compare Modern Dance Technique

My earlier modern dance technique class was focused on body coordination and weight support exercise. Floor movement was the major difference compared to my Chinese classical dance training. I also never danced or moved with bare feet in Chinese classical dance class. In Chinese classical dance, floor movement is just the transition that connects one movement to another. In my UMD modern technique class, floor movement existed unto itself. Another difference was that the core of the body in Chinese classical dance is located at the abdomen. The abdomen leads the entire body to move. In Morgan's

modern technique class, movement involved various joints leading the body to move. For example, the movement would start from the shoulder or the movement would start from the hip joint. The movement started from a joint then led the entire body into moving and transitioning to another joint, and so on. It was very challenging for me because it changed the core and alignment in Chinese classical dance movement.

After reviewing my modern dance technique class experience, I defined unique things that I found interesting to experiment with and incorporate into my research ideas including: jumping and lightly landing into modern movement, using weight support/balance from classical dance into modern floor work, leading body movement with joints, and breathing support. Most importantly, I incorporated a sense of freedom in my mind, one by one challenging the Chinese classical dance rules of my foundation, and moving anyway that I wanted to move.

Weight Support in Floor Movement

When I started to insert weight support ideas into modern dance floor movement, I started at a slow speed allowing me to process fully the movement through my thinking process. The weight support from Classical dance uses muscle control to maintain balance. I found it interesting from my modern dance technique class that some floor work transition from movement to movement is very smooth. My theory in this experiment was to feel my body in the movement that came from modern dance. In Chinese classical dance, my focus was always external – how my body physically looked when I moved. In modern dance, my focus had become more internal – how my body felt when I moved. Experiencing my body was a new big concept. When I was moving, more ideas from both dance forms were continually surfacing. I decided to use the water flow movement from Chinese classical

dance, meaning the movement should be smooth like water with continuous character. It requires more muscle control to keep the body in balance and moving smoothly. After combining all the ideas, the movement was very nice. After a few crossings of the floor, I realized my movement was maintaining a horizontal plane. I tried to change the horizontal pathway to a vertical circle plane pathway. In the vertical circle plane pathway, my body could transition between upper and lower levels. The decision to go with a vertical circle plane pathway could lead to facing forward or backward. When facing forward, by keeping the water movement, the most challenging movement was after rolling over the floor with my head. I had to use other parts of the body to make sure my lower back landed on the floor lightly to maintain the whole movement smoothly. The challenge of facing backward was to decide whether to use my hands or shoulders to touch the floor, then immediately transfer my weight through the hands or shoulders to allow my knees or feet to touch the floor to maintain a smooth transition. I also experienced the degree of back flexibility required in this process.

Balance

Based on my experimenting in the weight support section, balance was another element supporting my body to move in a stable way. The more balance the smoother I could transfer one movement to another. When I was working on my very fast movement changing section at the end of my solo *Dancing in the Closet*, I realized that balance support and quick decisions were the key factors to help me maintain the fast tempo. Of course, weight and breath support were the major physical factors to support the movement as well.

I used the concepts of balance from classical dance and implemented a routine of practice to improve muscle control to support the body and stay balanced; building muscle

memory for the body to quickly find balance during active movement. In classical dance, movements are connected through stillness and keeping the body stable in stillness. Being able to stay stable in stillness requires coordination of the entire body using muscle control to manage weight, find balance, and stay in balance. It also requires the dancer to quickly make decisions to define the balance and stay stable. In terms of landing with stability, the dancer needs to understand that the landing process on the feet is toes-ball-entire feet-knees-hips to transfer weight into a balance position.

Shape

While experimenting with movement in the studio, I was inspired by a painting of a Buddhist god. In each Buddhist god painting or sculpture, the god has a very beautiful shape pose. These poses are also often seen in Chinese classical dance.



I started to make these god body shapes and would then transfer from one to another using the above described weight shift and balance theory. I had a completely new experience through this process. I deeply felt my body and deeply process the transition in my mind. I felt how my muscles and bones were supporting me to transition between shapes. In this

process, I could communicate with my body and feel the weight support process and balance process. I understood my body's ability to move and its limitations, then I would break the limitation. It was a fantastic experience. I was in the studio moving with this shape idea and never felt bored of it. After this, I created *Shape*.

Shape involves a higher-level engagement with space and gravity; greater muscle control to stay in balance and maintain the exercise; more endurance to be focused; and more flexibility to expand the range of the movement space.

My Theory of Difference

To me the main difference between modern and Chinese classical dance theory is the freedom from rules.

Rules. My Chinese classical dance technique classes started with rules. Everything had a rule. I had to wear ballet shoes. I had to be quiet when walking or landing from any type of jump. My toes always needed to be pointed or flexed based on the movement. The knees always needed to be straight or bent, there was no such thing as being in the middle. Each body part had specific posture and direction. Muscles were always to be tightened. All the dancers in class were to demonstrate the movement in the exact same way by the rules or it was incorrect.

Freedom. My modern dance technique class began with no such rules. I had freedom. I freed my feet of ballet shoes and allow them to be bare. I felt the temperature of the floor. I made sounds when I breathed. I inserted my own characteristic into class movement materials and recreated them through my own understanding. I created my own movement vocabulary instead of just learning the movement vocabulary from the textbook.

It was as if I had a blank sheet of white paper on which I could decide how and what to draw. I liberated my body from the rules in Chinese classical dance and began to create my movement vocabulary. I moved the way I wanted to move. I communicated with my body and felt how it moved. I heard my breathing and sensed the energy through my body when I moved. I stopped worrying about the rules and whether or not my toes were pointed.

To study both dance forms in their entirety would be immense. They provide me with an unlimited array of ideas to research. Thus far, I have been defining the elements based on my experience from both dance genres. In this process, I learned that the purpose of combining these two dances forms has been for me to create my own aesthetics of who I am as a Chinese dancer. I realized that Chineseness not only came from Chinese classical dance but other dance forms in China. Within an overarching category of Chinese dance, Chinese folk dances represent 56 ethnic groups. They have been a resource supporting my movement research.

Soul

I was shocked to learn how much politics plays into the theme of dance in the Washington, DC area. In China, art it is not allowed to present content related to politics or any politically sensitive topic. Many movies are produced and never shown publicly in China because of the content. Same for music, theater, and dance. All art productions need to go through the evaluation process and possible censorship before being published. In 2006, after spending months preparing with a guest choreographer for the New Year Gala hosted in Taiyuan, we were informed two nights before the performance that the show was not approved because male dancers played the roles of female dancers. The evaluation team thought that it was not healthy for people to see this portrayal. This is just one of my personal experiences. While most would not agree with the evaluation process in China, there is one positive aspect – art is produced on its technical merits, not on the political statement. At times, the opposite appears to be true in the United States – art is produced for the political statement promoting one's beliefs regardless of its merit as art.

Where Is My Voice

I have often been questioned about why I choose to not add a political overtone to my works. People not only would question but they could not relate to my decision to keep dance at the center of my choreography. In 2016, I auditioned for the Choreographers' Showcase in Prince George's County with a piece I was still developing in order to receive the professional feedback in preparation for presenting it onstage a few months later. It was a three-section group piece that had no political content. I received the following feedback from adjudicator Leah Cox.

Overall, this work seems like a solo with backup dancers and I struggle to understand how the additional dancers in the work feel essential. On one level, this is a choreographic problem and on another level, it's an ethical issue. Why ask people to give their time and labor to a work in which they are essentially held captive and rendered impotent? Of course, dances need not feature all performers equally. However, it is important that each performer be doing more than provide the occasion for a soloist. At the level of the political, this is no different than a dictatorship masquerading as a democracy. I encourage you to make the solo, or to figure out how the dancers other than the Asian man can exist as more valuable. (Cox 2016)



The piece I auditioned was a section from a draft version of my production *Another Side of You*. I was surprised at the tone of the feedback. I had hoped to receive criticism that would help me improve. I was disappointed not that the piece was not well received, but that I realized that while in the United States there is great creative freedom, politics run deep. In many ways, I felt the same as how Cox described my piece, this showcase was masquerading as a dictatorship, reinforcing support for those who choose to play a certain

game. In China, there was no masquerading as a democracy. If one presented non-political art, evaluations were clear and direct and based on the quality of the art and not subjective opinions.

