



## **THE 1999 RAMON MAGSAYSAY AWARD FOR JOURNALISM, LITERATURE, AND CREATIVE COMMUNICATION ARTS**

### **BIOGRAPHY OF LIN HWAI-MIN**

**A** true child of Taiwan, he has drawn nourishment from the island and the world beyond and has given back to both his amazing gift of dance.

Lin Hwai-min was born on February 19, 1947, in Chiayi, a small but old and scenic city in south-central Taiwan. His family has deep roots in Taiwan, going back some seven generations to their ancestral town of Hsin Kang, one of the earliest Chinese settlements before the Manchus seized the island in the seventeenth century and brought the first significant wave of Chinese migrants to what Westerners then called Formosa.

Lin's great-grandfather was a learned man, a poet and businessman who founded a factory and a bank and ran a Chinese school during the Japanese colonial period (1895–1945). (China ceded Taiwan to Japan in 1895, after Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War.) Lin's grandfather was a poet and medical doctor. Though both died before Lin was born, they were veritable figures of legend in the family when Lin was growing up.

Lin's father, Lin Ching-sheng, earned a law degree from Tokyo Imperial University and briefly worked for Toshiba but had to return to Taiwan to help take care of the family business after his own father died. After the Communists drove Chiang Kai-shek's government to Taiwan in 1949, Lin Ching-sheng was drafted to serve in the Kuomintang (Guomindang) government, in what was part of Chiang's move to incorporate the local Taiwanese elite into his government. Lin Ching-sheng served as magistrate of Chiayi (1951–1954) and Yunlin (1957–1964) and as director of the Cheng Ching Lake Industrial Waterworks (1964–1967). He went on to fill such high positions as minister of interior (1972–1976), minister of communications (1976–1984), and vice-president of the Examination Yuan, the national board that oversaw examinations to select civil servants (1984–1993). For many years, he served as member of the standing committee of the Kuomintang Central Committee and in 1993 was appointed senior adviser to the president of Taiwan.

Lin Hwai-min was born to Taiwan's bureaucratic and intellectual elite. His mother, Lin Cheng Pen-pen, herself of an old Taiwanese family, was a graduate of the Tokyo Economics College, an attainment remarkable for a woman at the time.

By the time Lin was born, the family had lost much of the family business. They lost their lands as well (Lin refers to their family as "small landlords") under the Kuomintang land reform program. Theirs, however, remained a privileged, old-elite family with a reputation for being learned, modern, and outward-looking. Lin's parents are both fluent in Japanese and Mandarin. Lin recalls that one of his aunts was the first Catholic nun from his hometown. Under her influence, his grandmother welcomed and assisted the first Catholic missionaries in Hsin Kang.

Lin Hwai-min was born at a tragic moment in Taiwan's history.

In 1945, after Japan's defeat in World War II, sovereignty over Taiwan was returned to the Republic of China. The new Kuomintang government turned out to be repressive and

corrupt, fueling discontent among the local population. On February 28, 1947, just days after Lin was born, anti-mainlander violence flared and, for several weeks, rebels took control of much of the island. In retaliation, an island-wide massacre ensued as the Kuomintang launched a campaign of terror to suppress the rebellion. It is estimated that twenty thousand people died, among them many of the Taiwanese elite. Martial law was imposed and would remain in place for the next four decades. Various strictures were imposed to “Sinicize” the population. To have a photo discovered of anyone wearing a Japanese kimono would result in being branded un-nationalistic. To be heard speaking the Taiwanese dialect in school was to invite punishment. Political dissidents were put into prison or simply “disappeared.” Among those who “disappeared” was a cousin of Lin’s father. These events, Lin would later say, “cast a dark shadow on our bodies and minds.” The trauma was deep since memories of these events were suppressed in the country’s official history for forty years, until the abolishment of martial law in 1987.

In 1949, the situation was aggravated when the movement to the island of mainland Chinese turned into a human flood: the defeat of the Nationalist army by the Communists on the mainland that year brought an influx of two and a half million military and civilian refugees to Taiwan. Political and demographic changes tore at the fabric of Taiwanese society. The local economy started to collapse, the newly arrived Chinese took over properties left by the Japanese, and postwar tensions simmered between mainlanders and the local inhabitants.

For all this, Lin had a relatively untroubled life as a child. The family lived in a “magistrate’s mansion” inherited from Japanese officers, with a large compound and garden. Lin grew up in the midst of aunts, uncles, and cousins, who pampered him with attention. He had limited interaction outside of home and mostly interacted with adults. Except for occasional sallies with aunts and family members to watch performances of Taiwanese opera and to see Japanese and American films, he had a sheltered life. His recollections of childhood rarely mention peers, and his early years seem to have transpired in a world that was very private and family-centered.

