

Fusion art with *I Ching*  
an Interdisciplinary Choreography Project

by

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A Bound Document Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts

Approved April 2019 by the  
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2019

## ABSTRACT

Cultural background is very important for people, and people from different cultural backgrounds will have different understandings of art. This document explores how individuals relate to other cultures and incorporate the advantages of Chinese cultural values into contemporary dance experiences as researched for the applied project, *III*. This project uses the *Bagua* theory in the ancient Chinese book the *I Ching* to carry out the process of collaborative creation through different art forms in collaboration with artists from different mediums. This document details the artist's process of self-exploration and creative expansion using personal cultural background and influences (both Eastern and Western). Through this research the artist has come to understand and develop unique personal perspectives and formulate a creative method that she will continue to use in the future; it centers the importance of cultural identity and how that shapes experiences of art and art-making.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

As a Chinese person studying at Arizona State University in the United States, I find myself exploring the relationships between these two cultures. It is challenging for me to find my place as a dance artist, and I plan to use my MFA project as an opportunity to use my own cross-cultural experiences as a basis for my creative work. I want to investigate and learn more about the many styles of dance that emerge out of different environments and reflect different world cultures. Furthermore, where I stand in relation to a dance form will affect my experience and understanding of it.

I plan to use my MFA Project as an opportunity to examine the creative possibilities of image, music, costumes, interactive design and live performance. I will explore how these elements can be brought together through artistic fusion. For me, this will bring a deeper understanding of the two cultures. Being trained in both classical ballet and Chinese folk dance, I would like to explore the way that both techniques inform my creative process. I am also interested in how I will incorporate elements from my new experience of postmodern contemporary dance into my work.

My choreographic research will address a form of an ancient Chinese philosophical system, *Bagua*, which views the world through eight natural elements: Heaven, Wind, Earth, Water, Fire, Metal, Thunder, and Mountain. I wish to explore how *Bagua* elements can be used creatively in the context of contemporary dance performance. Innovation is highly valued in today's world, where many new cultures and industries constantly inform our worldview. The advancements of modern technology have led to an increasingly fast

pace in our everyday lives. Experiences of speed, acceleration, and urgency echo through the art and dance world as well. Many choreographers are using accelerated, fast movements in many of their performance works. By applying the *Bagua* theory of ancient Chinese philosophy in my own choreography, my intention is to slow down the pace of my creative process and deeply investigate the ways that *Bagua* might influence my choreography and my creative direction as an artist, as well as how it might affect modern audiences by helping them slow down their busy lives.

### Background

The goal of my project is to provide insight into the eight elements of *Bagua* outlined in ancient Chinese philosophy in the context of a modern artistic expression. The *I Ching* is an ancient text with more than two and a half millennia of history. The *I Ching*, as translated by Legge in 1899, outlines the theory of *Bagua*, which addresses the balance of the eight natural elements.

I initiated my research by exploring my creative process. To begin with, I plan to use knowledge from the interactive design practices that I have learned while at ASU and add visual elements to the lighting or music with dance. As a person of Chinese cultural background, I especially want to explore the ways that interactive design will affect my artwork. Although China has a long cultural history, there are not many Chinese artists working with interactive design. Instead, most artists choose to make art in traditional manners, using specific ways that they learned instead of integrating new ideas about technology. It is difficult for choreographers or artists in China to dare to innovate and break the rules. I have been exposed to and inspired by interactive design while studying



in the west and want to combine it with traditional Chinese philosophy, which influences a part of my research. I want to develop creative methods that use the Chinese philosophy described in the *I Ching* to produce dance movements. I will research *Bagua* concepts in order to develop choreographic questions and use related improvisational prompts with my dancers in rehearsal. I am interested in collaborating with dancers as well as artists of different mediums to produce innovative results and bring an interdisciplinary aesthetic sensibility to the outcome of my research.