I chose to become even more focused on the artistic value of dance. For a period, I stopped making dance with any content or meaning and focused only on movement. Initially, I did not have a story line for *Equinox & Solstice*. I only wanted to make a dance with good visual experiences that would engage the audience and share Chinese culture.

During my independent study, I created a solo which I planned to include in *Equinox & Solstice*. After I showed the last draft of my solo, Patrik Widrig asked me about its deeper meaning. I was not sure how to answer as it had no meaning and I did not feel there needed to be meaning. He suggested that I review my process for when I created another solo - *Dancing in the Closet*. I did... I reviewed my creative process, felt the feeling of dancing it, the feeling of sharing a message with the audience. I told myself, yes, I need meaning in my dance. It does not need be the “big meaning” like *Dancing in the Closet*, but I need meaning in my dance. *Dancing in the Closet* is a very detailed dance for me in terms of movement. Each movement has a deeper meaning. I feel the meaning when dancing it every time. The moment I looked at my fingers. The moment I shifted my weight. The moment I crossed the floor. No matter how many times I have performed it, no matter when or where I danced it, I feel that it has a deeper meaning to me. I remember the deep connection between each movement and my body. Each movement has a story and feeling that touched me deeply. I was telling my story. I was sharing something about me. I remember friends coming up to me after the performance, telling me they could feel me. They could feel the story. Yes, this is the connection I want to have with my audience.

This is the piece that I have been missing. From the methodology of choreography stand point, the moment I realized this, I saw my vision for the thesis choreography start to build and move. I was only focused on the idea of combining movement, but I forgot a basic component of the way I make dance. If I have a deeper story or meaning in my thesis, the theme will drive my choreography to keep moving. How to make it more meaningful? What is going to be the story more than just four seasons? Paul Jackson, UMD faculty member, commented after a showing that I should “go deeper than beautiful.” In my desire to avoid making a political story, I forgot to have a meaningful reason in my dance.

Creating a Story Line

After nearly seven years of living in the United States and having daily conversations with people including some who have taught Chinese dance classes both in the community and universities, I realized that most people do not recognize that China is a very diverse country. The Chinese nation includes 56 ethnic groups called Minzu. These ethnic groups are located all over China and each ethnic group has their own unique cultures, traditions, beliefs, and even languages.

I was raised by my grandparents. My grandmother is Protestant, my grandfather is Catholic, my mother is Buddhist, and my father is Unitarian in that he only believes in science. The community where I lived in my hometown of Changzhi is a Muslim area. I went to a middle school where 90% of my classmates and friends were Muslim. My grandmother was a leader in the Christian community and would often host bible study at her home. I remember the police would often visit to stop the bible study and disperse those who were there. My grandmother taught me the value of freedom and the importance of respecting others with different beliefs. I did not understand the reasons for different beliefs

but I knew one big area of difference was what each believed happened after death. Each believed that we would go to different places after we died because each had faith in different gods. I felt the difference in beliefs was great because we were so young.

My view of death has changed. I was always scared of death. I never wanted to face it. Not just for myself, but also to see other people face it, especially my family. I continued to think the beliefs were very different until my family members began facing the realities of death.

The first time I bravely looked at death was during the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008. Over 80,000 people died. The entire country tried to give support in any way they could. Photos of dead bodies appeared over social media. I could finally keep my eyes open and face these images of death. The number of bodies without souls hit me so hard that I was numb. The only help I could offer for people who were struggling was to pray. I saw the power of nature and the fragility of lives.

The first time that I embraced death as a natural part of the cycle of life was in the production of *rapture* with the PEARSONWIDRIG DANCETHEATER. The rehearsal and performance experience changed the way I looked at death and life after death. I never wanted to face it because I did not want to accept it. I never wanted to face that one of my family members would die and that one day I would die as well. I had not even thought about it; I avoided at all costs. Death is so dark, but in *rapture* it was so humorous. I now accept that death is in fact part of the natural cycle. It is indiscriminate and everyone must deal with it someday. I was forced to face death when I was dancing in *rapture*. We were jumping, singing, screaming, thinking, playing, and supporting each other. I am not scared about death anymore, because the black memory of death was replaced with all the

beautiful images, movements, and laughter. It my view has changed and death is now peaceful.

During the last two years, I have been dealing with health issues of my grandparents, parents, and even myself. I prayed, I feared, I cried, I passed out on the floor with the loss of senses and vision after I reached out to support my mother, but the feeling of suffocation caused me to crash so hard physically that it sucked me into a deep hopeless hole. I remember them, I remember these feelings.

In Buddhism, people believe life is a metempsychosis process. When people die, they will start a new life. This life could be as a human with a good or bad life, or even not as a human at all. It depends on the person's past life. The soul may be starting a new life in a new body, go to hell, or start life over as an animal.

To create my thesis story line, I decided to put myself in the frame of mind of facing death and to make it into a dance; to honor and appreciate the diversity of religions; to let more people know about Chinese dance; and to build my own voice of my dance as an artist.

Performance Content

Drowning to Death



The house lights dim. The theater is dark and quiet. The male voice carries Tibetan song in a cappella style through the theater. The voice is very limpid. It feels far away from a Tibetan mountain. On the red grand drape, a projection of flowing water is slowly rotating. As the light of the water touches the floor, there is a man lying face down with only his legs protruding from the curtain. His torso, arms, and head are behind the curtain connecting to another world.



The grand curtain opens as the singing ends. The first image is that of the man being held tightly around the upper body, pushing his chest upward, breaking his back, by a second man, representing a ghost of the Dark Impermanence in Buddhism. The stage is full of blue light, giving the impression of being deep under water. The man is struggling as his life passes before his eyes. Does he try to fight and live, or accept his fate and go with the Dark Impermanence into the afterlife. As he fights for his life, he loses more and more energy. Wherever he goes, the ghost is there, pushing him, throwing him in the air allowing him to fall to the floor, all part of a plan to take every bit of energy from the man, until he succumbs to the power. Finally, the ghost grabs the man's head and snaps his neck,

sealing his fate. The man falls to the floor, in the same spot as he was when the grand curtain opened and the stage becomes dark with water flowing around his body.



He had never moved. The violent and vivid dancing on the stage was happening in his mind. His dead body floating in the water is the beginning of the story, starting with death... the stage goes dark for five seconds.



Following the God



The god wearing a traditional Tibetan red garment illuminated by a glowing yellow light from the top appears, standing with arms on hips and lifted elbows, over the man,

peering deeply into his soul. The floor is littered with three other dead people. Monks chanting mixed with the female Tibetan soul calling song fills the theater. Ghosts, serving the god, are linked to the souls to follow the god. The man looks up at the god and realizes that his body is no longer alive. The god turns and walks upstage and the black traveler opens showing a bright white light and haze slowly consuming the stage. The gate to the afterlife has been opened. The god leads the way as the souls roll about the stage with no self-control, drawn to the power of the god. As the final soul crosses to the afterlife, the traveler closes. The gate to the afterlife is closed. The stage becomes dark once again. The journey of the soul has begun.



Water



After a brief two seconds of darkness, the stage is again engulfed in blue light, the first dancer, wearing a white Chinese coat with a water painting design is upstage left,

slowly rotating with the rippling water at her feet. Then a second dancer enters the stage walking towards the first. With each step, the water moves with her. The dancers represent water, one of the five elements of Chinese feng shui in the afterlife. They are delicate as they walk and jump across the stage. Their transitions and movements follow the smooth flowing of the water. As one dancer slowly completes a back arch and the second dancer circles her, the stage goes dark for four seconds.

Fire



A deep voice chants and a yellow spotlight shines center stage. Fire sparks fill the stage, emanating from the floor and appearing throughout as the red light takes hold. Four dancers in black enter the stage and begin circling the spotlight to build the fire energy. The beat of the natural drum and synthesized music increases in tempo as the energy grows in intensity. Each dancer on cue enters the spotlight and performs acrobatic like movements to the energy of the music. As the energy builds, the dancers consume the entire stage

traveling as they jump, turn, flip, butterfly, and slide to build the quality of the fire element in feng shui. With a harsh ending the dancers crash to the floor and the stage goes dark.