His parents dunned into him lessons in discipline and responsibility. The oldest of eleven brothers and sisters, Lin’s father was raised to assume responsibilities for the family. This he tried to pass on to his son (Lin was the oldest of four brothers) who was constantly reminded that he would, in his turn, be “the engine of the train.” His parents, Lin says, raised him in a home that was a curious mix of Taiwanese, Japanese, and Chinese in its ethos. His mother was a caring and, at the same time, sensible, no-nonsense person. His father had a sensitive, artistic temperament but was nevertheless a stickler for duty. When Lin showed his mother his report card with a grade of 98 percent, his mother would sternly say, “That’s quite alright, but where are those two points?” His father instilled in him the notion of the elite’s responsibility to serve the public (which Lin calls a kind of “British elitism” filtered through a Japanese education).

Even when he was young, Lin felt he was not quite cut out to follow in his father’s footsteps. As a boy, he often accompanied his father on his official duties and saw how hard he worked. Lin later said that he did not wish to be in government; it was “too busy and too complicated.”

Yet, there was a tender side to his father, who would send Lin, when he was in school, samples of poetry to read. He was a conflicted person, Lin says, a dedicated bureaucrat who was, at the same time, enamored with the quiet diversions of music and literature. Lin’s father loved to draw and paint, while his mother enjoyed classical music. Lin remembers his childhood world as one filled with Japanese and Chinese books and the images and sounds

of Chinese, Japanese, and Western painting and music. He also grew up with an appetite for movies and theater.

Lin first attended Chun Wen Elementary School in Chiayi but studied there for only over a year since the family moved to Hsinchu. His father had lost in an election and, in financial straits, they decided to stay with his mother's rich family in Hsinchu for three years. Then, when he was eleven and a half, he was sent away to Taichung First High School, the best school in central Taiwan (his great-grandfather was one of the school's founders). Mandarin was the language of instruction and the school had a good program in English and the arts (music and painting). From Taichung, he was moved to Weidao, a private boys' school run by Catholic Brothers.

Lin enjoyed school, read a lot, and watched movies in his spare time. Through his years in school, he largely kept to himself. The other boys in school considered him "different" because of his reclusive love for books and the arts. It was a difference he cultivated.

When it was time for him to enter college, he signed up for literature and history, but his father, who had studied law in Tokyo, found out about it and changed his proposed course of study to law. Thus, he was admitted to law studies at National Chengchi University in the outskirts of Taipei. He chafed against a course that was not to his liking and, after a year, transferred to journalism.

He had, by this time, cultivated great interest in writing. When he was fourteen and in high school, he published his first story in *United Daily News*, one of the country's biggest newspapers. In the years that followed, he wrote stories in Chinese, mostly of adolescent angst and alienation, publishing in Taipei literary magazines and newspapers such as *United Daily News* and *China Times*. He used the money earned from writing his stories to buy books and records; he immersed himself in reading and corresponded with writers and editors in Taipei. He was barely eighteen and about to enter the university when he went to Taipei and signed up as one of the contract writers for *Crown*, one of Taiwan's biggest magazines.

Based in Taipei, he enjoyed his freedom away from the family. With time on his hands, he associated with writers, poets, and artists in the capital. Contemporary Western culture was making inroads in Taiwan (songs by the Beatles and Joan Baez were popular among the young), and there was excitement in the perils and challenges of the Vietnam War and Third World nationalism, but the outside world still seemed far away as Taiwan remained under martial law. All forms of artistic expression were under heavy censorship; depiction of reality on the island was taboo. Young people found an emotional outlet in Western arts. In literary and artistic circles, there was a lot of interest in modernism, the avant-garde, and artistic experimentation. Lin's readings ranged widely and eclectically, from novels by American and Russian writers (F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky) to biographies of Mahatma Gandhi and the great American dancer Isadora Duncan, as well as "forbidden" books by Chinese writers such as Lu Hsun (Lu Xun). He followed the latest trends in film and theater (Federico Fellini, Akira Kurosawa, Samuel Beckett) and saw himself part of the wave of modernism in Taiwan's literary circles.

After Lin graduated from National Chengchi University with a degree in journalism, he was drafted into the army. But instead of being dispatched to the field in some far-flung post, he was assigned to an office job in communications in Taipei. Bored with the job, he spent most of his time writing stories. It was at this time, in 1969, that he published his second book of stories, which included the story "Cicada," a Taiwanese rendering of the "Lost Generation" theme that became very popular, striking a responsive chord in a young generation increasingly alienated from the high political propaganda of the Cold War.

It was dance that became Lin's great passion. It was a passion that had always been with him. Lin recalls the effect on him when, barely five years old, he saw the British film *The Red Shoes* (1948), a contemporary adaptation, set in London, of a story by Hans Christian Andersen about an aspiring dancer's struggle to join a famous ballet company. So mesmerized was he with the movie that he viewed it eleven times. Asked by an interviewer many years later about the film's story, Lin enthused, "What happens in the story is not important! The important thing is people are dancing! And they are doing pirouettes on those shoes! And men are jumping so high!"