### Literature Review

In preparing for this project, I researched several artists whose work I found inspiring and related to the type of piece I wanted to create. The first of these is Shen Wei. He is a Chinese artist who studied Chinese ink painting from an early age. He later began to specialize in Western oil painting, and then he learned to dance. His choreographic creations include everything from the stage set to the costume design, music, and even dancers' hairstyles. Shen Wei said: "A work must have a soul to master. It is because of the independent ideology that art is different. Because it is different, it has its uniqueness" (Fan 1). Wei's theory has deeply influenced me and inspired me when doing cross disciplinary art making. I agree with him that everyone is a different individual and different artists can create different unique expressions specific to their own experiences. And I will call this the "soul" of my artwork.

In the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympic Games, I was most impressed with his work *Scroll*. He used a long scroll as the floor for the dance, and the dancer was covered with ink. As the dancer moved, he drew a beautiful painting through the movement of

touching the scroll of paper with different parts of the body. Wei's choreography included mostly contact movements between the body and the floor. In my opinion, the result was a dance and also a painting. The relationship between the two complemented each other. This affects the way I wish to combine the skills I have learned to transform into different methods of creation. This interesting combination of mixing art forms gave me the inspiration to take an interdisciplinary approach to my project, *III*.

Another artist who inspired me was Lin Hwai-min, the director of Cloud Gate Dance Company in Taiwan. I am interested in his work because he incorporates different art forms into his pieces and his work is grounded in Chinese philosophy. According to the Cloud Gate website, "He is famous for his ability to seamlessly integrate different styles such as ballet, traditional Chinese opera, Buddhist meditation and martial arts like tai chi . . . into his choreographic works" (Lin Hwai-Min). Hwai-Min started dancing while studying under renowned poet, Paul Engle, in the University of Iowa's International Writing Program. While there, he also attended his first Modern Dance course, taught by Marcia Thayer. Lin Hwai-min's works use a lot of ancient Chinese literature as inspiration, often using the body like one might write with a pen.

His work *Cursive* is my favorite dance piece. Cursive's choreography is based on Chinese calligraphy. The dancers create lines, strokes, and other movements like calligraphy in the piece, and images of calligraphy are projected onto the dancers' bodies as they move. The stage light is designed into a rectangle, where a dancer in a black costume sways under soft white light, like ink splashing on rice paper. His work made me realize that the essence of dance creation is not just how beautiful the dance movement is, but how all the elements work together. It made me want to create an experience that the

audience could think deeply about in my work. Additionally, knowing that Lin Hwai-min often gets ideas from Chinese literature, I decided to use this as an inspiration to find a book to influence my work. This process led me to choose the *I Ching*.

The *I Ching* is an ancient Chinese book, though there is neither evidence of a specific author nor a definitive date of publication. By definition, *I Ching* refers to studying the worlds of heaven and earth as they change. "I" translates as change, and "Ching" is the truth. Using the *I Ching*, one explores the laws of natural development and change, which reveals the truth, and offers guidance for personal life decisions. The *I Ching* is an influential text read throughout China that provides inspiration in the areas of religion, psychoanalysis, business, literature, and art (Legge,1899). Because the *I Ching* is such a large text, I chose to focus on the *Bagua* section within it.

*Bagua* is the basic concept of the *I Ching*, and it represents the movement of all-natural phenomena. As mentioned earlier, the *Bagua* can represent a variety of natural elements or dynamics, including sky, earth, water, fire, thunder, wind, mountains, and metal. These eight elements are explained in the *I Ching* as the material foundations of the world (Legge,1899). *Bagua* is the aspect of the *I Ching* with which people can apply the laws that they have learned from the evolution of these eight natural phenomena into their daily lives in an attempt to achieve a world view in which humans and nature are in harmony. The *I Ching* describes ancient Chinese astronomy, geography, philosophy, and other cultural ideas. The *Bagua* theory is also applied to martial arts, Chinese music, and other arts. The martial arts aspect of Bagua is Tai Chi. The breathing in Tai Chi, both yin and yang, come from Bagua.