Mud

Suddenly a red-yellow spotlight appears behind the string curtain upstage left where five dancers wearing vibrant red costumes and red lipstick stand with their hands on their hips, elbows raised, and backs slightly arched. Mud, a third element in Feng shui, begins to flow down the string curtain to the floor. The dancers begin to move, twisting their upper bodies as they maintain eye contact with the audience. They break through the curtain. As they travel the stage, they leave mud marks. The dancers fall and roll, with sharp turns of the head to keep focus on the audience, then they return to rolling and supporting each other as they move. Soon the stage is consumed with their mud drippings created by projection design. The dancers repeat the initial movements downstage right as the light fades from red to dark.





Bodies



A flower appears on center stage. A female dancer enters from upstage center into the spotlight wearing a shear top and shorts. Once she reaches the light she falls to the floor. The second dancer follows the same path, enters the spotlight, and falls to the floor. The third, fourth, and fifth dancers do the same. Finally, the sixth dancer approaches from upstage center and enters the spotlight, falling on the bodies of those before him. A spotlight illuminates the six entangled bodies on the floor. The stage is still and quiet as the bodies are dead. The bodies begin to move under the light in a slow, consistent manner, supporting each other with a high level of contact. They do not know why they are moving. They are just dead bodies.



Suddenly there is a light from stage left that attracts the attention of the bodies. They look at the light and slowly begin to move towards it. They do not know why because they are bodies with no thought and can only feel the attraction of the light. As the bodies

move to the new light, the spotlight from above tracks their movement. The bodies are still intertwined and they move in a supportive manner, some pulling, some pushing, so all reach the new light, even if there is no reason to do so. Little by little, the light goes to dark. The stage is back to the silence of death with dead bodies.

Ghost Fire



A dancer wearing a white costume, illuminated directly with a handheld flashlight, enters from stage left. The black traveler opens to reveal a white background, creating a totally white stage with no light other than the flashlight. She is twisting from the core as she travels with quiet piano music playing. As the light from the flashlight hits the floor, the dead bodies are still visible. Four more dancers enter stage right one by one.



The ghosts travel around the stage, changing direction, moving as if they were lingering in a room, passing through the string curtain as if it were a solid wall. Their shadows are seen throughout the stage as some ghosts are visible only in the emptiness of space.



The dancers congregate upstage left awaiting the imminent storm. Music builds with a strong natural drum. The summer storm crashes on the ghost fire dancers, pushing them apart, and they struggle to reunite. In the afterlife, there is conflict just as we know today. The ghost fire travels to upstage right and aggregate their energy, the zoom of the flashlight changes and the battle with the storm is over. The stage goes dark.



Reunion



As the storms of summer give way to the change of air in the fall, the music emulates a soft breeze passing through a wind chime. Two dancers facing each other slowly enter stage left and travel to the center. They are two bodies that for this brief moment

regain their memories. They recognize each other, lovers before death. The dance is bittersweet as the lotus flowers fill the air. This is their last reunion before they begin again the cycle of life. A god enters the stage from the audience, standing powerfully with hands on hips, elbows raised, and back slightly arched. Each of her steps are heard throughout the theater.



Winter Wood



Just as the god ends the last memory, she calls all other souls to the stage as she captures their energy to help propel them on the final step to the new life. The ghosts also enter the stage to support the god. The music increases and the god's energy builds to a cumulating point and there is an explosion. The bodies repeat a motion of back arches falling to the floor over and over. The god begins to call the bodies to the center as she stands in a yellow spotlight while imagery of bamboo and snow of winter is projected. The season of Winter and the element of wood in feng shui are represented. The bodies begin to encircle the god. The god raises them from the floor, the bodies are vertically twisting into a back arch, while moving around the god.



She is controlling their every movement. The dancers continue their movement until their souls escape their bodies which slowly fall to the ground.



Creative Concept

Drowning to Death

This dance was based on a solo that I developed during my independent study in the fall to combine Chinese classical and modern dance. I invited Huiwang Zhang from the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company in New York City to join my cast, but we were not sure about his schedule and if he would be able to join. So, I developed this section that could either be performed as a solo or a duet.

My thinking process was focused on how to create a dance that would allow the audience to connect with death. I chose words to insert into this dance such as dying, exhaustion, suffocation, falling, and fighting. With each of these words in mind, I would use dance to push my body to its limits to convey the meaning to the audience. I wanted the audience to feel emotion through my body movement, to feel the last moment. When my body fell to the floor it was not that I was acting and throwing myself on the floor, but rather I had expelled all my physical energy and could go no further. I wanted the audience to feel this as well.

From solo to duet... just three weeks before the opening, Huiwang committed to the thesis. I had his commitment and knew this was going to be a duet. I spent time to evaluate both myself and Huiwang as dancers. We both have similar dance training backgrounds from Chinese classical to modern dance. I needed to know how we would interact to choreograph the full movement that would build on individual strengths and still convey strong meaning to the audience. That, to me was paramount.

Huiwang and I met in the studio. I presented the dance as a solo so he could understand the concept. I cast myself as the person dying in the water and Huiwang as the ghost who was there to take my soul to the afterlife. To complete the duet, we experimented using partnering to determine how far we could go in the dance. We experimented with Huiwang lifting me, throwing me to the floor, supporting me.

His role of the ghost is an observer of my death, to make certain that I die in the end. Huiwang is free of all emotion during the dance, whereas I am the person dying and full of emotion. The rehearsal process was every effective as we finalized this dance in only three rehearsal hours.

Following the God

Since I was a child I have had a visual image of the transition that happens when someone dies and begins the journey of the dead, when the soul and body separate. There are three roles in this dance: god, souls, and ghosts.

I decided to use Tibetan Red for the costume of the god to connect to my Chinese roots, but I also wanted to be careful to not define the god as part of any single religion. I defined the role of the ghost to support the god and decided to use body contact between the ghosts and the souls to create the image for the audience, starting downstage and moving upstage to demonstrate the journey following the god. The souls do not necessarily want to move but were consumed by the power of the god with the help of the ghosts. I used a consistent slow-motion movement to demonstrate this.

Since this dance was set to be between the real world and the afterlife, I often visualized this as a tunnel. I wanted to have a dark stage with a bright light upstage to

signify the gate to the afterlife. The gate opened to break down the darkness for the audience and give a glimpse of the afterlife. Working with the lighting designer, I realized that while I thought the light should be a yellow tone, it was presented as a white light. I attribute this to a difference in how the afterlife is perceived in western vs eastern cultures. I decided to not change this because I wanted to connect with the audience.

Water

Even though *Equinox & Solstice* is a ghost story, I wanted the audience to embrace the story without feeling uncomfortable or scared about the content. I chose water as the first image of the afterlife because I wanted to signify peace.

Water, reflecting one of the five elements, was designed as the sole section mostly built from Chinese classical dance. I thought it was important to have a section that presented the concept of Chinese classical dance for the audience to experience. I placed it early in the performance to set the stage for the other sections because my choreography and dance style has grown from Chinese classical dance to modern dance.

Initially I did not have a specific image for the lighting but saw the dancers wearing white costumes with images of Chinese paintings on the white floor.

I chose to use costumes that highlighted the Chineseness in this section; silk-like so they would flow as characteristically as water and classical dance. I wanted the costumes to be white and incorporate traditional Chinese ink paintings.

Fire

In the Chinese dance drama production model there is typically a section that highlights Chinese dance technique. It is not always meaningful in terms of plot, but it is intended to build a connection with the audience.

This section was not in my initial plan for the performance. I had defined *Ghost Fire* which would address the element of fire and provide energy, however as I worked through the process, I wanted to interject an even higher energy section to engage the audience and incorporate a technical yet playful dance to lighten the mood since the story line has a heavy theme of ghosts and death. This would allow the audience to associate more easily with the visuals of both sections since *Fire* incorporated the expected red color whereas *Ghost Fire* used white.