So taken was he with dance that he started dancing himself, improvising his moves before indulgent family and relatives. His mother fashioned ballet slippers out of leftover fabric, and so moved was he with the fantasy that he took to carrying his "red shoes" with him to bed. His parents were tolerant of the little boy's dream of being a dancer. They were themselves, after all, aficionados of dance and music, familiar with works such as Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* and Verdi's *La Traviata*.

To fantasize was something Lin enjoyed when he was young. He loved movies, theatrical performances, and festivals. Lin recalls an episode when he was a boy in Hsinchu and his family lived in a building across the street from a wine house. From his room, he could see the goings-on in the busy banquet room and the private quarters of the hostesses. He was fascinated by the theatricality of the view and imagined he was looking at a plot unfolding in what was the public "stage" of the wine house and its secret "backstage." As he later said, "Fantasy is the most essential part of my life."

It was only in the 1960s that local artists such as Liu Feng-hsueh started to introduce modern dance in Taiwan. There were not too many opportunities in Taiwan for a boy dreaming of becoming a modern dancer. In elementary school, his teacher brought him to dance in a competition. In high school, when he was about fourteen, he enrolled in a dance studio but gave it up after three months because he felt there was little there he could learn. At this time, he fed his appetite by reading what he could find on the subject of dance and the arts. In Taipei, he frequented the local United States Information Service (USIS) library to borrow novels and to read pictorial books on American modern arts and modern dance.

While he was in high school, he had the rare opportunity to watch the great Mexican-American dancer José Limón perform in Taichung when Limón visited Taiwan under U.S. State Department auspices. Limón's cool, dignified movements in *The Moor's Pavane*, a dance adaptation from *Othello*, left a deep impression on the young Lin.

When he was in college, Lin had his formal introduction to modern dance when Chungliang Al Huang, a U.S.-educated modern dancer, conducted a dance workshop in Taipei. Around this time, Lin also had the opportunity to watch a performance of the renowned American choreographer-dancer Paul Taylor when Taylor's company toured Taiwan. When the U.S.-trained Hong Kong Chinese dancer, Yen Lo Wong, gave a lecture-demonstration and performance in Taipei, Lin went to see her. He also went to concerts of contemporary music when the pioneer Taiwanese composer Hsu Chang-huei came home to Taiwan after his studies in France.

Lin picked up what he could to nourish his interest in dance and the arts. He occasionally performed as a dancer in concerts in Taipei, choreographing his own "structured improvisations." But Lin was still undecided on fully devoting himself to the art. He felt he was too "old" to be a dancer and, at the time, considered being a dance critic instead.

An important milestone in his life came when he left for the United States in 1969 on a scholarship to study journalism at the University of Missouri. While he was not particularly keen on leaving, going to the United States was something either expected from or encouraged among bright, young Taiwanese. Lin says that he decided on Missouri because

many of the leading journalists in Taiwan studied there or at Columbia University in New York City. An influence was Richard T. Baker, the associate dean of journalism at Columbia, who came to Taiwan in 1968 as a guest professor in journalism. Lin joined Baker's class and struck a friendship with the American. When Lin was in Missouri, the Bakers had him come to spend the summers with them in their home in upstate New York.

Because his scholarship covered only tuition, Lin had to support himself with part-time jobs. Though the son of a high government official back home, he thought little about doing menial work, including cleaning toilets. He was, however, restless in Missouri. He found Missouri "provincial" and was bored with his classes since he was impatient with theory and wanted the practical work of journalism.

Two months after his arrival in Missouri, Lin received a fellowship to the prestigious University of Iowa's International Writing Program under Paul Engle, a renowned poet. Lin spent two years in Iowa (1970–1972) and found the place exciting since Iowa had an active theater and fine arts program. As part of his university program, he took a course in modern dance under Marcia Thayer and joined the dance ensemble she formed that performed on campus and toured communities in the state. Lin cites Marcia Thayer as an important influence because of her passionate dedication to the art of dance and the encouragement he received from her. Touring Iowa with Thayer's group, he also learned a lot about the practical side of running a dance company and serving a local audience. Thayer (1936–1982) whose background as dancer and choreographer included work with José Limón and his mentor Doris Humphrey—headed and developed the Dance Program at the University of Iowa (1962–1974) and the University of Iowa Dance Theatre.

Lin's Iowa experience sharpened his interest in dance and summers found him taking trips to New York to enroll in the June course of the famous school Martha Graham founded. Of his stint in Iowa, Lin recalls, "I started spending more time in the studio than at the typewriter."

After he finished his master's degree in fine arts in Iowa in 1972, he went to New York and spent several months at the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance and took several classes at the Merce Cunningham Studio. Graham, who has been called the finest creative artist of dance in the United States, was highly admired not only for her stark, highly theatrical dance style but her use of ancient myths and religious themes to express the deepest human emotions. Graham's style was clearly a formative influence on Lin's development.

