ABSTRACT

The development of Chinese architecture has always been strongly connected to the Chinese philosophy that informs daily life and the relationships between people. This concept parallels dance in regard to the relationship between life and art. This research will focus on the work of Taiwanese choreographer Lin Hwai-Min and explore the connection between traditional Chinese architecture and contemporary modern dance. Centering on the aesthetic links between architecture and dance, the thesis will investigate the historical connections with the support of photos, drawings and written material.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
LIST OF PICTURES

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION
   Purpose of the Study
   Benefits of the Study
   Statement of the Problem
   Research Questions
   Methodology
   Limitations and Delimitations

2. BRIEF INTRODUCTION: ARCHITECTURE OF SOUTHERN CHINA
   History
   Philosophy and Aesthetics of Southern Chinese Architecture
   Distinguishing Architectural Features

BRIEF INTRODUCTION: TAIWANESE CHOREOGRAPHER LIN HWAI-MIN
   Biography of Lin Hwai-Min
   Lin Hwai-Min's Philosophy and Aesthetic Ideas
   Distinguishing Choreographic Features which are Influenced by Traditional Chinese Art, History and Architecture
3. ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF LINE IN BOTH TRADITIONAL CHINESE ARCHITECTURE AND THE CONTEMPORARY CHOREOGRAPHY OF LIN HWAI-MIN

   Line, Design, and Volume

   Use of Water and Flowering Plants in Architecture and Related Imagery in Dance

   Illusion in Architecture and Choreography

   Dramatic Wall Paintings and Narrative Dance

   The Art of Calligraphy as Used to Embellish Architecture and Dance

   Contrast

   Use and Symbolism of Color

   Symmetry and Asymmetry

4. CONCLUSION

APPENDIX

BIBLIOGRAPHY

VITA

ABSTRACT
THE LINE BETWEEN TRADITIONAL CHINESE ARCHITECTURE

AND CONTEMPORARY CHOREOGRAPHY

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We are surrounded daily by the beauty and line of architecture. Almost without acknowledging its existence or impact, architecture brings its force to human life. In traditional Chinese architecture, focus is on the fine line etched by the artistic relationship of harmony and conflict, unison and variety, simplicity and complexity (Wang, 1993). Seeking to explore the ideas of symmetry, texture, proportion and space, Chinese architecture deliberately reveals the endless variety and challenge of nature's most internal and external secrets. The art form of dance explores nature and human existence in ways (Ping, 1995) that often mimic architectural patterns and choices, especially in the common ideas of line, shape and dimension (Wung, 1993). As with architecture, contemporary dance is an expression of the individual's inner landscape but carries the indelible imprint of the choreographer's cultural identity. The creative processes of dance and architecture have many commonalities beyond the obvious building blocks of spatial design.
The choices made in conceptualizing these two art forms are similar; the underlying rationale linked, with the end result reflective of both the individual and the culture. This study will explore more fully the connections between these two forms as evidenced in the shapes of pure linear design in architecture and dance. Embracing the layers of meaning in the word line, the focus will be on exploring the line, that relationship that connects the process of choreography with the process of architecture, while examining the concrete and visible spatial line common to both traditional Chinese architecture and modern dance.

Architecture is an art form of necessity; it defines living environments. Dance is an art that reflects quality of living, cultural background and the attitudes of a people.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between architecture and contemporary dance. Certain aspects of traditional Chinese architecture will be defined. The choreography of twentieth-century Taiwanese choreographer Lin Hwai-Min will serve as a map for analyzing and comparing the elements these two art forms have in common.
Benefits of the Study

The research into historical, cultural, societal, aesthetic and philosophical aspects of selected elements of traditional Chinese architecture and the subsequent comparison to the choreography of Lin Hwai-Min will be important for many artists in the field of dance, including choreographers, critics and scholars. Choreographers from both the east and the west, for example, will be able to use this information as a point of reference to relate to traditional architecture and ultimately use these architectural ideas to extend their own creative processes in new directions. Critics will gain greater range of understanding with regard to the origins and perspectives of eastern choreographers as they gain means for looking at a larger, more integrated picture of the body of a choreographer’s work. So, too, will they be able to utilize these components of a multi-arts approach in their own discussion and analysis of the dance works that they view and critique. Scholars will be able to take this study of the relationships between these two arts forms and develop it.
Statement of the Problem

This research will identify common threads between architecture and dance. The ways of seeing, the methods of working and the technical and conceptual vocabulary have a hidden relationship, which once explored, will enrich each discipline.

Research Questions

1. What elements exist in the process of conceptualizing and creating architectural design and choreography? How are these individual elements similar or dissimilar?

2. What are the influences of culture on the conceptualization and creation of architecture and choreography?

3. What do the components (elements) of design in architecture and movement reveal about the culture and the individual?

4. Is Mr. Lin conscious of his choices in paralleling the architectural lines? Or is this line embedded in the cultural psyche?
Methodology

Using comparative analysis, this research will address an aesthetic and culture perspective. This research will also delve into the history and philosophy of traditional architecture and contemporary dance. Descriptions of architecture and movement will be included in this study. The oral history of dance will be applied in the research.

An exploration of the creative process in the choreographic style of Lin Hwai-Min, who is influenced by western contemporary dance but grounded in Asian forms will be conducted. In exploring these conceptual ideas, the primary interest will be on concrete examples of line, shape and texture in specific works of the choreographers and architects, comparing them with the traditional spatial designs of ancient Chinese art. Through this study, there will be a focus on the common line as evidenced by repeated patterns and linear shapes as well as the line, or common thread, that philosophically bonds the two forms together.
Limitations and Delimitations

1. Limitations

This research is based on information gathered from photographs, videos, and oral histories as the author has neither visited Mainland China, nor seen all of Mr. Lin’s work in live performance.

2. Delimitations

China is an enormous country with a history of more than 5000 years. As might be expected, the traditional architecture has many time and regional differences. In order to concentrate on the comparison of line in architecture and dance, this research will be limited to specific elements most comparable to modern choreography. Lin Hwai-Min, founder and Artistic Director of Taiwan’s Cloud Gate Dance Theater, was the choreographer selected for comparative analysis due to his international reputation and his role as one of Taiwan’s premier choreographers.
CHAPTER 2

BRIEF INTRODUCTION: ARCHITECTURE OF SOUTHERN CHINA

History

Downstream of China’s Yang-Tze River is an area rich in the cultural heritage of Asian architecture. At the southern part of the longest river in China, economic growth during the ancient dynasties Han (BCE 202~CE220) and Wei (CE220~265) dynasties and the later Ming(CE1368~1644) and Ching (CE1644~1911) dynasties produced the flourishing cities of Jiang-Zhu, Jew-Ching and Jiang-Zi. Unique characteristics of Chinese architecture developed here as government officials and wealthy businessmen built homes and gardens, and city officials laid plans for matching bridges, roads and elaborate city walls.

An example of the unique character of southern Chinese architecture is the lovely and practical traditional homes of this region. “Jing” [進] (Wang, 1993, p. 9) is the Chinese
character for each residential unit; the character also reflects the design of the home. Each Jing is surrounded by a tall wall that serves as fire protection, isolation from the bustling city and insulation from summer heat. The homes include a main building and adjacent living quarters which are joined by a winding pathway of ponds and gardens filled with plants and decorative stones. Constructed of rectangular stone, brick and blue tile, the homes often boast white painted walls and a black wooden door. The native materials, artistically crafted, reflect the gentle and humble atmosphere of the culture of southern China. Most representative are the SuZhou city gardens and homes, constructed with brick, wood and carved stone, and considered the best of the classical southern architectural style. SuZhou has been renowned since ancient times as a peaceful city, rich in delicate and refined architecture, and filled with people whose language and mannerisms are musical and light (Wang, 1993, p. 120).

Chinese garden architecture has two categories: residential gardens and imperial gardens. Palaces of the region are numerous. Connected to the palace, imperial gardens boast large and dramatic scenic areas. Residential gardens, created for the pleasure of families, reflect both the income level and artistic interests of individuals. After the Ching and Ming dynasties, Chinese architecture moved toward smaller and more creative gardens yet still retained original Chinese form and style. Nurtured for generations, these small
gardens remain, even today, quite unique and fashionable (Liu., 1993, pp. 5-6).

**Philosophy and Aesthetics of Southern Chinese Architecture**

The architectural style of southern China is a hallmark of Chinese architecture. Based on the philosophy of complexity within unity, the gardens of southern China are excellent examples of Chinese architectural style. Rooted in the Confucian ideal of human interaction that requires one to be conservative and polite, and coupled with the Taoist belief of aligning oneself with nature, architecture relies on simple and pure elements of beauty. The philosophy of the Tao and Confucian principles are evidenced in architecture from the harmony of the roof to the quiet and even lines of doors to window carvings that delicately showcase the beauty of the natural landscape (Liu, 1993, pp. 89-93). Without the Taoist worship of nature, the traditions and innovations in horticulture so primary to Chinese gardens would not exist. It is the influence of both Taoist and Confucian ideals that fill Chinese architecture with energy and honest beauty.