Thinking about fire itself my senses embraced energy, heat, and red color: fire brings energy to life. However, in Buddhism, fire is also associated with Hell, burning people who did bad things in their past life, burning their souls. I decided to use the heat and color for the design aspects and high energy as the movement, avoiding the focus of the negative views of fire. I wanted a circle spotlight to highlight the core of the fire to gather the energy of the dancers.

Mud

Representing the element of Earth, *Mud* in my vision was to be a group dance. Just as with a clump of mud, the dancers could separate from the group, but could also rejoin the group. With the soft texture of mud as my inspiration, I designed the dance movement to start from the core and use the body to build different shapes. I used sharp timing changes

to bring the movement into focus. I used an image of a female god in Buddhism for inspiration. In Chinese mythology, it is believed the Chinese people were created by a female god who made clay figures and gave them life.

I had a strong vision of bright red costumes for this section with yellow light from above to create a visual experience for the audience, using red to elicit excitement, especially since I had not seen red used often in modern dance productions. In Buddhism, when a female kills herself by hanging wearing bright red clothing, they will not follow the typical path of the afterlife, but rather will be cursed to remain on Earth as a devil ghost with strong power, seeking vengeance. I had mixed feelings about using red as opposed to a more traditional mud-like color but decided to follow my inspiration to build an abstract visual experience of the mud.

Bodies

I was initially planning to call this section *Birth* but decided to change the focus to be about the body independent of the soul. This was important for two reasons. First, I did not want to confuse the audience with the concept of birth as in the beginning of life. And second, I wanted to present a visual of the body since many of the sections use dance to present abstractly the five elements.

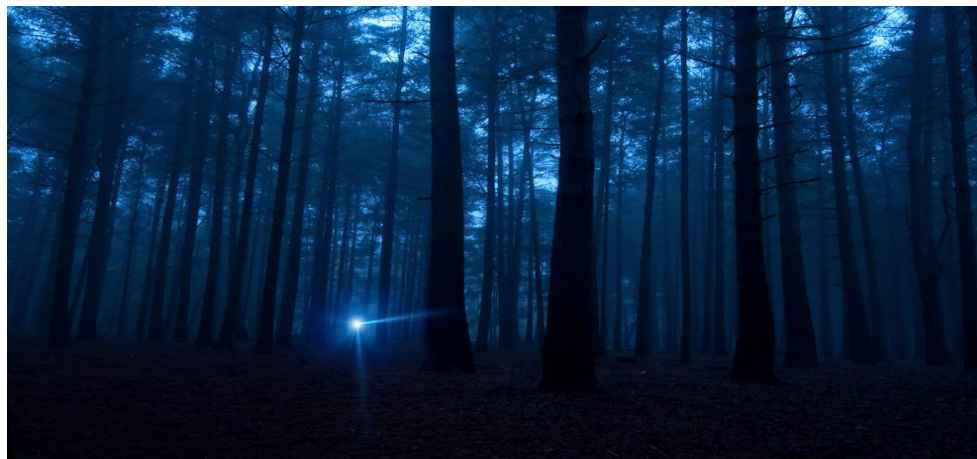
My plan was to build *Birth* based on the solo *Desire* from *Another Side of You*, a piece that focuses on body shapes. The inspiration was the Chinese folk dance Dai and I liked the idea of adding new life into the ghost story theme of my thesis and *Desire* has an image of the mystery of life. I thought it would fit well into my thesis. But instead of a solo, I planned to develop it into a duet, two dancers using their bodies to build different shapes reflecting the new gift of life.

While creating the movement in the studio, my vision evolved. Starting with crossing the floor and improvising, I inserted partnering and weight sharing and supporting, building body shapes, and responding. I liked the movement quality, the slowness, and smooth continuous transitions. This would provide contrast to other sections that have fast and abrupt movements.

Incorporating improvisation into the production offered an opportunity to blend Chinese classical dance and modern dance. I decided to rename this section *Bodies* and add more dancers to make a group piece - dancers of all skin colors to use their bodies to build different shapes, sharing weight, supporting each other, laying on each other. They would be bodies with or without soul, with no facial expression, just human bodies.

Ghost Fire

After successfully using flashlights in *Another Side of You*, I decided to create a new dance using them. The flashlights' limited range of light created a visual effect for the audience. The inspiration for this new dance was the will-o'the-wisp, or what in Chinese we call the ghost fire, that appear in areas where people have died, and represent ghosts of those buried below the ground.



The ghost fire dancers appear as flying white-blue fire balls, but I wanted a beautiful visual experience and not a scary one. I created a section where the dancers only highlighted one part of their body with the flashlight to limit the visual. The audience would only see a part of the body to represent the belief that each ghost fire is a ghost, no matter what part is seen. I designed white costumes with the white background to receive shadows and create a multidimensional space.

I introduced the concept of storms in this section to connect with the season of summer and identify that, even in the afterlife, there can be conflict.

Reunion

In the Chinese dance drama production model, a romantic duet is the central theme. I also felt that it was important to include because it would allow the audience to receive the emotion and feeling of the dance through a familiar concept. Also, it would bring the story from the abstract back into reality for the audience.

Beautiful, sweet, bitter, reunion, and separation... these were the words that led me during the creation of this section. Fall is the season of separation, memory, and emotion, so this was a natural inclusion in the inspiration. *Reunion* represents the element of gold in the resonance of reflection that is characteristic of the shiny metal surface and the reflection that the dancers embody when they remember their life together. Gold is also epitomized visually during the Fall season with the changing color of tree leaves. When I created this section, I had decided that the dancers were going to be Rose and me. Because we have a sibling-like relationship, through the process of creating we relied on our history of partnering on many duets and not passion of the moment. I did not have an emotional connection to lead my creative process. In my mind, I had an image that there was a

spotlight in the center of the stage with leaves falling and it was this image that prompted me to review an essay I wrote in 2010 called *Fly Away* which I was inspired to write when I saw the leaves falling from a tree signifying the end of life.

Winter Wood

This section was designed to represent the winter season and the wood element. I had many iterations of this section to get to the point where I felt it was both strong and powerful to bring the afterlife to closure and start a new life. I decided to use a Tibetan ritual dance as the inspiration to create a dance that would help the souls in my performance complete the last steps to reach their new life. I incorporated the concept of dancing in a circle which is a key aspect of Tibetan ritual dances where the main role dances in the center of the circle surrounded by the supporting roles. I carried the circle spotlight concept through to this section to create continuity with other sections and connection with the audience.

To accentuate the impact of power I decided to have the dancers downstage as close to the audience as possible. This was coupled with a powerful solo representing the god.

Casting and Rehearsal Process

I decided to not conduct an open casting because I wanted to select the dancers I knew could bring passion and technique to the performance. I wanted to work with dancers who knew my dance style and could commit to collaborating with me. When defining a cast, it is like defining a family. In my creative process, I choreograph movement based upon the strengths of each cast member, so it was important for me to know the capacity of each dancer and how far they could grow through the process.

I created general groups for the roles. I defined a core group of five dancers to perform in the role of ghosts in the *Mud*, *Ghost Fire*, and *Winter Wood* sections. I then defined a group that would highlight special techniques that would bridge the concepts of Chinese classical and modern dance. Third, I incorporated dancers trained in Chinese classical dance. Fourth, I defined the role of soloist for *Winter Wood*. And finally, a partner to work with me on a duet.

I knew the technical ability and personal commitment of each dancer I invited to be a part of the production. Each member of the cast brought their unique skills to a role that was defined for them. My dancers were subjects in my research methodology. I did not want my dancers to just learn the movement I created, I wanted them to bring their own characteristics into the project; therefore, I selected some with Chinese classical dance training and others with training in a wide range of western dance forms. I wanted to learn from the way that each would receive and recreate my movement vocabulary.

Rehearsals began during the fall 2017 semester. I took time initially to solicit availability from my cast and defined a schedule that would allow each of the groups to meet

independently. I brought mostly finished choreography to each rehearsal along with a few ideas to lead experimentation in the studio. Our rehearsals were very productive. We had a positive rehearsal culture where everyone was fully engaged, and the structure of the rehearsals allowed each cast member to contribute their unique talent to the process.