As Feuchtwang explains:

In Chinese cosmology, the universe creates itself out of a primary chaos of material energy, organized into the cycles of Yin and Yang and formed into objects and lives. Yin is the receptive and Yang the active principle, seen in all forms of change and difference such as the annual cycle (winter and summer), the landscape (north-facing shade and south-facing brightness), sexual coupling (female and male), the formation of both men and women as characters, and sociopolitical history (disorder and order). (150)

Some Chinese ideas of these elements as described by *Bagua* are different from those of Western associations of the same natural concepts. For example, in China, fire is viewed as auspicious and prosperous, but the understanding of fire in the west is devastating. Rain, in Western understanding, is a natural weather event, but in ancient China, the rain was considered a blessing from the heavens.

### Assumptions

My project is based on three assumptions:

- 1) The eight *Bagua* elements in the *I Ching* represent important values in Chinese culture;
- 2) *Bagua* elements can be used artistically in other cultural contexts; I can use the elements in *Bagua* artistically in other cultural contexts by fusing these ideas with forms like interactive design, which are more prevalent in the U.S. than China.
- 3) Due to the breadth of images in the project, dance students and audience members from any culture will benefit from exposure to these ideas.

## Limitation and Delimitations

My plan is to create and investigate eight artistic elements; this will entail the completion of eight different small creative projects within the overall project. Actual financial support, interactive technical support, and rehearsal space will be provided as resources. The availability of dancers for rehearsal time is limited and rehearsals require many multiple components that I won't have consistent access to during the preparation period. I may not be able to complete all eight small projects based on all of the eight elements.

I plan for the show to be held in the Fall of 2018. Dance rehearsals will be held two or three times a week, for a total of five hours per week. Every two weeks the rehearsals will focus on a single *Bagua* element. I plan to use two or three dancers per *Bagua* element and work with a cast ranging from four to eight dancers in total.

## Preliminary Procedures

This research is mainly about my own exploration of and experimenting with different art forms and merging of cultures. I will be bringing all these elements together into a performance to create a unique environment in the theater space. My research process is mainly divided into two parts. The first part is my rehearsal with the dancers. In dance rehearsals, I will communicate with my dancers, explaining my research based around the concepts of *Bagua*. My dancers will collaborate with me on the choreography, using improvisation as one tool to move in the manner of a given *Bagua* concept. After each element is first analyzed and discussed, it will be created and combined. For example, in

the Earth part, the components of the Earth are water, land, sand, plants, etc. I will develop dance moves according to these components using the improvisational process and the dancer's individual interpretations of these terms. For this reason, I am working with a cast of dancers with different cultural backgrounds. Two of them share my Chinese cultural background, while the others are all American, with different ethnic identifications. I wanted each dancer to bring an individual perspective to the *Bagua* concepts.

The second part will be individual work done without my dancers. I will work with artists from different mediums and also do some work by myself. For instance, the installation part will involve a lot of sewing to make the planet structures for the galaxy section. For this part of the process, I will focus on the integration of art with "objects" created through interactive design. Since there are many advanced technologies available at ASU, I would like to use them to make my art become more dynamic. For this second part of the project, I believe the scheduling will be more flexible as I work to create the artistic elements or "objects" independently.

#### Artistic collaborators and dancers

I am purposefully choosing dancers from different cultural backgrounds as their cultural differences and various ways of embodying movement and thinking are critical to my research questions. I think this will present more possibilities for different interpretations of the *Bagua* elements and will create more interesting results during improvisation. For example, two dancers might interpret the same image in a very different way, providing richness to the movement vocabulary that wouldn't emerge if I assumed that we all saw the concept the same way. The non-dancing artistic collaborators in my

work, fashion designers, interactive design engineers and filmmakers, are more skilled in their art fields with much more professional experience than me. I need to communicate with them in many new ways. Learning how to collaborate and communicate with artists from different mediums and respect the understanding of those artists is something I am exploring.