Traditional designs require years of experience and dedication to recreate and maintain. Chinese architects respect the heritage of these designs and strive to make each garden a living shrine filled with motion, harmony and natural beauty. The primary, innate
quality of Chinese architecture is naturalism. Although created by humans, the feeling remains that of natural growth. The architect creates an atmosphere of natural yet fanciful and imagistic design (Liu, 1993, pp. 15-21).

Chinese architecture has the unique quality of utilizing open space. Within very small areas, the architect creates a world that seems suddenly large. Whether using special lighting or curved walkways, the architect seeks to move beyond mere decoration to manipulate time and tailor reality as effectively as dance and music do. One sees in the architectural elements evidence of folk tales that remind visitors of the past and sculptural details that move the eye to a new world of the imagination. The effect is one of a vivid past and an energetic future, all within a harmonious present (Liu, 1993, p. 7).

Distinguishing Architectural Features

General Features

1. Perhaps the first distinguishing feature of traditional southern Chinese architecture is that homes and gardens are not considered separate designs. Concepts in Chinese architecture are present not only in the design of homes but also in the creation of the decorative gardens which extend seamlessly from the homes. The goal is to present a
harmonious whole, as if the landscape and home existed in nature without the assistance of humankind.

2. Homes

There is symbolism inherent in the structure and color of the homes. The base of the home presents a natural and powerful image as the foundation for life. The body of the house stands with equal weight and power with the main door of the home a happy and energetic red. The gigantic grey roof softens its natural weight and overwhelming image with the curling swallow’s tail ridges that give life and delicacy to the design as it meets the sky. The economic status of the resident is read in the length of the swallow’s tail, with greater length relating to wealth. With white interior walls, grey earthen roof tiles and black exterior walls punctuated by a dark red door, the home is as elegant as a Chinese black and white water color painting (Liu, 1993, pp. 15-21).

Gardens

1. The garden is divided into sections, each section boasting its own distinguishing feature. Sections are demarcated by wall, rocks, water, trees, towers, hallways or carved doors or windows. Within the many sections, one is designated as primary with others
secondary. Transitional designs to guide the visitor from one section to the next are essential and serve as important elements of the art form, lending rhythm and flow to the overall design (Liu, 1993, pp. 8-15).

“Borrow the Scene” (Lou, 1977, p. 141) is a special technique applied to the construction of Chinese architecture. After viewing a design from the front, the viewer might be surprised to find an entirely different view when observing the design from the back. Carved windows, for example, create a magical source for completely changing the viewpoint. Considered refreshing to the eye, changing the image through the technique of “Borrow the Scene” is often accomplished through level changes, as in the path of a hallway, and create the opportunity for the viewer to go inside the thoughts of the architect to discover new images (Liu, 1993, pp. 8-13).

2. The use and symbolic nature of rocks and water is also a distinguishing feature in southern Chinese garden architecture. Rock gardens and water are traditional features of the southern Chinese garden. If water is a major focus in a garden, a pathway must be built around it with bridges to accent the water pond. The reflection of both the bridge and pathway in the water are equally important and function as a major part of the overall design. Rock gardens, filled with abstract form and symbolic features, are created to echo
the nature of mountain structures, with primary and secondary peaks. Rock gardens represent the deep and silent forests and imposing mountains of nature while water lightens and modulates the structure to create the image of movement within stillness. Rockery and water are not just an imitation of nature but an artistic re-creation that places contrasting elements in juxtaposition (Liu, 1993, pp. 8-13).

3. The use and symbolic nature of the vegetation further distinguish southern Chinese garden design. Plants are a major design factor that color and highlight the gardens of southern China. With seasonal change, the garden reveals its complexity and layering of images. Plants create the distinguishing feature of gardens, varying in concentration to create of feeling of closeness or a hazy image of aloof space. The selection of plants must reflect the philosophy and aesthetic of the home owner. For example, it is traditional belief, in both Chinese architecture and painting, that chrysanthemum and bamboo are chosen by a gentleman scholar, that orchids distance one from mortal life, and that peony indicates a rich individual (Liu, 1993, pp. 13-15).
BRIEF INTRODUCTION: TAIWANESE CHOREOGRAPHER LIN HWAI-MIN

Biography of Lin Hwai-Min

Lin Hwai-Min, Artistic Director of *Cloud Gate Dance Theater* (CGDT), studied Chinese Opera movement in his native Taiwan, modern dance in New York, and classical court dance in Korea and Japan. He founded CGDT in 1973.

One of the most renowned choreographers in Asia, Lin draws his inspiration from Chinese myths, legends and folklore, and blends traditional Theater elements with Western dance techniques for his choreography, creating a unique dance style that is both distinct and exciting. On Cloud Gate’s numerous international tours, Lin has been widely acclaimed by international dance critics:

“Lin Hwai-Min has succeeded brilliantly infusing dance techniques and theatrical concepts from the East and West.”—New York Times, U.S.A.

“Lin Hwai-Min’s Chinese modern dance choreographies should be mentioned along with the best works of the U.S. and Europe.”—Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Germany

“Lin Hwai-Min, unchallenged giant in Asia…..one of the greats of the 20th century.”—South China Morning Post, Hong Kong
In 1983, Jaycees International named Lin one of the ten outstanding young persons in the world for his artistic achievements. He has been the recipient of the most prestigious arts awards in Taiwan. He has also been a guest artist in the Dance Department at UCLA, and has taught and performed at the American Dance Festival. In 1990, he was a Fulbright Scholar at the Department of Performance Studies, Tisch School of Arts, New York University.

Lin founded the Department of Dance at Taiwan National Institute of the Arts in 1983 and served as its Chairman for five years. He is also the founding Dean of the School of Dance at the Institute. At present, he serves on the faculty of the National Institute of the Arts.

Lin is also a critically acclaimed writer and holds an MFA from the Writer’s Workshop, University of Iowa. *Cicada*, Mr. Lin’s novel, is an all-time best seller in Taiwan, and several of his works have been translated into English and published in the United States (Lin Hwai-Min, http://www.iwine.com/bay/cloud/9s-lin.html).

Lin Hwai-Min’s Philosophy and Aesthetic Ideas

Lin was raised in a political family. His father, a leading government official in
the Ministry of Domestic Affairs, greatly influenced his views of public life (Yu, 1993, p. 10). Majoring in journalism in college, he began his professional career as a novelist. He has always said that he sees himself as seeking to adhere to Confucian philosophy, which states that man should serve society, and Taoist philosophy which states that man must find harmony with nature.

“The Tao permeates nature. It moves through the world, leveling the extremes—smoothing and harmonizing—and evolving the universe and all things in it.” (Wing, 1986, p. 4).

Although a successful novelist, Lin abandoned writing in favor of dance choreography. He brought to dance liberal viewpoints, literary ability and a keen eye for design and composition. His goal in the creation of CGDT was to create a professional modern dance company “composed by Chinese, with Chinese themes, danced by Chinese, for a Chinese audience” (Yu, 1993, p.10). His works often focus on tradition and the role of Chinese heritage in the creation of modern society. His fame as a novelist brought other artists in music and Theater to his side for collaborative statements through theatrical dance and thus his influence extended well beyond the dance world. A well-known intellectual, Lin combines all of the arts through choreography, and his work reflects both traditional Chinese culture and its impact on modern society. Without his political and economic
connections, the leading artists of Taiwan would not have joined forces with Lin. His liberal viewpoints pave the way for collaborations with members of the avant-garde collective. The result was the creation of total Theater.

Lin believes that the traditional and the contemporary must be merged together to make an artistic whole. He states: “Tradition without modernity is like an antiquity that fails to life. But modern art without the spirit and roots of tradition is like an outer shell empty inside” (Yu, 1993, p. 189). Lin places the merging of contemporary and traditional styles as central to his artistic vision.

Also primary to Lin’s aesthetic views are his research into the primacy of nature, the Tao as it relates to human beings. This concept began to find concrete form in 1979 with choreographic efforts that placed his concern for his identity as Taiwanese as central to his investigation. He began with the masterpiece Legacy and continued with explorations of the conflicts of modern life for the Taiwanese in Rite of Spring, My Nostalgia, My Song. He expressed his political views in works such as Dirge and choreographed the epic tales of Chinese literature in dramatic works such as Nirvana, The Dream of the Red Chamber, Nine Songs and The Songs of Wanderers. His concern extends to children with two evening length works Little Drummer and Shooting the Suns (Yang, 1998, pp. 383-405).