Group Dancers

The core group performed in group dances, however each were cast based on unique skills that they would bring to their roles.

Emily Ames – We first performed together in *rapture* and we were classmates in two modern dance technique classes. She has solid technique detail and brings theatricality into her performance.

Reyna Fox – We met my first semester in modern technique class. She is a hip hop dancer and has also trained in multiple dance forms. She was a cast member in my production *Another Side of You* and has unique talent and high energy.

Erin Lenahan – We were classmates in my first semester modern technique class and twice in advanced technique classes. She was also a cast member in my production *Another Side of You*. With strong modern technique and a wide range of ability, she has the ability work with many different types of dancers.

Daria Mozolina – We were classmates in partnering class my second year. With a background in rhythmic gymnastics and training in modern technique, she has excellent flexibility and movement quality.

Katie Nerud – We were also classmates my first semester in modern technique class as well as partnering class my second year. She was a student in my Chinese dance class.

Katie has a background in both ballet and modern and has a wide range of ability that allows her to work with many different types of dancers.

I wanted the core group to be consistent and deliver an experience of modern dance for the audience. But in terms of consistency, I did not want to have individual styles overshadowed by others. I wanted to bring my choreography into the studio and allow some level of personalization. Katie and Erin provided the foundation and Reyna, Dasha, and Emily could bring variations to the group dance based on their differing backgrounds.

This group of core dancers spent the most time with me in the rehearsal process, meeting weekly for about three months, as well as a winter intensive session, to build *Mud* and *Ghost Fire*.

Individual Dancers

The individual highlight group was structured to bridge Chinese classical and modern. My vision was to bring together a few dancers with individualistic styles and define choreography that would allow these to shine through very clearly.

Laurie Dodge – We were in many classes together, performed together multiple times, and she was in most of my productions at UMD. With training in areas from ballet and jazz to modern and contemporary, she brings high energy... a powerful strong female dancer... a fast dancer.

Shawn Stone – We were in advanced modern technique class together. It was Shawn's background in gymnastics that made him a natural member of the cast because in Chinese classical dance technique there is a strong gymnastics-like component. I also

wanted to ensure we had male dancers in the cast because the roles that I envisioned needed both male and female roles.

Huiwang Zhang – As combining Chinese classical and modern dance is the core of my thesis, engaging a dancer trained in both Chinese classical and modern was an easy decision. Huiwang has the body rhythm from Chinese classical dance that requires years of training and the strength to support me in *Drowning to Death*.

The rehearsal process for the individual dancers group did not begin until about a month prior to the opening of the show. Each of the cast members in this group had other commitments or situations that prevented us from beginning sooner. I updated my plan for this section to include times of structured improvising, based on each dancers' individual skills.

Chinese Classically Trained Dancers

Olivia Xia and Conmay Rose Du – I needed dancers trained in Chinese classical dance to execute my vision. Olivia and Rose are students at Xuejuan Dance Studio in Herndon, Virginia where I completed my MFA internship and they have each had years of Chinese classical dance training. I was also excited about engaging the local Chinese community and both Olivia and Rose, as well as their families, have been active for many years in the Northern Virginia and DC area. I knew that this would be a great way to incorporate feedback and attendance.

When I selected Olivia and Rose, I knew the level of their technique based on their training, but they had not had much Chinese classical drama performance experience which is where dancers learn the qualities of light and continual movement. *Water* was to be the

only section totally based on Chinese classical dance, and I wanted to be certain that we executed the small details well. When these qualities are missing the experience can appear to be a bit dry, so I defined the rehearsal process to walk through the choreography movement by movement with specific attention to the details.

Duet Dancers

Qi Rose Xinran – Rose and I had the same training in China and have danced on the same stage since 2008. She has the movement and performance quality of Chinese classical dance and good flexibility, but for this section Rose’s main attribute was the highly developed performance quality from her time performing in Chinese dance dramas. We have partnered in duets for many pieces and she has excellent partnering technique. She knows how to integrate muscle control and weight sharing learned in Chinese classical dance training.

The one challenge we faced in building this section was how to make it look different from the other work we had done. While we started with 80% new choreography, I received feedback that it looked like other duets. Sara Pearson challenged me to think about how to make it different even with the same choreography. Maura Keefe, associate director of the school of Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies at UMD, suggested that I play with the timing. And Alvin Mayes, head of dance performance and scholarship at UMD, provided feedback that I should look at using the body and not just the hand for support in the partnering. Rose and I took all these comments back to the studio where we experimented. In the process we were excited about the creativity that was unleashed when we incorporated the expanded use of the body in partnering.

Soloist Dancer

Amanda Fair – I needed a soloist with confidence and strong performance technique to fill the role of the god of death. While taking advanced modern technique class, Amanda got my attention. Every time she would present a phrase, she would turn the technique into a performance and insert her own emotion and detail of the movement quality. Her emotion would touch me so deeply, it would even shock me; from this point on I knew she would be the soloist for this section.

I taught Amanda the choreography and then she spent time on her own to practice. I am not certain how many times she did, but when I look back, I think every time I saw Amanda from the time of our first rehearsal to opening night, she was practicing! She embodied the role, and each time I saw her rehearsing, she had taken it to a new level. What I learned in working with Amanda was that I provided the choreography, but she made it her own, and the growth of it was limitless. The powerful, strong, and confident qualities that she brought to the solo helped me to have a new understanding of what my work could be.

Collaboration

Sound Design

Absorbing Soundtracks

Sound is often the cornerstone of my inspiration, leading my creative process. Often, I begin to process the idea of a dance from music that has touched or inspired me. Music has the power to convey the meaning of a dance to the audience, build the theme, environment, engage the audience, and impact the dancer's performance. For *Equinox & Solstice*, I wanted audience members from both Chinese and non-Chinese backgrounds to engage in the performance; to find their own connection.

As I was thinking about the Chineseness of the performance, I decided to insert drum sounds into the music as well as Chinese singing to highlight the Chinese culture. The drum is an important symbol of the spirit in Chinese culture, especially as represented in dance.

Using the same key words as for my creative concept, modern, new, and Chineseness were the terms for me to search soundtracks and music. To ensure the audience would receive the modern, with traditional Chinese elements, I had to be very specific about the music selection. My desire was for the audience to have the same image as me for each dance I created. My music track was based on each dance section's theme. In addition to using terms of modern, new and Chineseness, I added additional terms to help with the identification of music concepts that would be appropriate for each section.

- *Drowning to Death*: drowning, death, fighting
- *Follow the God*: Tibetan god, sky

- *Water*: quiet, flowing, watering
- *Fire*: burning, heat, fast
- *Mud*: entanglement, gravity, earth, slow but has strong rhythm
- *Bodies*: human, lost, light, quiet
- *Ghost Fire* (entry): quiet, flying, night, beautiful
- *Ghost Fire* (storm): storm, thunder, lightning
- *Reunion*: love story, bitter, sweet, reunion, separation
- *Winter Wood*: nature, power, super nature, drum

Inserting Chineseness into Music

I received feedback from Alvin Mayes that some electronic music felt modern some music had Chinese elements and conveyed the Chineseness, but the two were not connected. The music was changing from one section to the next, and my challenge was to determine how to create a cohesive flow for the music.

This feedback prompted me to reevaluate and think more deeply about the integration of music beyond the story line. I listened to more soundtracks from Chinese songs, mixing them to create a sound that exemplified both modernity and Chineseness. I used the Tibetan female singing sound as the main sound track to create the image of god. I inserted the Tibetan monk chant and lowered the volume of the second sound track to highlight the Chineseness. I added deep electronic bass to the third track to set the background and highlight the modern. For *Fire*, I added the beginning monk chant to build the mystery and Chineseness.