New York, Lin says, was the happiest time in his life. Young and free, he soaked in the atmosphere of New York in the Seventies, going to theaters, museums, and galleries; reading the latest works; and watching modern dance performances by some of the world's best dance artists. He supported himself partly with odd summer jobs in hotels and restaurants. Such drudgery did little to dampen his enthusiasm. It was an exciting time for him, filled with artistic stimulation and dreams of possibilities. Even then, he remained ambivalent about becoming a professional dancer. "I was too late," he felt, though he was then only twenty-five.

Lin returned to Taiwan by way of Europe, traveling across several countries in true bohemian style, staying in cheap hostels or sleeping in the park. Back in Taiwan, a world of "responsibility" closed in on him. No longer the sojourner, he had to respond to the call of family, friends, and the home country. He went back to writing and doing choreography and was involved in various educational and cultural activities, such as teaching at National Chengchi University and Chinese Cultural University. He also found himself in the midst of the "identity" politics of the time, when artists and intellectuals were beginning to call for Taiwan to develop and define its own culture in the arts.

In 1973, one year after his return, he established Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, the institution that would become synonymous with his name. It is the first modern dance company in any Chinese-speaking community anywhere in the world. The company takes its name from what, according to legend, is the name of the oldest known dance in China, a ritual dance of some five thousand years ago. As the company's founder, choreographer, and artistic director, Lin ran Cloud Gate almost single-handedly.

Lin calls the first years of Cloud Gate as "a very Chinese period." They did original pieces as well as adaptations from Beijing opera, modifying body movements and narrative structure, and adding new psychological layers to the form. Even then, he was interested in morphing old forms into something contemporary and new. An example is what may be Lin's first major creation, *Tale of the White Serpent* (1975), which dramatizes the tensions of spirituality and worldly temptation by using a well-known Chinese legend popularized in Beijing opera about an upright young scholar seduced by the spirit of a white serpent. Here he had his dancers trained in the movements and music of Beijing opera but, reconfiguring the form and drawing inspiration from such musical sources as Karlheinz Stockhausen and Arnold Schönberg, Lin crafted a work that in its tempo, style, and vision was "pure contemporary."

Lin was beginning to forge his distinctive mark on dance. He felt he was no longer working in isolation. If, in his early years, he felt somewhat disengaged from the place into which he was born, now he was beginning to feel, he says, "the fiber of the society." He had found his artistic home.

In 1978, he created *Legacy*, a full-length choreography that depicts the pioneering saga of the early Chinese who made the perilous voyage to Taiwan to build their lives on the island. It is an energetic piece of theater that almost seamlessly combines acrobatics, karate, gymnastics, and traditional Chinese dance movements, accompanied by traditional Chinese music and a battery of percussion instruments, in telling a nation's story.

Part of the stimulus for the work came from another trip to the United States in 1977 when, under the auspices of the Asia Foundation and John D. Rockefeller 3rd Fund, Lin spent a semester as resident artist at the University of California–Los Angeles and in the American Dance Festival at Duke University, North Carolina. He confessed to feeling extremely lonely during his second American sojourn. He was also troubled by events taking place in the United States and China; after Nixon's historic visit to China, the two countries were growing closer and, as a result, Taiwan was becoming more isolated. He began thinking about Taiwan's history, about his own past, that of his own family, and the larger story of the Chinese diaspora. He had always wanted, even as a child, Lin says, to do a family saga in the vein of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. When he returned to Taiwan, he immediately started working on *Legacy*, "the first theatrical presentation of the history of Taiwan."

By pure accident, *Legacy* premiered on December 16, 1978, the very day President Jimmy Carter announced that the United States was breaking diplomatic ties with Taiwan. (In 1971, Taiwan lost the China seat in the United Nations, and in 1979 the United States transferred diplomatic recognition from the Republic of China to the People's Republic of China.) It was an emotional moment for the Taiwanese, filled with the sense that their country had been betrayed and cast adrift. Thus, *Legacy* struck a deep chord among the Taiwanese when it premiered in Chiayi, the city where Lin was born. At the premiere, six thousand people in the stadium wept and shouted, seeing in *Legacy* a vision of their own story as a people. The production toured Taiwan and "took the whole island by storm."

Lin went on to produce other choreographies, including *Nirvana* (1982), a sensual exploration of the Buddhist theme of enlightenment and transcendence; *The Dream of the*

*Red Chamber* (1983), a full-length work based on the famous classical Chinese novel of the same title; *Rite of Spring* (1984), which transforms Igor Stravinsky's controversial work of the same title (a composition that, some scholars say, marked the birth of modern music) into a modern drama set in the streets of Taipei; *Dreamscape* (1984), which explores the identity of modern Chinese caught between East and West; and *My Nostalgia, My Songs* (1984), which depicts the travails and dreams of young people from a rural background struggling in the city.

Lin Hwai-min had established himself as Taiwan's leading choreographer and turned Cloud Gate Dance Theatre into the vanguard of modern dance in the country.