Lin states: “Theater is the best place for communication and expression and dance
is just one theatrical form. I do not want to be limited by rules. I cannot tolerate limits on my creativity” (Yu, 1993, p. 35). In viewing Lin’s choreography, his philosophy of nature and his views on the role of humankind in society are evident. Not limited by a single artistic form or theory, he freely explores the interaction of the traditional and the modern and, in doing so, reveals the essence of Taiwanese society. Looking at his work metaphorically, one might see his preoccupation with the traditional and contemporary as a vertical through-line while his fascination with the events of society may be seen as the horizontal line. His choreography finds voice where the two elemental lines intersect.

Lin is a demanding choreographer, training his dancers not only in technique but with a broad understanding in all of the arts. Dancers in his company are required to take classes in literature, history, aesthetics, drama, architecture and Chinese calligraphy. He believes that a true artist can only arise from a total view of the arts in history, and rejects the notion of a dancers as a mere technicians. He demands that his dancers view and discuss Chinese Peking Opera and study under renowned teachers who are charged with passing on the heritage of epic Chinese literature and philosophy. Dance technique, he believes, is only one base on which to build an artist (Wang, Y. Y. Interview 1/10/99).

Lin’s philosophy adheres to Confucian theory which states that an educated and scholarly individual must study four books and practice six physical techniques. With
literature as a base, Lin constantly returns to his search for the spiritual aspects of nature, an
essential concept of the Tao. These explorations can be seen in works such as Lin’s

*Floating Cloud.* Lin lives between these two major philosophies in the same manner that
most Chinese pray to both the gods of Tao and to Buddha. The Chinese find no conflict in
these two religious methods and trust that good results will result from prayer. Like the
Chinese concept of Yin and Yang, Lin’s doctrines create balance and harmony that allows
the exploration of conflicting elements.

Distinguishing Choreographic Features which are Influenced by

Traditional Chinese Art, History and Architecture

1. Technical Training

CGDT is a company whose technique is rooted in modern dance. Major technical
training for the company members is in modern dance, ballet and/or Chinese Peking Opera
movement. The Martha Graham Technique is the primary background of modern dance
for Cloud Gate dancers and so Lin, once himself a student of Graham, makes technical
choices in teaching that reflect both his study of the idiom and his background in Chinese
aesthetics. He consistently states that his movement, music, narrative and design choices
remain Chinese, and that this was especially so early in his career (Cloud Gate Dance Theater of Taiwan, http://www.jwinc.com/bay/cloud/9s-cloud.html).

Lin’s choices in movement style go beyond the Graham foundation to embrace the vocabulary of Chinese Peking Opera movement. Just as he combines the narrative drama of China with the concerns of today’s society, the two styles are merged to create a new form of dance technique. Seen as “tools” for expression, the styles do not create conflict but rather are employed harmoniously to define a new and innovative style of Theater. Fortunately, both Chinese Peking Opera and the choreography of Martha Graham find expression in dramatic theme and both reveal deep concern with regard to human life. These universal concepts are employed by Lin without conflict to bring deeper meaning through a variety of sources.
2. Use of Circular Design

- Figure 1: *Cloud Hands*

![Figure 1a](image1a.png) ![Figure 1b](image1b.png) ![Figure 1c](image1c.png) ![Figure 1d](image1d.png)

- Figure 2: *Ba-Ju*

![Figure 2a](image2a.png) ![Figure 2b](image2b.png) ![Figure 2c](image2c.png) ![Figure 2d](image2d.png)
Unlike European scholars, Chinese philosophers have traditionally believed
that the earth is round. The concept of circular time, of tradition passed on from
generation to generation, is comforting and satisfying and may be seen in the smallest of
symbols, like the traditional circular family dining table. Circles are found in traditional
window design, in the images of clouds in Chinese painting or in the image of endless
fidelity in rounded wedding pictures. Lin’s early works, such as The Tale of the White
Serpent, for example, utilized an impressive array of rounded movement, including Cloud
Hands (Figure 1), Ba-Ju (Figure 2), Yu-Ju-Fen-Shen (Figure 3) and Po-Yun-Chu (Figure 4),
all elements drawn from Chinese Peking Opera and combined with modern dance.

Movements in Chinese Peking Opera deliver specific meanings to the audience. Cloud
Hands, or Liang-Sha, signify a traditionally feminine quality (Yu, 1993, p. 148) of demure
reticence while Ba-Ju delivers a distinctive masculine quality (Yu, 1993, p. 148) through the
image of the body energy wheeling in the air. Yu-Ju-Fen-Shen symbolizes spinning
emotion through the whirling of the body with an arched back while Po-Yun-Chu is used to
signify the changes in time and space as in a journey.

Other common theatrical devices from Peking Opera which employ circles were also
utilized by Lin in choreographing The Tale of the White Serpent such as the rounded
movements of fans and umbrellas. The Chinese fan symbolizes the promise of love but
also the moral nature of love within society (Yu, 1993, p. 150). When the fan is rotating,
the man and the white serpent are in love. The umbrella symbolizes separation. When
the umbrella is rotating, the lovers are separated because their love goes against moral
precepts of society. These commonly understood symbols are Chinese, but the tale of love
is eternal. Borrowing from the past, Lin employs selected elements of narrative style
while telling a story for contemporary life. The Tale of the White Serpent has remained a
popular part the repertory of Cloud Gate since its premier in 1976.

In Requiem (1989) (Figure 5, 6), Lin devoted an entire work to the concept of the
circle as symbolic to the Chinese. A soloist spins center stage throughout the ten-minute
work. She turns counterclockwise, then reverses to indicate her struggle from oppression
to freedom. This work symbolizes Lin’s philosophy and life experience through the simple, eternal form of the circle (Jiang, 1993, p. 228).

3. Use of Narrative Drama

Traditional arts in China generally are presented through narrative drama. Within a story familiar to the audience, abstract ideas can be explored. Lin structures an evening-length work by dividing it into sections with transitions into each section, much like the classical gardens of SuZhou. *Legacy*, for example, has eight sections: “Prologue”, “Call of the New Land”, “Crossing the Black Water”, “Taming the New Land”, “Joy in the Wilderness”, “Death and Rebirth”, and “Planting”, and “Celebration”. The sections go beyond a mere chronology of the history of Chinese migration across the Formosa Straits to document the internal life of a people. Chen Da, a musician honored by the Taiwan government as a National Living Treasure, played the Huqin, a traditional two-stringed bowed instrument, as a transitional element in the masterwork.
4. Use of Props to Promote Symbolic Design

Figure 7 Han Shu

Special symbolic props and vivid color are important features of Chinese stage design. For example (Video, Nine Songs second section), a curtain opens to the width of a door and light shines through as if the sun is rising to symbolize the arrival of a god. Lin’s contemporary work Nine Songs uses a similar concept to signal the timeless travel. In Nine Songs a real lotus pond is created by flooding the pit of the stage to float between the audience and performers. The water is real, influencing the audience just as a pond would guide feelings in a Chinese garden. Fabric is used symbolically as key props. For example, in Han Shu (Figure 7), a thirty-foot white panel represents the hero’s integrity.
His movement against the fabric symbolizes societal restraints and his desire and struggle for freedom (Yao, 1993, p. 130). The soloist in the work is a character in Chinese historical drama, and the white fabric forms endless space just as the white background of a Chinese painting gives space and freedom to the viewer to create images. White, red, blue and black are primary colors for Chinese art. Lin often uses white in prop and costume design, guiding the audience toward calmness or fanciful daydream. He uses a strong claret red with black and dark blue to let the audience see the image of an old Chinese garden and house.

5. Nature as Focal Point

Figure 8 Nine Songs

Figure 9 Adagietto
Nature is central to Lin’s philosophy of art and life. The creator of Tao, Lao Tzu, believed that “a constant awareness of the patterns of nature will bring us insight into the parallel patterns in human behavior. Just as spring follows winter in nature, growth follows repression in society; just as too much gravity will collapse a star, too much possessiveness will collapse an idea” (Wing, 1986, p. 12). Water is central to Taoist thinking because “nothing in the world is as yielding and receptive as water…The receptive triumphs over the inflexible, the yielding triumphs over the rigid” (Wing, 1986, p. 78).

Water is essential in Lin’s *Nine Songs* (Figure 8) both as symbol and as reality. In the water pond float beautiful lotus flowers representing purity and rebirth, a central concept in
the dance and in Lin’s own philosophy.