#### Procedures to be followed in choreographing the work

After reviewing my limitations, I will choose four elements in *Bagua* to explore in the work. Because of the time constraints, I want to make every element as distinct as possible, so I may not be able to finish all eight elements with the time and resources available. Each element will have a 7-10-minute section out of the whole performance. Each section of the choreography will focus on combining one of the natural elements of *Bagua* with an additional artistic element such as interactive design or filmmaking. The final work will be made up of three parts incorporating four *Bagua* elements.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Creative Process/Methodology

When I started to create the project, my first consideration was how to explore each element and find inspiration. In the Creative Practice class I took as a graduate student at Arizona State University, I discovered that I am a person who is very sensitive to visual elements. When I first arrived in the United States, my language expression was not yet very proficient, so I often used pictures and other images to express what I meant. For example, when I was in the Creative Practice class, the professor asked us to interpret the look of the artistic style each student was interested in exploring. At that time, I found a lot of pictures and I brought those pictures to the class to explain my ideas. The professor and my classmates immediately understood what I meant. From this experience, I have become aware of my great receptiveness to the senses and allowed it to inspire my initial exploration with the making of my project. After I studied many images, I began to understand a deeper meaning of each natural element that I was interested in using in my research. I also discovered the difference between Chinese and Western cultural interpretations of those elements. For example, in ancient times, Asian people perceived the sky as an extension of the space humans inhabit on Earth. More recently, those in the West traveled into outer space prior to those in the East, which changed Westerners' perceptions of sky by adding outer space into their concept. In my work, I chose to combine these two seemingly identical but not identical meanings. For example, the dancer's movement metaphor lives in the sky in Eastern culture, where the sky is something alive,



like the dancer or referencing humanity. In Western culture, it also has a meaning associated with outer space, but not necessarily a reference to human beings.

### Statement of Choreographic Intent

During the process of creation, I generated a preliminary plan for the entire event. I determined that each *Bagua* element would be expressed through a different art form. The following outlines how I planned to combine the eight *Bagua* elements with the various mediums within my choreographic work:

- Water/Sound: I plan to collaborate with musicians from other cultures to create a song about water.
- Fire/Dance film: I will use the symbol of fire to work with a person from another culture to make a dance film. This film will be projected during the performance. Fire represents joy and festivity in Chinese culture, whereas in American culture it may signify danger and chaos. I am interested in the results produced by the different uses of this symbol.
- Sky/Costume: In Chinese culture, the sky is often used as a symbol of openness and freedom. I will integrate this concept into ideas about fashion design for the dance costumes in order to show the integration of Chinese cultures and fashion design. I will use the clouds in the sky as the main element. I plan to add some minimalist dance movements to connect with the creation of the costumes. I prefer a minimal aesthetic because I believe that simplicity allows more room for the audience to contemplate what they are viewing without distraction.

- Earth/Dance: I will use floor work in the dance vocabulary to represent the *Bagua* element of earth; all the movements will be performed on the ground during the “earth” section of my choreography. I plan to put a huge piece of paper on the floor and paint a part of the body of each dancer. The dancers will then use their bodies to imprint the paper on the floor.
- Thunder and Lighting/ Interactive lighting: I imagine when the audience walks onto the stage, the lighting will be triggered to a brighter level; when the audience leaves the space or moves elsewhere, the lighting will respond by dispersing.  
  
For this section, I would like to have motion-sensor interactive lighting. As the audience walks around the room, different lights will light up and others will diminish.
- Wind/Interactive design element: I plan to use the interactive design with motion sensors and haptics to create some objects that let the audience feel the wind when they touch or get close to it.
- Mountain: I plan to use a 3D printer or use wood to make some objects. The text of the mountain comes from hieroglyphics in Chinese culture. I want to use western 3D printing technology to express fusion art through hieroglyphics idea.

As mentioned earlier, once I started working, I realized that in terms of time and funding limitations, I needed to scale back my project ideas. I decided to choose only four natural elements to explore: sky, earth, mountains and thunder and chose not to develop the wind or water sections.