From 1988 to 1991, Lin suspended the operations of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre. Taiwan was going through a period of political and economic turmoil. Lin felt drained, having been extremely busy not only with Cloud Gate but with other commitments. In 1983, he had founded the Department of Dance at the National Institute of Arts and acted as its chairman for five years. (In 1993, he founded and headed the institute's Graduate School of Dance.) He was also writing, publishing the essay collections *On Dance* (1981) and *Passing by Brushing the Shoulders* (1985). Lin felt the need to disengage and take stock of his life and work.

The respite allowed Lin to study and travel. In 1989, on a Fulbright fellowship, he studied Performance Studies at the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. More important, the time allowed him space to immerse himself in Asian culture and recharge his spirit. As early as 1975, on an ASPEC fellowship, he had studied court dance in Seoul, South Korea, and Buragu in Tokyo, Japan. But the hiatus of 1988–1991 allowed him the freedom to deepen his personal experience of Asia. He spent time in Bali, a place he visited for the first time in 1986 and found so spiritually rejuvenating that he has since visited it many times. In Bali, he lived in a small house at the edge of a river and observed or participated in local rites such as cremations. He traveled to Java, India, and Nepal, fascinated by Hinduism and life lived in ways intimate with the rhythms of nature. These experiences deeply affected him and would find expression in the metaphysics and symbolism of light and water in three of his works, *Songs of the Wanderers*, *Portrait of the Families*, and *Moon Water*.

Lin also visited the People's Republic of China. He relates how on his first visit, as they were about to land in Xi'an, the mountain under the wing of the airplane reminded him of the Chinese poems he had read as a child; he was so overwhelmed with emotion that he started crying. He confesses to his deep love for the culture of China and the primordial emotions evoked by its landscape and cultural relics but recalls at the same time how, on his first visit, he could not help but be conscious of his outsidership. "There I discovered that I'm not Chinese."

The 1980s saw important changes in the political life of Taiwan. In 1987, martial law (which had been in force since 1947) was lifted. Opposition parties were legalized, press controls were relaxed, and there was greater openness, for instance, in dealing with the trauma of the 1947 massacres. In Taiwan's rough-and-tumble democracy, Kuomintang rule became less secure. The dream of "retaking" the mainland faded and the movement for "independence" from mainland China grew. There was a flourishing of activity in literature, painting, theater, and the arts, stimulated in part by increases in state expenditures for cultural development.

The quest for a "local-soil" Taiwanese identity intensified as Taiwanese leaders and intellectuals turned inward to the land to find the moral resources to build a nation. There was much interest in recovering what had been suppressed in the public memory. Lin

recalls that in the past, the history of Taiwan was just two or three pages of the textbook. “We knew the length of the Yangtze River but not our local rivers. We knew the history of China through thousands of years but our own history is a blank.” This was the time that Lin started to research the past of his hometown, collecting more than two thousand old photographs of his family and the townsfolk (material he would use in *Portrait of the Families*).

Lin’s “vacation” from theater and dance proved to be a great boon. Reviving Cloud Gate Dance Theatre in 1991, he returned to his work with greater and richer passion and produced his most important work.

To mark the twentieth anniversary of Cloud Gate in 1993, Lin produced *Nine Songs*. The anticipation over its staging was such that, with tickets for the fifteen performances already sold out at its premiere in Taipei in August 1993, almost twenty thousand people crowded into the National Theater’s outdoor plaza for a live broadcast of the performance that was going on inside. Performed in various cities around the world (it premiered in the United States at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC in 1995), it has been hailed as “one of the most important dance works of our time.”

*Nine Songs* is a stunningly theatrical dance-opera based on a cycle of ancient poems, “Nine Songs,” by the famous Chinese poet Qu-yang Hsiu (Ouyang Xiu), poems that reflect on primitive rituals enacting the entire cycle of life, love, death, and rebirth. Lin interprets the dynamic and flow of this cycle and brings it into the present by highlighting the destructive force of injustice and suffering in the modern world as well as the ultimately, spiritually uplifting hope of purification and renewal.

What makes the work compelling is the way Lin creates—through the medium of dance, sounds, and images—an artistic piece that transgresses and exceeds cultural and temporal boundaries and yet emerges as something quite powerful and organic. The performance begins as the audience is ushered into the magical space of an auditorium where the entire orchestra pit has been transformed into a lotus pond, with real flowers and huge green leaves hovering above a pool of actual water. To the sounds of flowing water and bird calls, the audience sees, as the curtain rises, a magnificent lotus painting on giant back and side panels that open and close in various configurations during the performance to emphasize a shift in mood or to allow a group of dancers to enter the stage.

The dance that follows is ninety minutes of richly diverse and often startling images that bring together gods and mortals, allegory and history, the ancient past and modern times. The various stages of human existence are dramatized in a fluent and powerful mix of movements, symbols, and sounds—at turns, sensual, lustful, violent, beatific, or serene—which draw from an eclectic repertoire that includes the sounds of Indian flutes, Tibetan Buddhist Tantras, and the songs of Taiwan’s indigenous tribes, and dance movements evocative of Chinese, Southeast Asian, and Western traditions.