Skilled in the use of props, Lin often uses huge panels of silk fabric, sometimes covering the whole stage as in Adagietto (Figure 9) where dancers move with the slowness and concentration of T’ai Chi in spreading the cloth. Each dancer, strong in his or her body core, maintains an individual rhythm and flow in executing the movement as the cloth gradually covers the stage just as the seasons of nature and human life unfold. In the Crossing the Black Water section of Legacy (Figure 10), a huge panel of silk is also utilized. The white fabric forms, in turn, both the ship that carries the immigrants and the raging water that surges around them. In Lin’s 1994 work The Song of Wonderers (Figure 11), a monk stands stationary center stage throughout the dance. Three tons of rice drop slowly from above, covering the space around the monk like a golden mountain. Time vanishes and the universe becomes only the rice and the monk, symbolizing the Taoist ideal of each individual gaining acceptance over his fate (Yang, 1998, pp. 356-357).
CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF LINE IN BOTH TRADITIONAL CHINESE ARCHITECTURE AND THE CONTEMPORARY CHOREOGRAPHY OF LIN HWAI-MIN

Line, Design, and Volume Center

1. Separation, Crack, and Deletion as Utilized in Architecture and Dance

The nature of architectural shape is found in the element of line. Based on the dot and simple line with plane and dimensionality, it is geometry enhanced by color and texture. The concept of line is the essence of architecture, and those observing or walking through an architectural shape can sense the beauty and spirituality of the design. In Chinese architecture, lines carry symbolic meaning. For example, in the horizontal line there exists a sustained feeling, catching the viewer’s eye and revealing a lightness and flow. This can be seen in the main houses of the SuZhou. Vertical lines in the houses, on the other hand,
bring feelings of strength and fulfillment, leading the viewer to the sky. The sense is that of positive self-esteem, like the strength of a tall tower. Lines, in Chinese architecture, are created for such deliberate feelings (Wung, 1993, p. 203). The straight line represents power and vitality while circular lines bring rhythm and beauty. A square lends stability. All lines are used to lead the viewer through emotions and the classical gardens and houses of SuZhou are a perfect example of the symbolic use of line in Chinese architecture.

![Figure 12 Circle Gate](image1.png)  ![Figure 13 Half-moon Gate](image2.png)  ![Figure 14 Tower](image3.png)

In Figure 12 the thick plain wall is carved in three-dimensional style to allow for the lines and shapes of light and shadow to come through, thereby giving volume and depth – a vivid feeling – to the overall design. The techniques of separation, crack and deletion are employed to produce this effect. For example, a simple square might look static, but by
carving that utilizes the design techniques of *separation* and *crack* or by other methods such as *deletion*, light and shadow appear and three-dimensional art is created. As seen in Figure 12, a white wall utilizes the technique of *separation* to create two spaces. The wall “separates” two unique spaces. A circular door is created through the technique of *deletion* to join the spaces. The act of removing material so that what remains is empty space is known as *deletion*. An additional circular wall carving lends dimensionality to the image. Again, looking at Figure 12, the line created by the natural edge of the stone at the right side of the “deleted” circle is an example of *crack*. This stone was purposefully placed in this relationship to the circular design in the wall to create a specific affect, or “line”. Again, looking at Figure 12, the line created by the natural edge of the stone at the right side of the “deleted” circle is an example of *crack*. This stone was purposefully placed in this relationship to the circular design in the wall to create a specific affect, or “line.”

In Figure 13 one sees a variation on the circular garden doorway of Figure 12. The technique of *deletion* is still employed as is *separation*, but the overall feeling is different. Instead of the continuous, recycling motion of the circular shape, the halfmoon design actively carries the visitor’s eye upward, toward the heavens. In addition, due to the fact that Chinese culture, as many other cultures that trace their origins to ancient
times, holds that the moon represents the feminine aspects of life, and conveys a sense of mystery, the design itself holds mystery and also points to mystery. It separates the visitor’s “known” space (the space he/she is currently inhabiting) from an “unknown space” just beyond the moon’s entryway and the visitor’s vision.

In Figure 14, one can see that the tower, which is part of a SuZhou garden, is divided by several sections. It is the use of the horizontal lines that catch the viewer’s eye and organize the viewer’s perception of the tower. The verticality of the tower carries the viewer upward. The combination of the horizontal and vertical lines give the viewer a sense of weight, texture, and movement – as do the windows, which stacked on the vertical lines of tower are themselves examples of *deletion*. Because the tower is strategically situated to be seen through the foliage of the garden such that the architect employs the technique of *crack*. These elements are part of the rich techniques described above that have given character to the architecture of southern China.
Critical to the Chinese notion of beauty are the contrasting elements of dynamic stillness and harmonious motion which, in the case of the SuZhou houses and gardens, is achieved through the architectural use of line. In architecture, designs used to indicate stillness are two-dimensional and include linear shapes such as the triangle, the upright line and the square. Three-dimensionality and curvilinear lines, by contrast, indicate motion. Looking at Figure 15, one can see an abundance of curving lines and designs: the circular shape cut out of the wall; the half-moon shape of the stone just to the other side of the wall; the curving designs integrated into the walkway. All of these move the viewer through the scene. The viewer is offered a still point through the placement of the column – an upright
line – just inside the garden entrance, visible through the circular entryway.

In Figure 16, the house itself is constructed to visually project a number of square shapes: the walls, the porch, and the windows all create a sense of stillness through their design. Even the rectangles created by the pilings that support the house in the water speak of stability. In addition, one can also see a triangle created by the roof design of the house behind the forward house. In this example, the water actually provides the flow, the motion in the overall architectural design.

One sees in the total presentation of the SuZhou homes and gardens where the addition of bridges and water help add to the feeling of flowing motion within the harmonious stillness of the main house, therefore enhancing the Chinese aesthetic of beauty through a certain complexity. The use of lines not only reflects Chinese aesthetics but also a common dynamic of Chinese religious ritual. Flowing, motional lines seem to rise out the groundedness of their two-dimensional counterparts and carry the viewer into a deeper, more spiritual place.
In dance, the human body itself creates the architectural elements of dot and line, plane and dimension. The sense of dimension and volume that carving creates in architectural design is paralleled in dance. And, in order to appreciate the following point, one must remember that where traditional Chinese architecture relies on stillness punctuated by motion, dance almost always relies on stillness to compliment motion.

In the choreography of Lin Hwai-Min (hereafter referred to as Lin), one can see the conceptual intention to carve through a wall of dancers (Figure 17). The sense of depth and dimension – or volume – is clearly constructed. There is, however, an essential difference in these two renderings of the technique. Lin has chosen to break with the traditional notions of symmetry in Chinese architecture and Chinese Opera. He consciously creates dissonance where in architecture there was harmony (Yang, 1998,
This dissonance is clearly present in Figure 17. Not only is there an absence of a focal point, but the movements themselves express unease and, using the terminology of Laban Movement Analysis, also express *fighting* effort.

One can see Lin’s use of the architectural techniques of *separation, crack* and *deletion* as captured in this photograph. (These are, of course, also apparent in live performance although it is perhaps a more fleeting image due to the temporal nature of dance.) In Figure 17, dancers leave the ground with different timing, creating a *separation* of spaces on stage. The visual use of the variety of dancers’ body shapes creates lines similar to those created by the technique of *crack* in the gardens where natural elements were utilized. Through the active density of the dancers’ bodies, even the empty space becomes more lively. This creates an effect similar to *deletion* because the deletion of space actually reveals more activity.

Stated in a slightly different manner, architecture achieves motion through implication whereas motion is intrinsic to dance and is accomplished by the human body moving through time, in space, utilizing energy. It is, perhaps, easy for the viewer to detect the line in a motionless dancer. It requires an active viewer to detect and follow the lines created by a dancer in motion. The stillness and harmonious motion achieved through the use of line architecturally are often choreographed by Lin in a manner that is
reminiscent of the juxtaposition of the two elements in SuZhou homes and gardens. The photograph in Figure 18 shows a dancer seated, legs crossed, striking a pose while two other dancers are in motion – in fact, airborne. The two aerial dancers exhibit a similar movement motif with a clear and unified focus. Whereas in architecture circular lines and designs are utilized to suggest motion, dance, by its very nature, is not limited to a particular line to create this illusion as long as the body is moving. Even though the lines made by the dancers’ bodies in Figure 18 are linear, the total effect is one of harmony because the photograph implies both stillness and motion: the seated dancer rooted to the earth in her pose is in contrast to the two airborne dancers, clearly in motion.

Figure 19 Legacy

Figure 6 Requiem
To continue along this line of perception, dance is space designed by the body. The choreographer shapes the space with the human form to represent his/her conceptual design. Lin utilizes the circle of dancers against the square of the proscenium stage to further accentuate the contrasting elements of dynamic stillness against harmonious motion. In this case, the shape of the stage represents stillness; the dancers’ design carries the motion.