## Actual Creative Process

A lot of ideas changed in the process of the exploration and creation of this project. The adaptations I made are as follows:

Earth:

At the beginning of the creative process, the first thing I thought about was the Earth. The initial inspiration for the creation of the Earth section comes from the dances by Shen Wei. He creates work going between Chinese culture and Western choreographic theory with dance. Originally, I wanted to use a similar process as he used in the piece from the Olympics as a way to draw and create dance movement. I started with Earth because in my understanding, from birth we learned to climb and walk on the ground. To me, it means that after we are born, every step of our journey will leave indelible memories in our lives and the lives of others. I did not find a point that is well integrated with the Earth in my own experience. However, upon further research about the meanings of the word Earth and to better understand the structure of the Earth, it brought me to think humans are also part of this Earth, including soil, mud, sand and other elements. I changed my mind and wanted to use these little elements as a basis to choreograph dance moves.

When we started generating the movement material and rehearsing, I shared my inspiration with my dancers. I gave them a question asking, “In your perception, what is the earth?” The other dancers replied with the soil or sand, but one of the dancers gave me a very surprising answer. She said that the earth has a life. This made me think for a long time, and her answer inspired my imagination, so I designed the solo part after it. In the solo dance, I wanted to express life, a process in which a plant grows slowly after sowing seeds.

This idea also formed the basis for the entire earth section of the dance, which started with a trio and is followed by the solo described above. I used the trio dance as the opening, emphasizing texture, the deep use of gravity, and shaking to express the soil and sand (Figure 1). Then, the solo dance appeared. The meaning of the solo dance is a symbol of vitality. I described before that the earth is made up of many base elements and the combination of these base elements gives life to the creatures that dwell on it. The trio dance is a base element, and solo dance is the life of a plant. The combination of the trio and solo is my complete understanding of the earth. In the solo, I used the trajectory of breaking out and climbing up to express the growth of the plant (Figure 2). Finally, the running dance action ends, indicating a living state after the plant matures.

However, the finishing touch for the earth section is that I changed the perspective of the audience to look down on the dance from a balcony above the dance floor; the audience watched the whole work from overhead, in a God-like or external perspective. I found this a very interesting point. In the culture of the East and the West, human beings tend to share a similar way looking up to God. So, I imagined how God would look at things in the world, with a bird's eye view, and moved the audience to experience the dance from this perspective. Additionally, I wanted the audience to start with this view point as though they were in outer space looking at the earth, then later to zoom into it closer.

For the choice of costume, all the dancers wore grey in the design of the pants; on the one hand, in order to seek unity, and on the other hand, the single grey color is more representative of minimalism. Grey is the color between black and white; darker than white, lighter than black. Grey is no more than black and white, but it is not as distinct as black or white. In ancient Chinese culture, grey is like chaos. It is not as pure as white. The grey

interpretation of Chinese characters is lonely, ethereal, and unpredictable. Just like the human heart, it is constantly changing, fickle, and difficult to ponder. I also consider the color grey to be one of the most human-like colors. For the upper bodies of the trio dancers I chose nude color tops to represent the primitive and nature, and for the solo dancer I chose green to represent plant and life.



(Figure 1)



(Figure 2)

#### Mountain:

The first part of the piece, the Earth section, was choreographed in collaboration with my dancers. But in the second section, Mountain, I chose to also work with photographers to combine dance and film. The inspiration for the choreography was to show the mountain and life growing from it. I encouraged the dancers to embody the different qualities of mountain elements, such as soil, plants, etc. After that, we considered how those elements would move in different situations, such as with wind or sunlight, in order to develop the movement.

In making the film, the first thing I considered was the location of the filming. Fortunately, there are plenty of natural locations in Arizona for us to choose from when

shooting outdoors. After our discussion, we chose Papago Park in the north of Tempe. There are a lot of strangely shaped mountains with reddish, sandy soil. Because of the desert climate, there are no plants on the mountain, which for me, aesthetically meant the focus could be on the beauty that is contrasting the mountain and the dancers.