In a final section, called “Homage to the Martyrs,” a modern world vacated by the gods breaks through the remoteness of ritual in a violent climax of suffering and death. This is poignantly conveyed in a recitation of the names of martyrs that allusively span such episodes of history as oppression in ancient China, the atrocities of Japanese rule, and the 1947 massacres in Taiwan. This leads to an ending during which candles are brought in, forming a river of light, as consolation for the dead and the audience. The dead rise again and the performance closes.

In Brecht-like fashion, Lin reminds the audience that they are not witnessing rituals, ancient and exotic, but a reality quite urgent and contemporary. The most effective device is that of an intriguing Magritte-like figure in a Western-style suit who periodically crosses the stage, walking with a suitcase or riding a bicycle, even at those points in the performance when gods and pilgrims are absorbed in an ancient ceremony.

*Nine Songs* has been staged in major cities the world over and has elevated awareness of the remarkable advances in modern Asian dance. The decade of the 1990s was an exceptionally productive time for Lin Hwai-min. After *Nine Songs*, he would create, in quick succession, other widely-admired productions.

Inspired by his visit in 1991 to Bodh Gaya in northern India, where Buddha is said to have sat beneath a banyan tree and gained enlightenment, Lin created *Songs of the Wanderers* (1994), which takes part of its inspiration from the German novelist Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* (1922) in dramatizing the search for spiritual enlightenment. Concise and sparer than such epics as *Legacy*, *Nine Songs*, and *Portrait of the Families*, *Songs of the Wanderers* shows dancers, with staves topped by small bells that are rung from time to time, on a pilgrimage that moves from suffering and survival to a point of inner calm. Despite its austerity, it moved audiences not only because of its choreography but also Lin's gift for arresting images, such as the falling stream of golden rice grains (some 3,500 kilograms of it were used in the performance) that showers the dancers and the focal presence of a young monk who remains in a completely still meditation throughout the ninety-minute work. *Songs of the Wanderers* further enhanced Lin's reputation as an artist. Its performance at Sadler's Wells Theatre in London led the *Times* of London to hail Cloud Gate as "Asia's leading contemporary dance theater company."

*Portrait of the Families* (1997) examines the past one hundred years of Taiwanese history from the point of view of the family, exploring themes of human suffering, the fortitude of the human spirit, and the power of memory. Inspired by Lin's efforts at recovering his own family past, the performance combines various dance and ritual forms (a traditional lion dance, a religious procession, a trance dance, and a rite involving the burning of a sacrificial boat), images of hundreds of vintage photographs (from Lin's photographic collection) projected as backdrop to the performance, and the taped voices of Taiwanese speaking in different dialects. Along with *Legacy*, *Portrait of the Families* is one of Lin's more "historical" works and has been performed in Taiwan, Vienna, Berlin, and Jerusalem.

*Moon Water* (1998), like *Songs of the Wanderers*, illustrates Lin's shift to a more austere, essential form. It is a metaphysical exploration that uses *tai chi*, the Chinese physical exercise that harnesses internal energy, to recall the swell and ebb of a river through the motions of human bodies. One review captures something of the mesmeric qualities of the performance:

*A study in real vs. unreal and yin and yang, the dance juxtaposes the ancient martial arts' spiral-like movements with J. S. Bach's Six Suites for Solo Cello. It begins on a simple black and white set, revealing a lone man contemplating a simple sketch of water droplets on the stage's black floor. As mirrors descend and then disappear around him, a shimmering lunar landscape reflects the man's image, as well as the moving figures of the dancers who join him onstage. Water suddenly floods the stage, transforming it into a vast liquid mirror. Surrounded on all sides by their repeating images, the dancers are soon drenched, their billowing costumes gradually adhering to their whirling bodies.*

Thrilled by the choreography's technical excellence, a dance critic writes of *Moon Water*: "The phrasing of the dance and the use of the space could be put in a textbook on contemporary choreography." *Moon Water*, a dance critic writes in the *Daily Telegraph* (United Kingdom), is "a dream of a show, one of the most ravishing things I've seen in a

theatre.”

Lin Hwai-min is eclectic in his sources as well as rooted in his country and Asia. He has created dances that recall Martha Graham’s influence but draw at the same time upon familiar acrobatic and pantomime conventions of Chinese opera. He choreographed modern-dance versions of Chinese classics as well as wholly original pieces set to traditional Taiwanese music. He trained his young dancers in Asian classical dance forms and in *tai chi* and meditation, as well as in modern dance and ballet. Over time, he perfected the unique fusions of styles and forms for which he is now famous, lifting traditional dance from its indigenous roots to the full flower of modern art.