Sound Design

The successful collaboration with Jeffrey Dorfman, a sound designer and composer, started with good communication. After I found the soundtracks which I felt embodied *Equinox & Solstice*, I shared the examples with Jeff. I later learned that he found this to be valuable in understanding what I wanted to achieve through the music. From the first meeting, Jeff and I could effectively communicate – the sharing of ideas was effortless. I felt he understood me as well as my vision for *Equinox & Solstice*. I cannot overstate the importance of the effect this had on my creative process. As I mentioned above, music was going to be a critical element in my efforts to create a performance that would connect with the audience. I also found that my early work with Jeff prepared me to effectively work with the sound designer. It provided me with the vocabulary that would be needed in the process.

The process of making the final sound score of the performance was a true collaboration. Jeff provided many excellent ideas. One thing that I found to be truly valuable was building the ghost feeling and inserting my soul into the music. He recorded the sound of my breath and added it into the sound score of *Water*, *Ghost Fire* (storm), *Reunion*, and *Winter Wood*. It made the music live and I felt a deep connection to the music. It helped me to feel the story I was creating. All the music became the music of my story.

Jeff also composed the music for *Ghost Fire*. He perfectly used his music to create the image of ghost fire flying in a wooded area at night not just for the audience to see onstage, but also the image for the dancers to feel as they danced.

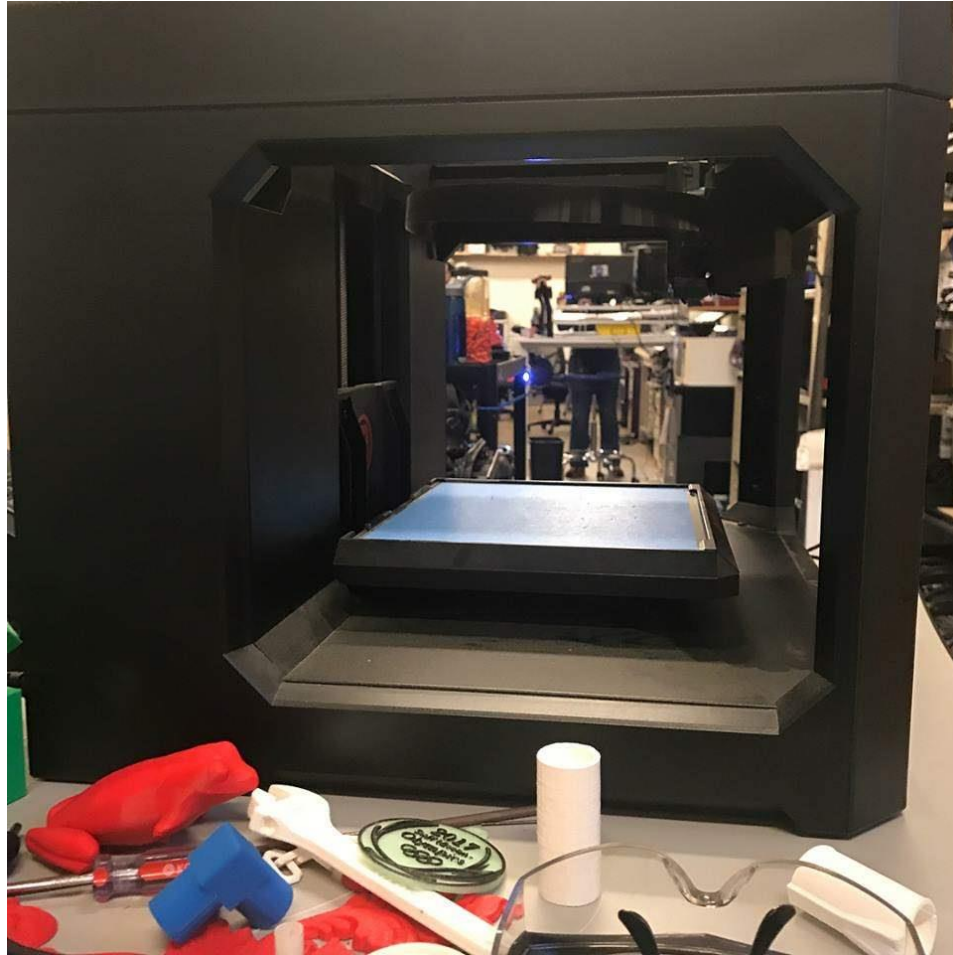
Jeff brought the sound program into my studio for rehearsal to make it more productive. This allowed for an iterative building process and the insertion of cues into the

music in real time. This helped improve the efficiency of the rehearsal process. When I needed to reset a cue, the stage manager could go directly to it without looking for it.

Lighting Design

Equinox & Solstice is the story of a ghost's journey. The journey is moving forward. The visual experience for each section should be different so the audience knows the journey is ongoing. Therefore, I wanted the lighting to help me build the theme and image for each piece. I also wanted the lighting to help create the different spaces onstage within the stationary set. The limitation of having the same set for nine individually designed dances in 35 minutes presented a challenge. We needed to design lighting for each section. Brandi Martin and I are friends, we have seen each other's work often but we had not worked together. We used our mutual trust to help us communicate with each other and share ideas. From the very beginning, I shared my specific images and plan for each dance. Because the nature of the thesis is a collaboration project, I thought it best to lead versus manage. I shared my lighting ideas of this journey with her and let her understand the aspects that I felt were most important to include, some unknown ideas I would like to try, and the gaps where I did not have any set ideas and then I gave her space to create.

We engaged in continual communication to keep us on the same page. I would share my rehearsal videos with her and discuss how things were proceeding – so we never got out of step, even if we were working independently.



In *Ghost Fire*, I decided to use flashlights as both a prop and a lighting source. The flashlights have a special design feature of a zoom that allows the light beam to be focused. They also have settings that allow the light to flash at different speeds. However, to use these features, the dancers would have been required to manually control the lights as they danced. This introduced a challenge of managing the timing as well as possible tech issues during the performance. Brandi suggested that we insert a wireless control into the flashlight so the lights could be controlled centrally like any other stage light while keeping the most important feature of the zoom in the light focus. Brandi did the research and engaged with the people in the shop. Devin Kinch used a 3D printer to create a body for the grip part of the flashlight that included extra space to insert the wireless controls so the

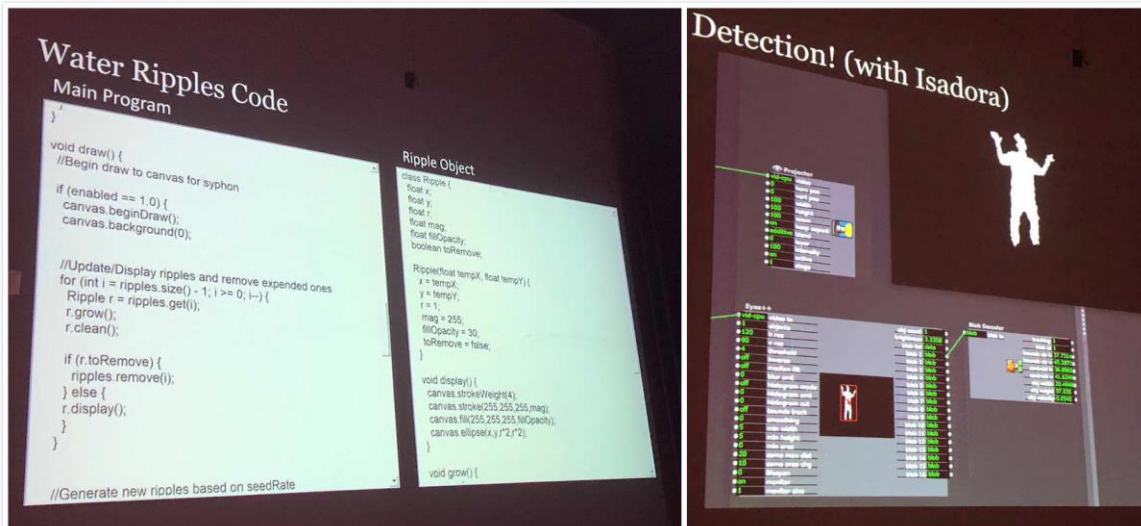
lights could be controlled from the board while keeping the head of the original flashlight. This resulted in the flashlights being totally set with cues and controlled from the light board wirelessly, and the zoom still functioned for a key part of the choreography. This process also allowed us to create a more vibrant experience since we removed the need for the dancers to operate the lights manually.