Secondly, I made a storyboard to describe and plan the structure of the entire storyline. Storyboard:

1. The first shot will be a long shot of the mountain without dancers. (Figure 3)
2. I will use aerial photography to take a bird's eye view of the mountain. (Figure 4)
3. For the next shot I will start from a part of the dancer's body, it may be hands or shoulders. (Figure 5)
4. Then I will slowly extend to the upper body using some minimalist movements. (Figure 6)
5. Next, I will incorporate whole-body dance movements. First, I will just use one dancer to do a solo. The dancer will be wearing a big green skirt. Second, I will shoot two dancers moving. (Figure 7)
6. As I continue, the movement will change from active dance moves to movement in place done in slow motion. (Figure 8)
7. Finally, I'll return a shot of the mountain without a dancer. (Figure 9)

After the storyline was planned, I thought about it and the relationship to costuming for a long time. I was looking for a lot of clothes, but I was not satisfied, so I decided to make a dress for the dancer performing the solo. Because I needed a very large skirt to represent the mountain, I chose a hoop skirt to put inside, in order to make the skirt fluffier

and more like a mountain. On the outside I wrapped it with a green cloth. For the upper body, I chose a nude color like the costumes in the Earth section. (Figure 10) In Chinese culture, the understanding of the mountain is green and life. But I later learned that the mountains in the desert do not have much vitality. China's cultural understanding of the color green symbolizes life, which is why I chose green for the skirt. At the same time, I wanted to use and integrate the geographical environment of my daily life, the desert. Finally, I added the nude color for the dancer's top. Using these two colors I wanted to show the interpretation of the mountains in two different environments and an understanding of those environments from two different cultural perspectives.

When everything was ready, we shot the video in May 2018. The overall filming was very smooth because our previous communication and storyboard helped us a lot. Of my collaborators for the video, one was mainly responsible for the operation of a drone, while the other artist was responsible for the flow of the frame (where we used a stabilizer). I was responsible for the stationary camera. All the work of the shooting was successfully completed. When I communicated with the dancers, I first wrote them the Chinese word "mountain(山)" and explained that the word mountain evolved from ancient Chinese hieroglyphics. Using this, I structured the film using the physical form of the mountain as inspiration. The two sides of the mountain are symmetrical, and the middle is convex. Therefore, the main performance in the film of the duet is symmetrical and the dancers influence each other's movement. However, the middle part, like the bulge, is a solo dance, which describes the top of the mountain.





(Figure 3)



(Figure 4)



(Figure 5)



(Figure 6)



(Figure 7)



(Figure 8)





(Figure 9)

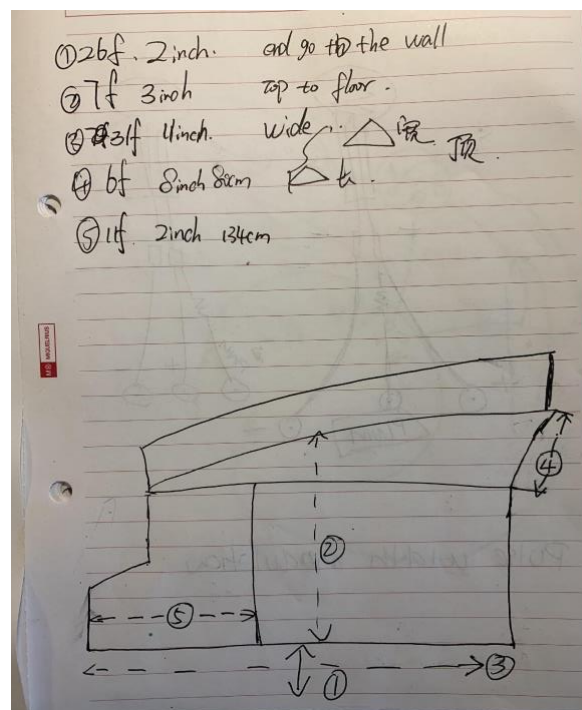
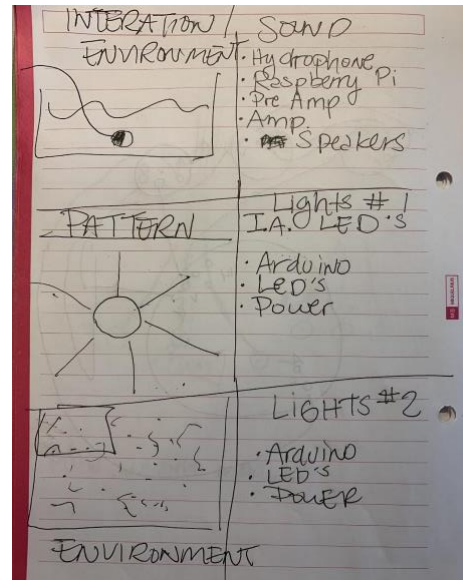
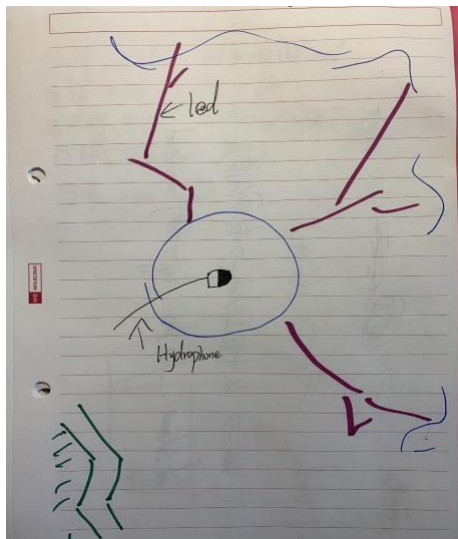