In Figure 19, ten dancers stand side by side with linked hands and bodies arched to the sky. The circle formed by the dancers is framed by the square design of the stage space and proscenium arch. Just as architectural designs relating stillness and motion can, and are intended to achieve a level of spiritual understanding, so it is in Lin’s choreography. The group gesture, used to connect human beings to God, matches perfectly the common dynamic of Chinese religious ritual. The dancers breathe as they unite to send combined energy to heaven and the feeling is one of endless universal space. The circle drops gently toward the audience so that the energy embraces the viewer. The circle created by the dancers is achieved by “deletion” in space. The effect is a satisfying sense of volume.

Another example may be found in Figure 6, the Requiem. The solo dancer turns endlessly center stage, kinesthetically affecting the audience with spiral energy. This spiraling action is evidenced in the photograph by the shape of the head, chest and arms upwardly torque, followed by the directional flow of the skirt. In the dance itself, as in the
photograph, this circularity allows the audience to feel her sense of spiritual longing.

From the outline of the dancer’s body, two circular shapes are formed. One circle is contained in the shape of the body; and rides along the upright line of the dancer’s vertical center. The other circle is in motion and is created from the body carving through the stage space in a moving spiral. Each aspect elicits a distinct emotion, the verticality of the body speaking to a stable, quiet emotional space, an interior human space; the circular motion in which she turns provides a harmonious contrast to that internal state. The architectural technique of separation can actually be likened to the spinning technique Lin employs: the act serves to separate two distinct spaces – the dancer’s emotional interior space from the space of the world.

In architecture, the perspective of the viewer in relationship to the static image is essential. In dance, the image moves so that the viewer may experience a range of emotions.
Figure 20 shows dancers whipping their voluminous skirts through the air to create a moon-like design. The photograph reflects the arcing motion of the dancers and sends the viewer’s eye toward the skies. This half-moon shape is a dynamic design, both in its static representation and its motional one. The dancers are women, and the image simultaneously suggests and embodies the feminine. The half-moon shape is perceived not only in the dancers’ bodies (the so-called positive space in the photograph) but also reflected in the negative space (the curving empty space created by their bodies.) In a sense, this void outlined by their bodies is the result of deletion. A sense of mystery is implied simply by virtue of the design as it separates two spaces. What lies beyond the dancers, just out of view of the audience? The dancers separate the audience and a “known” space from an “unknown space” beyond.
Referring back to the tower in Figure 14, one is reminded of the power of the horizontal line to create a sense of stability and organize the viewer’s perception of the whole design. The division of images in dance creates a sense of volume in spatial design, allowing the viewer to feel weight, texture and direction of movement in the space.

Figure 21 shows a moment in Lin’s *Legacy* where dynamic design reveals this. Following the design created by a white panel of silk fabric, dancers rise up out of the floor at different heights such as to give the image of weight and stability. The dancers, although surrounded by the “waves of the sea” suggested by the texture of the fabric, appear stable and safe. This image echoes the design of the tower in Figure 14 as both demonstrate great height which would feel precarious if it were not for the stability created through a strong base.
2. Linear Shape and Dimension in Roof Elements and Choreographic Counterparts

In the classical homes of southern China, key elements are the roof, the ridge of the roof, the walls and the support beams. As one looks at Figures 22 and 23, one is reminded once again that Chinese architecture is an organic form inseparable from its culture. This time the evidence is in the line of the roof design. Here in the photographs, the viewer can see that the roof shape is, in fact, a representation of the Chinese character for *person* 人. From here, one can deduce the strong symbolic connection between people and their homes. By extension, those entering and exiting the home should feel the invitation of this architectural style through the pathways and images created that extend the total effect. In the opinion of this researcher, this feeling begins with the roof (line ab and bc) which reaches down toward visitors, inviting them to feel safe and protected, and extends through the design of the ridge line of the roof (line ac) as it curls up in a swallow-tail pattern, which
lends feelings of stability, orderliness and safety. The supporting beams (see line de and
its repetition around the house) form an upright line and might be defined in Laban
Effort/Shape as Direct in Space Effort with a Spoke-like Direction in Shape. This bold,
straight line represents in Chinese architecture a clear path in the individual’s mind and
stability of emotion. Roof, ridge and beam together create an emotional space as well as a
practical shelter. To carry this line of thought a step further even, the skyward reaching of
the ridge lets the viewer imagine a bright future. In LMA terminology, once again, the
roof is Stability and the ridge is Mobility. The expression inherent in this design focuses
less on an aesthetic or religious context but more on social values as they relate to dealing
with family and community.

Figure 24
The Story of the Lonely Ghost
Lin’s work embraces these concepts through taking advantage of the structure of the human body, and choreographic choices to convey this invitation to stability, safety and orderliness among humans.

The human body is used by choreographers to create a sense of space that may be described as architectural (Wung, 1993, p. 37). Utilizing a prop, the dancer’s body can sometimes more fully sketch the image created in the mind of the choreographer. Lin’s *The Story of the Lonely Ghost*, seen in Figure 24, portrays a story of human relationships. A traditional underworld judge, embodied in the form of a huge piece of fabric is placed at upstage center. The fabric brings into focus the role of architecture in dance, creating a symmetrical design much like the structure of a house in southern China. The judge/fabric, as represented in this design, “speaks” of the ultimate safety and protection a person can expect. In this story, a good man is murdered, but his murderer is brought to justice. And although he is not brought to justice in life, he is called to account for his crime in the afterlife. This is expressed symbolically in Lin’s dance through the design of the fabric, coupled with the dancers standing on each end of the cloth, to form curved ends that echo the swallow’s tail edge of the roofs, which together create the Chinese character for person 人. The design meaning “house,” created by the fabric with dancers at each end, brings focus to the image of home while also showing us that humanity is central to the theme of
the dance (Wu, 1993, p. 169). The red color of the prop relates to the red in the dancers’
costumes and also brings balance and unity to the image. Just as with the design of the
roofs of the SuZhou homes, there is in this image an underlying sense of stability,
orderliness, and safety for all persons.

3. Simplicity and Complexity of Line

Figure 25 Floral Wall Design
Figure 26 House on Lake
Figure 27 Roof of House
Figure 28 Roof Tile
Simplicity and Complexity are juxtaposed to create a deliberately controlled vision, not a random series of unrelated images. Indeed, the curving, floral line that defines Figure 25 is in and of itself quite simple. However, when one looks at the carving that is encased between the outside edge of the design and the red lines that is more central to the design, one sees a more intricate pattern. Often, simple, prominent lines serve as containers for more elaborate architectural ideas. This is also apparent in Figures 27-30, photographs of a SuZhou home. As indicated earlier, structural supports of the home, as
well as the roof ridge together create a simple matrix of vertical and horizontal lines, and
serve to organize the overall design of the home in a very straightforward manner.

However, when one looks closely at the house, in Figures 28-30, one can see details that fill
in the space between these lines, creating designs that are much more involved. Inherent
in this technique, as well, is the use of repetition. Note the repeating oblong design in the
red balcony railing in Figure 29, the rows of roof tiles in Figure 28, and again, the multiple
tiles that create the drainage system for the roof in Figure 30. The overall effect is one of
structured complexity or of compounded simplicity. At a distance, the viewer is likely to
perceive the situation before he/she is in close enough proximity to realize what creates this
feeling of opposites.

Figure 31 is a photograph taken toward the end of Lin’s dance *Songs of the Wanderers*. The beautifully exact spiraling design, being created in real time on stage in
the sand by a lone dancer, is a simple, repeating pattern that “grounds” the image. Lin’s
dance layers complex emotions on top of this simple design. As people wander far from
their original homelands, they are faced with certain instability. The action of this man at
the end of this dance speaks of hope. He is engaged in a repetitive and spontaneous
creative act. But his spontaneity is that of an older, wiser human being. In the
continuously growing spiral, one senses his relationship to time, his belief in the continuity
and purpose of existence. These complex ideas are revealed through perception by the
audience – they are based on a certain understanding achieved in life, and are not
necessarily obtainable by the uninitiated. A network of unspoken messages is being
conveyed through motion and presence, and where they could have been so involved as to
be chaotic, they are not. They are organized by the purity of the design in the rice.

Use of Water and Flowering Plants in Architecture and Related Imagery in Dance

1. Symbolic Meaning Associated with Water and Flowers

Perhaps most typical of the southern Chinese style of architecture is the design of
ornamental gardens. Designed on a smaller scale, the delicately arranged SuZhou gardens
differ from the northern Peking style that directly incorporates the natural and more bold
elements of the landscape (Lou, 1997, p.135). Most of the gardens in southern China are
complicated in design but simple and unsophisticated in materials. Delicate and subtle, the
decoration is detailed and meticulous. Perhaps the two most important elements in the
garden design are the elements of water and flowering plants. Both of these elements
carry with them symbolic meaning that is universally understood among Chinese people.