Projection Design

Projection is a powerful tool that can build a specific image for the audience to receive. It can also work as a lighting source. Projection was always a crucial part of the design plan for *Equinox & Solstice* throughout my creative process. I wanted projection that could help me to create a specific image and build each section in a manner that would expand the set design. The four seasons and the feng shui elements were not represented in the set design, so projection was going to be the means to do so. Projection has impacted modern art and can also add Chineseness into *Equinox & Solstice*.

Dylan Uremovich and I have worked together on a couple of projects previously. For my production *Another Side of You*, he was my lighting designer. So, we had already built modern and culturally specific work together. I have always liked the innovation he brings into my projects. What made the process easy was that we knew each other's expectation for lighting however, this time he was my projection designer. I shared my ideas of how to use projection to build the image for each section. I let him know the very specific images I wanted throughout the whole production. I shared some potential ideas, and some gaps where I did not have a specific plan.



He took my ideas and did what I felt to be deep research. He decided to try new projection techniques, including a camera that was onstage to track the movement of the dancers in real time. This information is then used to direct the projection. In *Water*, the new technique of tracking dancers and projecting the water ripples onto the floor was used to highlight the element of water. Each place where the dancer stepped a ripple would appear. In *Mud*, to create the visual of the dancers being the element of mud, he created a projection of mud dripping down the string curtain to the floor. He also used a live track

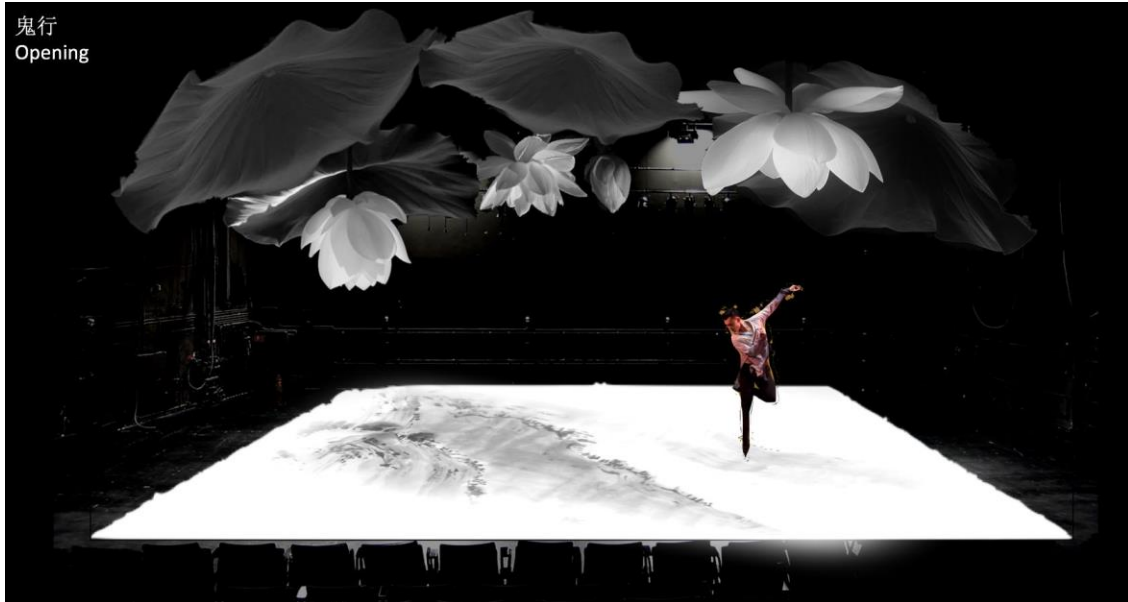
camera to follow the movement of the dancers, leaving the image of mud on the floor as they traveled. In *Reunion*, he projected a circling lotus flower on the floor circling and used the live camera to track the flower. Whenever the dancers would get close to the flower, the flower would fly away.



To highlight the Chineseness of my vision, he added context through projection including images of Chinese bamboo in *Winter Wood*; the plum blossom Chinese painting in *Reunion*; and the images of the other seasons and elements.

Scenic Design

The scenic design process was the most complex of the collaboration areas. Initially I had a vision of using a white floor to receive projection, large open floor space to maximize the dance area, and a lotus flower hanging from the ceiling facing the floor to also serve as a projection surface. By having the lotus flower facing the floor, it would convey the idea of an upside-down world reinforcing the concept of the afterlife. The reality that the stage was going to host two separate shows on the same evening introduced many restrictions on the set design.



Mustapha Braimah, fellow MFA dance candidate, and I were scheduled to produce our thesis performances as part of the same concert. We were not in agreement on the vision for the set design in advance. I wanted an open floor, Mustapha wanted an airport and a village on the stage. Through the collaboration process, Mustapha's vision for the set

evolved. During the first meeting he indicated that he wanted a village on the stage. During the second meeting he shared that he wanted to create JFK Airport on the stage. This conflicted with the initial vision that he had shared.



The final set design was not what I had outlined in my thesis proposal for two reasons. The scenic design team indicated that there was no way to create a set that would accommodate both Mustapha's vision and mine. Second, even if I had the lotus flower produced elsewhere, the production team indicated there was no way to handle the transition between the two sets during intermission. Many of the dance drama productions in which I have previously performed had much more elaborate sets. Considering the simplicity of my initial vision for the set, I did not see any technical challenges that would prohibit the transition needed during intermission. After much internal frustration, I

resolved myself to the reality that this was a collaborative project, not just for me but for others working on their thesis projects as well. Therefore, I offered to give up my vision and allow the scenic design team to develop a concept that would be able to serve both Mustapha's and my thesis performances.

Starting over with a new vision, I shared with Ryan Fox and Grace Guarniere the key words of clean, contemporary, and Chineseness. They in turn used these words along with Mustapha's JFK Airport vision to create a new set concept.



After several iterations, Ryan and Grace presented a new design that captured the contemporary design that worked with my vision. This design included the use of a new curtain material that would also serve as projection surface, allow dancers to pass through the curtain, and use lighting to have dancers appear or disappear behind the curtain. Additionally, the design included three sails that were designed to mimic JFK Airport and

support Mustapha's set design. The challenge for this design was the amount of floor space that would be consumed. Since my production would include up to 13 dancers on stage at one time, I needed to preserve as much of the dance floor as possible because my choreography included stage traveling and required adequate space for movement. Additionally, the workshop indicated that there was going to be a budgetary issue and to build the whole set would have exceeded the allocated funds. To address this issue, it was decided to remove the largest of the three sails and one of the two string curtains.



In working with Ryan and Grace, it was truly collaborative because while they created the physical set, it was through our interactions that we arrived at how the dancers could engage with the set. I feel they ultimately embraced the roles of the dancers and understood their movement needs. In *Ghost Fire*, I was planning to open the white curtain to use the mirror on the back wall. Based on their observations they suggested to not do

this because the mirror would reflect lighting and possibly be a distraction for the audience, breaking their engagement. We experimented both ways and I realized their suggestion was on target.



Once we had the set confirmed, I re-evaluated my choreography to determine how to use the set actively with the dancers. In the end, I feel we made the set a part of the dance.

Costume Design

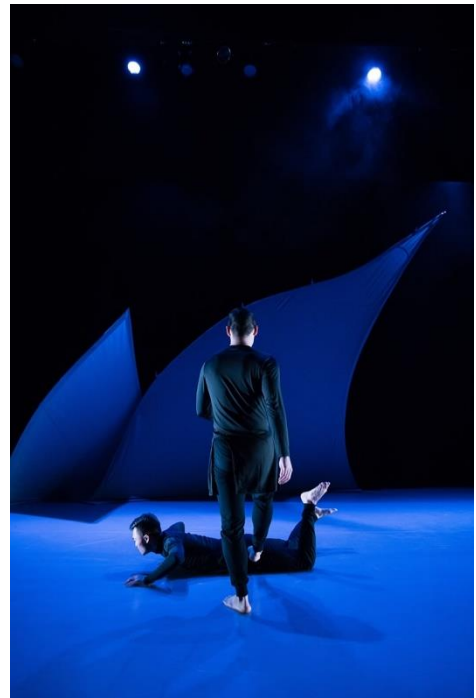
I decided to design my own costumes for three reasons. First, I wanted to use many costumes to support the different sections of *Equinox & Solstice* and was realistic about the limited budget. Second, I wanted to keep the costumes for future performances. Third, I already had a specific vision and did not want to engage a designer without allowing that designer creative input.