His range is remarkable. In *Nine Songs*, Lin combines dance techniques from India and Java with modern dance and incorporates ancient Chinese poems, aboriginal Taiwanese village songs, Tibetan Buddhist Tantras, and stage lighting inspired by his stay in Bali. In *Songs of Wanderers*, Georgian folk songs accompany Lin’s Zen-flavored interpretation of Hermann Hesse’s novel of religious searching, *Siddhartha*. He uses the music of Franz Liszt and Gustav Mahler in *Requiem* and *Adagietto*, translating for an Asian audience the arts of the West. And in *Moon Water*, dancers glide in *tai chi*-like movements across a stage to selected music from the Suites for Solo Cello by Johann Sebastian Bach.

While addressing universal themes of struggle, freedom, and spiritual enlightenment, Lin’s dance compositions often depict or allude to real historical events, such as the Taiwan massacres of 1947 and the 1989 tragedy at Tiananmen. Lin, however, rejects interpretations that would confine the meanings of his work to a particular time or place. Of *Nine Songs*, he bemusedly says, rejecting facile essentialisms: “I didn’t intend it to be Chinese. Then again, what is Chinese? I think I have stopped knowing what is Chinese.” Of his work, he says, “I’m moving in and out of cultures as I make my pieces.” His true subject, he adds, is not Taiwan or Asia, or myth or history, but “the landscape of the human heart.”

Speaking in an interview, Lin grounds his own refusal of neat, fixed categories in his own personal experience: “My story has all along been a mixture of Taiwanese-Chinese, Western and Japanese influences—my parents were educated in Japan. Even today I talk to my dancers in Mandarin, Taiwanese dialect, and English, quite indiscriminately.” While deeply respectful of tradition and the past, he is clear-minded about the globalized world he and the Taiwanese of today inhabit. “These days,” he says, “we go up to venerate the great masters in the National Palace Museum, then come down to eat in a McDonald’s and watch *Star Wars*. You can go to the mountains and join in an aboriginal dance ceremony, then come back to Taipei and see an exhibition of works by Picasso. We travel to Paris, Rome, New York, and even to China. Old and new, it’s all part of our life.”

This does not, however, translate into either a “nowhereness” or an easy acquiescence to the seductions of a dominant Western culture. Lin Hwai-min has continued to develop and refine his art in relation to the immediate cultural world he inhabits. This is shown in the deepening spiritualism of his work, his interest in Asian religions, and his continuing fascination with the artistic possibilities of such practices and symbols as *tai chi* and Chinese calligraphy as well as what he sees in the natural world of the country and region that is his home. There are indications in his recent choreographies that he has moved toward the distillation of the most essential virtues of his work.

At the same time, Lin has always insisted on the importance of technical excellence in the form he has chosen as an artist. Lin conceives of a performance as of a piece, something organic and integral. Defining himself in an interview, he says he is less a dancer or “dancer-choreographer” (who thinks or feels with his body, his instincts and emotions, but may be weak in content and structure) than a “choreographer-choreographer” (who sees with

“another eye” from the outside and thinks of movements in a metaphorical and kinetic relationship with other elements, such as space, structure, and musicality). “I’m more a theater person,” he says, “than a dancer-choreographer per se.”

In this respect, a large part of Cloud Gate’s success has drawn from Lin’s creative collaboration with other artists, such as Ming Cho Lee, renowned Chinese-American set designer and head of the Design Department of Yale University’s School of Drama. (Among his numerous credits, Ming Cho Lee has been principal designer for the New York Shakespeare Festival and has produced half a dozen designs for the Martha Graham Dance Company.) Ming Cho Lee collaborated with Lin in such productions as *The Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Portrait of the Families*. Their collaboration produced the stunning scenography in *Nine Songs* in which the dance movements were of a piece with such devices as a real lotus pond in the orchestra pit and Chinese calligraphies projected on a transparent screen covering the entire proscenium. Building on the collaborative work of dancers, set and lighting designers, and other technical people, Lin’s productions have been memorable as full theater. Audiences will not forget the hypnotic stream of falling golden rice transformed into a Zen garden in *Songs of the Wanderers* or the use of silvery mirrors that let the audience see the patterns of the dancers from various angles in *Moon Water*.

Lin’s bold conceptions and Ming Cho Lee’s technical mastery have resulted in revolutionary innovations in theater production technology in Taiwan.

Requirements for sophisticated lighting and film projections, or the installation of giant, moving panels or an actual lotus pond in the auditorium, forced improvements in stage technology and the upgrading of local skills. The changes have been so dramatic that Ming Cho Lee, remarking on how theater production in Taiwan has changed since *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (1983), says: “The level of production support has improved a hundredfold. It’s like day and night.”

Lin’s professionalism extends to the way his performances are run. Cloud Gate, he says, established standards of punctuality and efficiency in theater performances in Taiwan. Moreover, Lin is renowned for the passion he puts into training his dancers. Cloud Gate has a reputation for the intense physicality of its training regimen. Lin lightheartedly refers to himself as “the Mao Zedong of the company.” He says that while his uncompromising, “dictatorial” style scared off dancers in the beginning, dancers have lined up to join the company not only because of its international reputation and exposure but because of its artistic standards. In preparing for *Songs of the Wanderers*, for instance, he had the dancers practice sitting cross-legged, meditating, for three weeks. “We didn’t do anything else but meditate,” he recalls. “After an hour of sitting quietly, concentrating on your breathing, you move differently. You have a lot of energy, but it is very controlled. I wanted to create a sense of slow, self-aware motion.”