Water represents the cyclical nature of life, the recurrence of events, the rejuvenation
of energy. This is the true essence of life. The continuous flow of water elicits a feeling of hope – water is ever moving, ever meeting obstacles in its pathway and blending with them, always moving on.

Garden blooms, whether they be individual plants or trees, also connect a person to the meaning of life. Different plants symbolize different human virtues; for example, pine, bamboo and plum trees symbolize pride, and the owner’s sense of positive self-esteem. This pride will be intuited by guests who walk through the gardens. Likewise, the lotus communicates nobleness of character; the peony, wealth; the orchid, elegance.

The garden communicates the character and values of its owner; it speaks aesthetically and practically at the same time. The floral elements chosen to be included in a garden, and the use and design of waterways make a clear statement with regard to the inner life of the residents who created this whole.

This idea is paralleled in choreography. Each dance emerges as the result of the choreographer’s craft which, when articulately manipulated, layers images created by the movement, costumes, lighting, props, sets and musical elements to carry both symbolic and direct meaning to the viewer.
Nine Songs choreographed by Lin, is an excellent example of his conceptual link with nature and how he manipulates the choreographic elements to express several levels of meaning simultaneously. Like a Chinese architect, Lin uses dance to express the delicate and intricate nature of his own “inner garden.” He concurs that water is used as a symbol of life and rebirth, while the lotus flower with its connotations of nobility can also be understood to represent a literate person, a gentleman or gentlewoman, a person who values, if not resides in, tradition (Yang, 1998, p. 311). In Figure 32, a female dancer sits by a lotus pond; she is dressed in traditional costume and wears traditional make-up. Her gestures demonstrate a depth of longing for and connection to the past. In reflecting his thoughts and feelings, already Lin has utilized several layers of imagery to convey his meaning (Yang, 1998, p. 313). At the same moment, a male dancer dressed in a contemporary western business suit crosses stage, taking deliberate steps from downstage
right to upstage left. This added image, overlapping that of the seated female – who is at this point in contemplative stillness – draws the viewer’s eye to a depth of perspective that symbolizes the connection between the past and the future (Yang, 1998, p. 314). Among other details, the presence of the lotus flower helps to communicate the complex “garden” of emotions expressed by Lin.

In Figure 33, the final image of the same dance, a river is implied by the winding design created by thousands of candles on the stage. The Chinese audience recognizes this image as water and feels the import of the symbolism because each audience member understands the importance of ancestors in traditional Chinese philosophy and religion. In China, when remembering ancestors, descendants light candles and float them down a river, hoping to bring messages and peace to those already gone. In addition, the candles convey a secondary layer of meaning. Like the lotus, candles symbolize the proud quality of a person of noble character and integrity. Lin uses this ritual, and all the symbolism inherent, in imagistic form, set against modern-day life, to show how deeply he misses the past and traditions lost.
2. Water and Flowering Plants as Used to Frame a Focal Point

Figure 34 shows the architectural structure of a garden pavilion that is situated in the middle of a pond. In the center of the photograph, one can see a curving pathway that will guide the visitor over the water and to the heart of the pavilion’s space. The focal point of this architectural arrangement is the pavilion. The elements that draw the visitor toward this central space are water and flowering plants.
The texture and substance of the water, with its fluid nature, horizontal existence, and inability to support human weight is in direct contrast to the more solid structure of the pavilion, its verticality (note how the roof of the pavilion curves upward toward the sky supported by the very staid and upright character of the beams) and its obvious ability to support human weight. Visitors are “invited” to experience this space by a path that moves actively across the top of the water and is lined with flowering lotus plants. The path pulls the visitor toward this inner sanctum.

Another singular space in the architecture of the SuZhou homes and gardens is the balcony space of the home. This area is typically designated as a space for writing, drinking tea and visiting with friends. It is most often placed just off the house in a position which allows the person in this space a full view of the gardens beyond. The balcony itself is defined by and embellished with flowering plants. The poetic names of these spaces reflects their location and also reinforce the importance of water and plants in the entire scheme of the design. If the space is called Ting Yu Hsuan, which means listening to rain, then it means that the balcony is near a water pond. If it is called Pai Hua Ting, which means thousand flowers, it means that the balcony is surrounded by flowers (Lu, 1993, p. 23).

In the example offered by Figure 35, the balcony is built next to the pond with
flowers, always symmetrically balanced, to complete the overall picture. Here, the focal point would be the house itself, in the background of the picture. The flowers provide color in the architectural design of the garden, and also important to note is that they provide an element of unity. Flowers of the same variety are always chosen to complete a particular function. In this case, the flowers define the pathway around the pond, leading the visitor to or from the balcony, and they also guide the visitor’s attention to the house (which in this photograph, is only visible in the center background as evidenced by a portion of the roof structure.) In guiding the viewer’s eye to the house, the pond provides a silent, clear space across which to look.

Figure 36 shows a moment from Lin’s *Dream of the Red Chamber*, an adaptation of a popular classical Chinese tale that describes a love story of ancient times. When comparing this photograph to the photograph in Figure 35, one sees a striking similarity of intent. There is a great deal of “activity” circling at the edges, a quiet open center space and a strong vertical figure in the center background. Lin has designed the costumes to be floral representations of the four seasons of the year (Yang, 1998, p. 226). There is a uniformity of color and design that echoes that of the flowers that surround the pond in Figure 35. The dancers kneel around an open center space in which, through stage lighting, a continuous, flowing, serene illusion is provided. The fact that the dancers face each
other, as if in conversation (albeit a formal one,) hints at the function of the flowers to guide
the visitor to a place where he/she can sit, drink tea and visit with his/her host. The entire
design carries the eye of the audience up through the center to focus on a solo male figure
who is looking out toward the public. Two female dancers in motion, who first spread
their enormous capes in front of the male and then continue to move quickly around his
otherwise still space, also serve through their activity to draw the eye toward the male
dancer in the center of the stage. In the same manner that the architects of the SuZhou
homes and gardens carry the focus to the home, Lin carries focus to his central character.

3. Water as Used to Create Illusion in Architectural Design and Choreography

Figure 37
*Long hallway*

Figure 38
*Moon of Water*
Water, because it is a reflecting agent, has the ability when used as a design element to enhance or exaggerate the intended message of the architect or choreographer. In Figure 37, one sees the slope of the hallway attached to the house as a beautiful design in and of itself. That this curve is reflected in the strategically placed pond only serves to amplify the architect’s expression of that space: water added to this design brings a sense of concentrated calm. The curve of the hallway gives a sense of motion to the viewer, and not only that, because the nature of a curve is circular, implies an unending sense of motion.

In Figure 38 one sees an image from Lin’s dance *Moon of Water*. In this dance, Lin has actually arranged to cover the stage with water thus creating a reflecting pool for the dance. The dance itself is created from the circular movements of the T’ai Chi vocabulary – thus creating a “double reflection” with the use of the water. The flowing movements of T’ai Chi curve with the “current,” not against it. This is apparent even in this single moment captured in the photograph. Lin not only utilizes the quality and shape of the T’ai Chi movements to express his meaning but also arranges the dancers in a downward sloping design similar to the hallway on the SuZhou house. The two designs in Figure 37 and 38 not only express reflections mirrored in the water, but also reflect each other quite clearly.
Guided feelings and successive perception can be achieved in both architecture and choreography. Through use of techniques that create illusions, reflection and reality can became confused, and the dramatic intent increased. In addition, techniques for creating
Illusions are also used by both architect and choreographer to mimic or suggest natural elements where none exist.

In the south of China, doors and windows of homes are made of intricately carved wall. These ornate carvings enhance the shape and texture of the openings and also serve to entice the viewer to look beyond the surface, to see what is created as a result of the actual architectural form. This style of window carving is called flower window.

Figure 32 shows sunlight through an ornate window creating an illusion on the floor. This image is planned by the architect to create visual interest through repetition and reflection image. This image is transitory in nature but substantial to the viewer’s eye, and thus quickly and easily perceived.

In Figure 40, one sees an image from Lin’s dance The Tale of the White Serpent in which the Green Snake sits on the shoulder of the male character, Shu-Sing. In reflection to the Green Snake, seated on the floor, is the White Snake. Lin once told the dancers in rehearsal that, contrary to the traditional story in which the Green Snake is a mere servant, this character in his dance is a woman who considers herself equal to the virtuous White Snake. The Green Snake sees herself in the White Snake. This is even more obvious in the choreographic choices Lin makes for the two women. They move together across the dance, sharing, it would seem, their successful entry into the human world, the discovery of
their fraud, and ultimately, their despair. In this manner, Lin mixes reflection and reality, and ultimately increases the drama of the situation.