In my dance creation process, costumes are a very important part that is set early. Having a clear concept for costumes helps me to build the vision of the entire dance. This was the case for *Equinox & Solstice*. I visualized what the dancers would wear as I defined their movements. Using the same three words: clean, contemporary, and Chineseness, I decided on two main color themes: white and black. These two colors reflect the dark and light in the ghost story as well as connect to the title of the production, *Equinox & Solstice*. I added red to highlight the Chineseness and break the predictable white and black usage.

I chose materials that would reinforce the concept of the light and airy movement quality of Chinese classical dance.

Black Theme

- Human in *Drowning to Death*: I dressed the person in a simple costume to show the human character.
- The ghost of death in *Drowning to Death*: I chose a modern abstract style with a skirt length to show the abstract nature of the afterlife.
- The female ghosts in *Follow the God* and



Winter Wood wore complementary costumes in relationship to the ghost of death. The style of the tops was the same; however, I chose a different material to indicate

an airier presence as if the ghost were flying, not just from the audience perspective, but the costume also helps the dancer to connect with their role.



- In the section of *Fire*, the dancers represent the element of fire. While red would have been the obvious choice for this section, I wanted to reserve that for the *Mud* section. In doing so, I decided to use tight fitting long-necked tops made by the costume shop to highlight the bodies of the dancers and not be an accessory to the dance. The pants I chose were Chinese lantern pants to incorporate Chineseness and mystery.



- I wanted to highlight the core of the human body in *Bodies*. To do this I chose shorts so the muscle lines and skin color would be highlighted. I chose semi-transparent tops to allow the skin to shine through. I wanted the male dancers to not wear any top but was concerned about being questioned why the males were allowed to show more skin than the females. After the Saturday performance, I talked to my dancers and we decided that for the final show, the males would be top-less so we could see this vision executed.



- *Reunion* is about the human soul which is why I chose to use costumes that are simpler in design. Initially, I had selected pants to be worn, but after dress rehearsal, Alvin Mayes suggested that I consider showing bare legs to highlight the muscle lines during the partnering. I made the change based on this recommendation and the results were positive.



- The god of death in *Winter Wood* was dressed in dark grey to allow for differentiation with the black costumes worn by the ghosts. To accentuate the range of the dancer, I chose a multi-piece design that would visually extend the movement so that it would appear larger than life, drawing attention to the power of the god. The costume contained four large ribbons which are commonly depicted on gods in China. These ribbons convey motion, especially flying, in Buddhism. The final aspect of the costume design was the addition of bold earrings, also to reinforce the power of the god. Since I consciously cast a specific individual in this role, I knew wearing large earrings would not only be part of the costume but would also personally support the dancer in her role.



White Theme

- In *Water*, I chose costumes based on the inspiration of Chinese ink paintings made of material that would resemble flowing water.



- The ghosts in *Ghost Fire* wore costumes inspired by the will-o'-the-wisp. The style and material matched the ghosts' black costumes in other sections.



Red Theme

- In *Mud*, I chose red costumes to break the predictable theme of black and white, and to also interject Chineseness into this section. The tops match the style and material used for ghosts in both black and white. By keeping the style and only varying the color, I could accentuate without overloading the visual sensation for the audience. I chose red Chinese lantern pants to resemble the abstract nature of mud.



- The god in *Follow the God* is based on a Buddhist female god. Often these are characterized as beautiful and kind. I chose a long Tibetan red coat to highlight the power of the god, and I included a hair clasp to display the Chinese female character. Since female gods in Buddhism have covered legs, I incorporated the Chinese lantern pants.



A New Beginning

Just as the story line of *Equinox & Solstice* begins with death and explores the journey to the afterlife while being melodramatic, this next month is the final stage of my journey as I prepare for my new life. Through this thesis process, I have grown not just as a dancer and choreographer but also as a director, researcher, and artist. The resources and opportunities provided to me through this journey have been well received and much appreciated. I have learned the skills to lead and produce large dance productions working with dancers, designers, and production teams.

This thesis has helped me to identity myself as an artist. I was “only” a dancer in China for ten years where I was not able to have creative input, but just executing someone else’s vision. Because of this, I questioned my commitment to dance for five years. Through my personal journey I was lost, and then I became aware and realized that dance has always been so important in my life. I did not want to forever follow in the shadow of what other people created. I did not want to be the dancer without his own identity as an artist. Returning to dance with the freedom to choreograph, I want to continue to develop my unique aesthetic from both Chinese dance and Modern dance. I have a vision and theory of who I want to be as an artist. I want to build my own voice in my dance, a dance that can engage both Chinese and American audiences, present my culture, and enable me to stand by myself as who I am.

This thesis research and production has helped me to ...to the reality.

Equinox & Solstice has been significant to me in artistic value and research importance. Dance for me is not just movement, it is the history and culture that provides

inspiration and resources to make dance. It is the art form in which I can express my emotions, thoughts, and feelings. It connects me to space, energy, and people in the world. It is a way to share my culture, stories, and experiences.

As I move forward, I hope just as in the stories of *Equinox & Solstice*, that my afterlife will be rewarded with good fortune having embraced and learned all that I could from the wonderful opportunity that I was so fortunate to have had.

Bibliography

- Cox, Leah. "Adjudicator Comments Choreographers Showcase." E-mail. December 1, 2016.
- Fitzgerald, S., & Murphy, J. (n.d.). The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories. *The Journal of American History*, 244-244.
- Hossen, Abul. "Social Isolation and Loneliness among Elderly Immigrants: The Case of South Asian Elderly Living in Canada." *Journal of International Social Issue* 1, no. 1 (September 2012): 1-10.
- Liu, Qingge. *Xi Fang Xian Dai Wu Shi Gang = History of Modern Dance in the West*. Shanghai: Shanghai Yin Yue Chu Ban She, 2004.
- Lutz, T., & Kuklman, W. (n.d.). Learning About Culture Through Dance in Kindergarten Classrooms. *Early Childhood Education*, 28(2000).
- Ou, J. (1995). *History of the Development of the Teaching System of Chinese Classical Dance*. Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe.
- Mackerras, Colin. *The Performing Arts in Contemporary China*. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Martin, John Joseph. *The Dance in Theory*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton Book Company, 1989.
- Sun, Y. (2010). *Zhongguo Han Tang gu dian wu ji xun jiao cheng = The fundamental training of Chinese dancing in Han and Tang dynasties* (Di 1 ban. ed.). Shanghai Shi: Shanghai yin yue chu ban she.
- The Asian Americans. (2012, June 18). Retrieved December 16, 2015, from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/asianamericans/>
- Thomas, H. (2003). *The body, dance, and cultural theory*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wang, K. (1985). *The history of Chinese dance*. Beijing, China: Foreign Languages Press .:
- Wang, W. (2008). *The History of the Development of Chinese Dance*. Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe.
- Wilcox, Emily. "Han-Tang *Zhongguo Gudianwu* and the Problem of Chineseness in Contemporary Chinese Dance: Sixty Years of Creation and Controversy." *Asian Theatre Journal* 29, no. 1 (2012): 206-32. doi:10.1353/atj.2012.0021.
- Xiong, J. (2008). *History of the Development of Contemporary Chinese Dance-Drama*. Beijing: Remin yinyue chubanshe.

Xu, Rui. "Chinese Contemporary Dance or Modern Chinese Dancing: "China" and "modern" Have Been Separated." *People's Daily*, November 18, 2014.
<http://culture.people.com.cn/n/2014/1118/c87423-26044105.html>.