His seriousness as an artist is revealed in the way he takes to his work not just as a profession or craft but a medium through which both artists and audiences participate in a process of inner transformation.

Lin has created some sixty-eight choreographic works as of 2000, and Cloud Gate Dance Theatre has done more than a thousand performances, including events in prestigious venues in Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Frankfurt, Copenhagen, Toronto, New York, Los Angeles, Melbourne, Beijing, and Bergen, Norway. Viewing Lin’s work in the course of more than forty international tours, critics the world round have hailed its poetic vision, breathtaking technical perfection, and power to mesmerize and move audiences. The *New York Times* hailed Lin thus: “Lin Hwai-min has succeeded brilliantly in fusing dance techniques and theatrical concepts from the East and the West.” *Ballett International* (Berlin) writes: “His

company is not only on a par with the best modern dance companies of the Old World and the New, but perhaps even beyond.” The *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong) has called Lin “one of the greats of the twentieth century.”

Cloud Gate Dance Theatre is a relatively small and compact company, with around twenty-four dancers and an equal number of administrative and technical people. While it receives government and corporate funding, it is a true professional company that supports itself mainly through revenues from its performances.

In Taiwan, Cloud Gate performs to sold-out audiences in venues as disparate as the lavish National Theater and rural high school auditoriums. Several times a year, crowds of sixty thousand or more gather for the company’s free outdoor performances. Lin has promoted dance through community outreach programs and youth camps. He sponsored the Hsin Kang International Children’s Arts Festival, which brings together in a small village in central Taiwan children’s entertainers and young performers from all over the world. He remains active in civic initiatives to promote culture as a member of the board of Cloud Gate Dance Foundation, Hsin Kang Foundation of Culture and Education, and National Culture and Arts Foundation. Beginning in 2000, he served as artistic director of the Novel Hall Dance Series, a platform designed to introduce internationally renowned contemporary and avant-garde companies to Taiwan’s dance lovers.

Recognizing the load Cloud Gate Dance Theatre has to carry because of an international demand for its productions, Lin plans to form a new company, Cloud Gate 2, which will specialize in going to villages, schools, community centers, and banquet halls. For all his cosmopolitanism, Lin remains devoted to Taiwan. He recently turned down an offer to direct in a major European dance company. “How could I leave Taiwan?” he said. “It is where all my friends and family are. It is out of this that I create.”

Driven as an artist, he translated into Chinese in 1990 the British theater director Peter Brook’s *Mahabharata* (1985) and in 1996 made his debut as an opera director when he directed a full-length opera production, *Rashomon*, which premiered at Graz Opera House in Austria. In 1998, he was in Cambodia, under the auspices of the World Health Organization and the Dutch government, to conduct a training program in dance and music that would help in the healing of children victimized by war as well as contribute to preserving and rejuvenating Cambodian classical traditions in dance and music.

All this time, Lin has not stopped creating new choreographies to stage. At the height of his powers, he promises to gift audiences with more of his exquisite creations.

Among other honors, Lin Hwai-min has been acknowledged as one of the Ten Outstanding Young Persons of the World by Jaycees International, given an Award of Lifetime Achievement by the Department of Culture of New York and New York’s Chinese-American Arts Council, and named Honorary Fellow of the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts. More important, Lin Hwai-min has come to be regarded by the world dance community as one of the most talented and important choreographers of the late twentieth century.

Slight and bespectacled, Lin Hwai-min moves with the gait and grace of the dancer that he is. Unprepossessing, he often appears in public in simple sweater and jeans and, on one occasion, appeared at a press conference carrying a suitcase of his works.

Lin’s fusion of diverse influences has been studied by scholars who see his creations as outstanding examples of multiculturalism, interculturalism, deconstructivism, or postmodernism in dance. Lin himself is not into the theorizing of his work, although it is clear that he has the accomplished dancer’s unerring sense of what his work *does*. He is mostly disinterested in trying to explain his work. He believes that dance is not just about

telling stories. His modern dance compositions cannot be understood in the way stories are understood, he says. They must be experienced. Lin says, "I want to seduce a physical reaction from my audience."

Asked to speak of his achievement as an artist, Lin relates the story of a tree told by Zhuangzi, the great Chinese philosopher. People were complaining that the tree was twisted and gnarled, unsuitable for building a house or making furniture with. Zhuangzi said, why not leave that tree alone in the wild field, to provide space for the birds to rest and sing, and to give shade and comfort to tired travelers. Lin says: "As dancers, we are unable to stop a war, influence the stock market, or even improve the living conditions of the poor. We provide spiritual space with the holy instrument that is our body. I identify with that twisted and useless tree."

Lin Hwai-min has done more than being that tree.

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