In his dance *Nirvana*, Lin uses the power of illusion in a different manner. In Figure 41, one sees that yards of fabric are used to wrap the dancers, such that they become frozen, like statues. They are, in fact, meant to represent a kind of “living statue:” they are people bound or hiding themselves behind facades that they present to the world (and to themselves) as the “true” self. As the light shines through these beings, as it were, the viewer sees another figure emerge, a lighter, freer figure in motion: a figure that is not bound by the conventions of life or encased in the fabric of its own “human illusions.”

Dramatic Wall Paintings and Narrative Dance

Figure 42 *Wall Painting*
Common to Chinese art are ancient stories told and re-told to memorialize epic heroes or events in grand dramatic style. As may be seen Figure 42, wall carvings with narrative themes have become part of the decorative elements of architecture and are featured in many of the traditional homes in southern China (Wang & Chen, 1993, p. 179). Just as the inclusion of particular colors or plants comment on the owners of the home, so, too, do the narrative wall carvings tell the viewer about the nature of the people living inside. The inclusion of narrative artwork speaks not of the wealth of the owner and his family but of their cultural and artistic knowledge and connections. These aspects of life come more highly valued than financial standing.

Lin’s dances all have some tie to Chinese culture. They also employ primarily contemporary dance techniques. In this manner, Lin mixes traditional and current elements, at once inviting his audiences to savor the foundations of the past and engage in the forms of present day arts.

It is not unusual for Chinese choreographers to travel to private homes and public parks to view the dramatic carvings in order to gain inspiration for narrative dance. They search for the themes, costumes, decoration, even ideas for movement from the stories that are already told in visual format through decorative architecture. While in traditional Chinese choreography, the choreographer closely followed the original story so that the
audience could easily understand and enjoy the performance, Lin takes a more contemporary approach. Traditional staging techniques symbolic or mimetic gesture, and symbolic props, were all used to tell the story in a linear fashion, in earlier eras. The focus was on the interpretation of the performers. The Peking Opera is a good example of this. The story was known and was followed more or less in its traditional form; the actors’ technique of telling the story was the interesting factor (Ping, 1995, p. 158). This is not unlike western story ballets where the tale is familiar and the fascination lies in the performance of the dancer.

In the 1970’s, a new age of Chinese choreography was introduced in Taiwan by Lin. Much like innovators in the west, he created a new way of telling a familiar story. Legacy, for example, used many styles to tell a familiar story through non-traditional movement. Although the theme of migration from the Chinese mainland to the island of Taiwan is a familiar topic, Lin’s way of telling the tale was new. Dancers were instructed to interact with natural elements in such a way that new movement vocabulary was built. In addition, Lin used his background of study in the Martha Graham technique to choreograph Legacy. In this, his first major work for Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, Lin introduced his approach to Taiwanese audiences. Chinese audiences recognize and appreciate the telling of their stories as a way of definition of values. In his theatrical home, he carved stories in the
stage space, letting the public know that he was a man connected to culture through the arts, and that he would do this by fusing the traditional with the contemporary.

The Art of Calligraphy as Used to Embellish Architecture and Dance

Figure 43 Pavilion

Figure 44 Entrance Hall

Figure 45 Window

Figure 46 Carved Wall
Architecture embraces the symbology of Chinese calligraphy and painting. Calligraphic designs represent and interpret nature, and in turn are used to enliven living spaces, both inside and out. Calligraphy designs and paintings may be found in various places throughout the SuZhou homes and gardens: scrolls of calligraphy hanging in long hallways and as centerpieces in entrance halls (Figure 44), calligraphic designs carved into the doors and walls themselves (Figure 46), framing windows (Figure 45), in garden stones
(Figure 47), and pavilions (Figure 43). The swallow’s-tail design of the roofs is taken from the sweeping brush strokes of the calligrapher. Calligraphy is at once communication art, culture and spiritual practice, and inextricably tied to Chinese identity.

Interestingly, often the characters used are from ancient Chinese, and the contemporary visitor will not understand the words themselves. This is not important. The visitor will appreciate the work for the detail of the design – for its style, proportion, and beauty as it stands, where it stands, as it relates to what is around it, and for the underlying message that it conveys (Figure 48). Other times, the characters will belong to contemporary Chinese and can be understood. However, these inscriptions are likely to be written in a style created by the artist who wrote them. Taking the license given a poet, these artists often embed their work with a particular grace and flair that is outside of or beyond everyday lettering. These artists make their words dance (Figure 49, 50, 51).
In correspondence with the author, Lin actually likened his dances to traditional Chinese scrolls. They develop in time and space like the experience of reading and/or admiring the work of a Chinese calligrapher – flowing off the paper into the imagination and understanding of the viewer. Lin also compared the presence of various works of calligraphy, carefully placed around a SuZhou house and garden, to sections in dances he creates. The different sections are independent, possessing their own poetry, but drawn together by the entirety of the “environment,” that is, a unifying artistic vision.

In addition, he also draws a comparison between the brush stroke of the calligrapher and the motional stroke of the choreographer. The calligrapher is capable of making a light, graceful flourish with his brush, uniquely designed and constructed for this art form. Lin experiments with achieving this same quality by utilizing traditional Chinese long-sleeved costumes, lengthy ribbons (Figure 52) and “watery sleeves” (Figure 53). The
extra length of the sleeves and ribbons allow the choreographer to extend the line of movement, even creating a soft signature flourish at the end very similar to a calligrapher’s stroke lightly leaving his paper. With the sleeves and ribbons, too, Lin is able to create motional designs in space – creating for the active viewer a series of distinct pathways, “vapor trails of the imagination.” Like the visitor in a SuZhou home or garden, the viewer can appreciate the design created by the choreographer whether or nor he/she is cognizant of the precise meaning.

Just as the poems that decorate the SuZhou homes and gardens are not beyond comprehension, neither is the watery-sleeve movement. While Lin uses the sleeves in contemporary ways, he also draws on the traditional meanings inherent in the motion of this costume. Shaking sleeves symbolize water. The actively dancing red ribbons always connote festival or celebration, and when seen in conjunction with the lion figure, almost always suggest the Chinese New Year (Figure 52). Less traditional meanings can also be less abstract and fairly clear to the viewer. In Figure 53, Lin uses the sleeves in his work Landscape to suggest flight.

As the water and flowers are used to guide a viewer to a particular place, and sometimes define that space, so too is the art of calligraphy used. In Figure 44, one is led into and through the entry by the call of the red scrolls. In Figure 45, a window is framed
Chinese architecture emphasizes contrast: light against dark, strong against delicate, unity against diversity are the most predominant examples. In Figure 54, one sees that the SuZhou home offers a contrast, first of all, in light and dark tones. The roof is dark and stands out against the lighter base of the house as well as the light sky behind it. Dark window apertures punctuate the lighter space below, and as the entire house is reflected in the pond, the images of light against dark are magnified. The stability of the house also is in contrast to its watery, more fragile reflection. In addition, the vertical lines of the house

Contrast

Figure 54 House on Water

Figure 55 Songs of the Wanderers
suggest strength and a sense of solidness as they reach into the ground. The roof line or “swallow’s tail,” however, is in contrast to this. Here one finds a more lyrical line, curving gently up and away from the foundation of the home.

Again, using Lin’s *Songs of the Wanderers* as an example, one sees immediately in Figure 55 the contrast between light and dark. In this work, the rice has been streaming down on a solitary figure until it quite literally covers not only the stage but him. It is an act of overwhelming impact. The dancer virtually swims in this yellow sea of rice. Rice has various symbolic meanings to the Chinese people. One meaning is associated with survival. Rice is the staple of the Chinese diet. For this dancer to find himself immersed in this quantity of rice may be a symbol of hope for the future. Certainly the amber lighting design makes the scene pop out from the black void of a background – perhaps symbolizing the past. It could also represent man’s union with nature. Conveying both the illusions of a body of water and a basic connection of sustenance, the image does have strong ties to the necessities of life. In this way, there is an implied contrast between the delicate nature of human survival and the elements they need to sustain their strength and life flow. Rice also symbolizes wealth, in monetary terms. The simple character portrayed by the dancer, in his almost hermetic attire, is in contrast to this abundance of “wealth” in which he finds himself.
The Chinese people have strong associations of meaning with color. The south of China is not the seat of government but rather is populated with scholars, artists and common people. Whereas the color red is associated with royalty in the north, in the south it symbolizes joy and celebration. Interestingly, the red of the south is not as vibrant a red as that of the north. Likewise, the people of the south are known to be a more reserved group. The red color outlining the door panels in Figure 56 is an example of this more subdued red hue, yet still it is clear that the architect has used this color to express good will on the part of the owner of the home. This hue of red also lends itself to easy combination
with natural elements of the south – the reds found naturally in the south are reflected in this
color choice. As one might imagine, green and blue are associated with spring, and with
eternal rebirth as experienced through the seasons. The greenery in the door panels is lush,
and predominant, giving the overall feel of the door one of hope, which should extend to
those who enter therein. Gold represents wealth; therefore, modest expressions of wealth
are also found within the design of these panels. One can see that the flowers in the
rectangular patterns above the doors, as well as flower clusters in the top portions of the
panels, are golden. The birds are white, white being a color that symbolizes a separation
from the politics of the world – an aloofness that perhaps the southern Chinese feel so far
removed from the seat of their government. The bird itself emphasizes a strong
connection to nature and freedom, and perhaps the white bird is used to represent an even
greater philosophical separation between the north and the south.