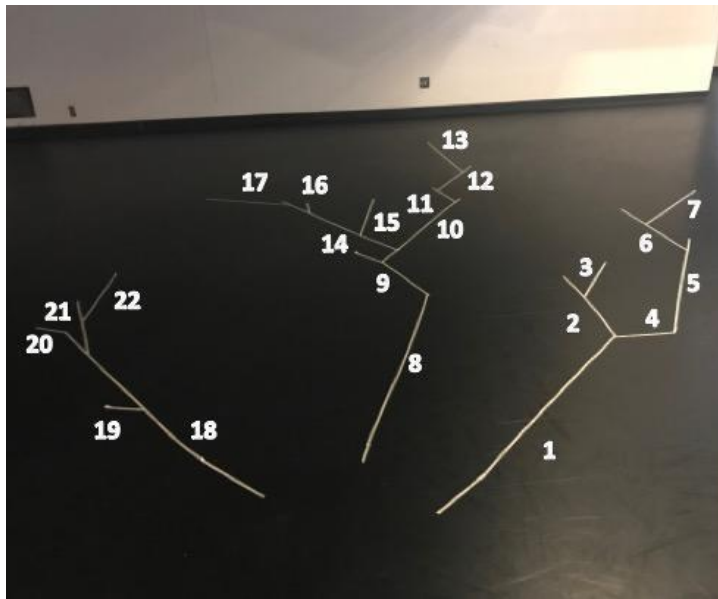
(Figure 10)

Thunder:

In the Thunder section, I wanted to use interactive design because I felt that when there is thunder there is usually lightning, and I thought this could be expressed with the interactive tools using lighting. I wanted to incorporate interactivity because the *I Ching* is about change and interactivity allows change to happen within technology when the dancers move. I designed the interactive design following an Independent Study course within my ASU program. In this course, I learned how to apply and combine the image and movement of thunder with interaction design. I determined that LED lighting would be used to make a flash, and hydrophones and other sounds would be used for creating the sound of thunder. A hydrophone is a microphone designed to be used underwater for recording or listening to underwater sound.