Figure 57 shows an image captured from Dreamscape, Lin’s expression of the garden
of his heart. There is a solo part in the work for a woman. The dancers that form the
group in this piece are costumed with long threads or lines circling their bodies, indicating
that they are bound as humans, not free. Peacocks wander the stage freely – the antithesis
of these bound individuals. The solo dancer is like the peacocks. In fact, she moves in a
way that doesn’t frighten them, showing her close connection to nature, and her individual
freedom. In the photograph, one sees the dancer is manipulating a long red piece of fabric. The line of the fabric moves through several configurations, framing and defining the dancing figure. The red color symbolizes the joy of the dancer. Lin uses the red make-up around the eyes to reinforce this connection, much the same way red laces through the floral design of the door panels. The costume that covers her body is primarily in shades of blue and green, conveying a sense of hope and resurrection. She wears gold bracelets, perhaps to suggest that she is not wanting. Her connection to natural “laws” is apparent both by the colors she wears and her easy proximity to the peacocks, and echoes the floral design expressed in the door panels in Figure 59.

Symmetry and Asymmetry

One finds in the SuZhou architecture of homes and gardens the intent to create a feeling of totality through simultaneous use of opposites. This is the Chinese notion of “yin-yang” in which elements that are in contradiction actually compliment each other when one takes in the entire picture. In architecture and dance, both, this can be accomplished through strategic use of symmetrical and asymmetrical elements, those etched in stillness, in motion, and perhaps even in some combination of the two.
In Figure 58 one can see enough of this SuZhou home to see that, like others shown in previous photographs, it makes a strong symmetrical statement with its vertical and horizontal lines. If the viewer’s eye travels to just left of center in the upper half of the
picture, he/she will also find a small symmetrically constructed pavilion as well. Within range of the viewer’s eye, in any given “frame of reference” within a SuZhou home and garden design, one will find a number of solidly designed and evenly balanced structures. But that is not the extent of the design. One will find these symmetrical elements offset by a number of asymmetrical elements. For example, the stone structure in the right hand side of the picture creates a lovely asymmetrical flow heading down toward the water. One can see, too, that the vegetation around the homes also creates asymmetrical flow. Beyond that, the reflections of these structures, natural and manmade, in the water shimmer in their instability. Interestingly, the asymmetrical elements are generally always natural while the symmetrical constructions are man-made. However, while relying on natural beauty to guide them, SuZhou architects do make choices as to where and how to place the stones, even doing so in a manner that they often seem to have a story to tell. In addition, because the designs are intentional, there is often a fine line between the art of man and the art of nature, causing a visitor to blur the lines of distinction and simply enjoy the juxtaposition of the elements that contribute to the whole.

Like an architect, the stage space is created with the entirety in mind. The choreographer, Lin, works from an understanding of an entire feeling, picture, and/or energy dynamic, expresses his ideas to set, lighting, and costume designers, and then moves
from this larger place in creating details. In Figure 59 and 60, another image captured from Lin’s work *Dreamscape*, the viewer sees first the whole and then the details. In Figure 59, there exists a strong symmetrical statement in the giant figures projected from slides on the backdrop. One also notices the strong red triangle that splits the vertical dance space between the figures, as well as a square yellow light projected directly onto the floor. In Figure 60, one then sees a detail of the configuration of humans tucked between those two imposing figures. There are three of them, their bodies are wrapped in bandage-like strips of fabric, and the design of their shrouding coupled with their obvious sense of imbalance with regard to movement speaks of asymmetry. Lin, like the southern Chinese architects, creates a sense of ultimate balance by combining opposites.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In the creation of either architecture or dance, the artist works to elicit a response in the viewer through the expression of concept. The goal is an ideal state of mind and the product may well be an artistic masterpiece. Although, as may be evidenced in the preceding chapters, the methods for creating dance and architecture may vary, the resulting artistic product and the underlying goals themselves present a strong sense of commonality.

Architecture in southern China reveals a focus on philosophy and history in its special features and integration of form and function. Each design, aesthetically pleasing, also teaches the viewer about Chinese history and philosophy. With a solid background in the traditional culture of China, Lin Hwai-Min similarly assumes the role of teacher, sharing with the audience his personal inspiration grounded in the aesthetics, history and philosophy of traditional China. Although educated in the west as well as the east, Lin deliberately chooses to shape his choreography along Chinese lines, both figuratively and literally.
From an aesthetic perspective, southern Chinese gardens and homes center on the concept of nature, a view that is primary to Chinese philosophy. The Chinese characters of Confucius, rigorous and straight, can be seen in the strong and harmonious lines of the architecture. These lines represent stability, reflecting an ordered society that is rooted in the Taoist ideal of harmony with nature. The garden is the crowning flower of architecture, matching the ideals of the home like poetic verse with greenery, flowers, water and precious detail. Lin also brings to choreography his rich background in the great literature of Confucian and Taoist theory. His serious attitude and working style is Confucian in form. His selection of content comes directly from Taoist philosophy. It is within the context of traditional Chinese ideas the Lin discovered his own identity and unique voice as a choreographer.

As evidenced by research, traditional southern Chinese homes are shaped like the Chinese character person with roof lines extending horizontally over a strong vertical base. The total vision is one of harmony and simplicity, reflecting the humble nature of Taoist thought. Still, the detailed elements of decoration bring a richness to the homes, adding curvilinear shapes and rich color that lend contrast and texture to the homes. The gardens are like a series of tiny treasures with winding pathways leading the viewer from one moment to the next. The curious viewer can look at the designs endlessly, from many
sides and perspectives, due to the deliberate choices made by architects. The use of water and small mountains, for example, indicate the personal journey of all individuals. The architect seeks to recreate these inner universal desires, creating metaphors with flowers and color to elicit emotional responses from the viewer. The flow and texture of the designs deliberately address Confucian and Taoist ideals.

The characters portrayed in Lin’s choreography are sketched through movement borrowed from Chinese Peking Opera and martial arts and integrated with contemporary dance styles. The western influence of modern dance on his work is extensive, but the merging of these technical idioms with the traditional methods of Chinese Opera and martial arts brings a fresh voice to world dance. Based firmly on traditional ideals, Lin feels free to search openly for choreographic vision, finding sources as varied as T’ai Chi and Graham technique or Balinese dance and ballet to tell epic stories. His sense of stage design is architectural, not unlike a Chinese garden in its deliberate pathways and divisions enriched by detail, texture and color. His compositions often use literary themes with underlying elements of Chinese philosophy and history told through staging with water ponds, bamboo, lotus, candles and silk in methods that serve the Taoist concept of nature.

From this research, one can gain an understanding of “artistic conception” as a major element of creativity. In each form of art, whether it is dance, architecture, drama or
painting, the artist works from an artistic concept in order to create and inspire. More often than not, the concept can and is intentionally expressed such that there are multiple layers of meaning. What is presented generally has at least one “subtext” intentionally designed by the artist. This approach to the creative process has been the measurement and standard of achievement since ancient Chinese times and continues to drive the creative process today.

Architecture is expressed in actual time and space. Through a physical sculpting of the space the architect may also create a spiritual image. Concrete and ephemeral elements share equal importance. In dance, space is sculpted abstractly through the use of the dancer’s body. In each art form, the artistic conception or multiple layers of meaning is shared with the viewer and remains the ultimate goal of the work.

At the beginning of the research, the aesthetic line between southern Chinese architecture and dance was inspirational based on personal interest and background. Exploring the concepts of complexity and simplicity or sensing the effects of conflict within harmony in design was visually appealing. But the true meaning comes from the artist’s sharing of his/her artistic vision, an idea that moves well beyond any of the discrete elements.

Examining the work of Lin Hwai-Min brought into focus the artistic vision of the
choreographer as essentially Chinese. Even with extensive training in the West, Lin’s primary methods and artistic visions retained the same Chinese lines, shapes and dynamics as Chinese architecture. Rooted in both are the ideology and history of a country over 5000 years old.

In summary, dance and architecture are deeply connected. Aesthetic form, cultural history and philosophy inspire both art forms. Happily, because the Chinese people value and preserve these cultural treasures, the rich history of Chinese architecture will remain an endless trove for choreographers to explore.