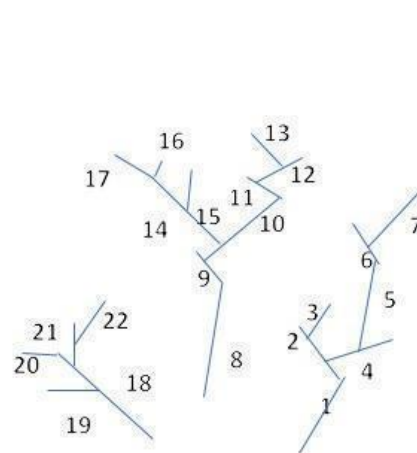
After choosing these methods, I implemented the plan. I was prompted to ask myself what kind of pattern I wanted to present. At this point I started to draw my first draft (Figure 11) and plan the whole thunder section (Figure 12). The distance at the venue was then measured to determine how many LED lights we would need and how big the water tank would need to be for the hydrophone (Figure 13, Figure 14, Figure 15). Of major importance for the successful running of the system was the correct connection of each LED lines; it is necessary to apply the wires and the specific connections between the positive and negative electrodes (Figure 16). Since all the LED lights are connected by wires, the route needed to be determined (Figure 17) and produced to the measured size (Figure 18).





1 = 58"	Current Total = 715"
2 = 27"	LED Strip Length = 180"
3 = 20"	
4 = 12"	<b>Current Length Breakdown</b>
5 = 51"	Right = 237"
6 = 32"	Big Center = 347"
7 = 37"	Left = 131"
8 = 54"	
9 = 31"	<b>Modification Options</b>
10 = 52"	Left Modified?
11 = 15"	(131" - 34" = 97")
12 = 31"	
13 = 43"	
14 = 53"	
15 = 30"	
16 = 10"	
17 = 28"	
18 = 68"	
19 = 8"	
20 = 8"	
21 = 25"	
22 = 22"	

(Figure 14)

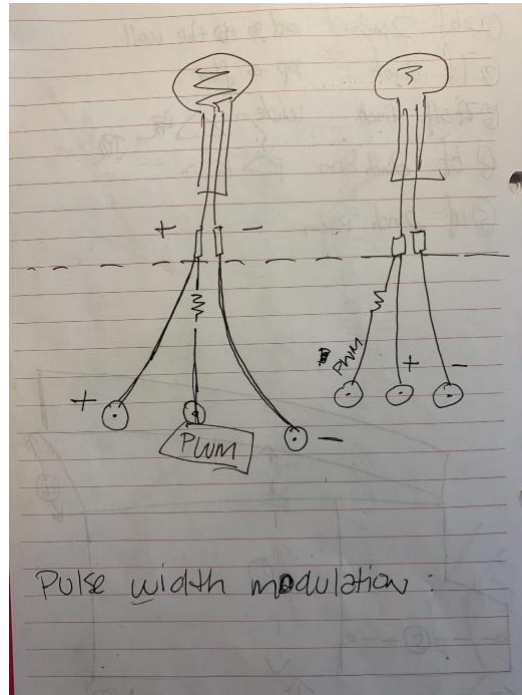


Red= already cut  
Draw the line

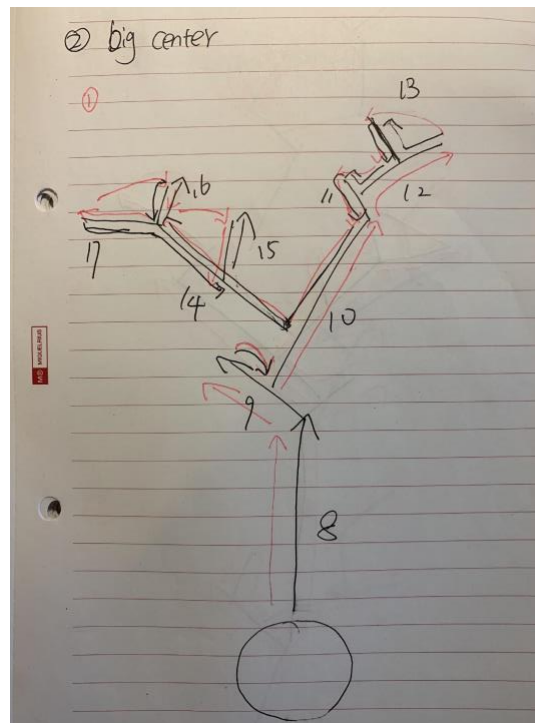
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2 = 18" <b>28</b>	LED Strip Length = 180"
3 = 20" <b>31</b>	
4 = 12" <b>18</b>	<b>Current Length Breakdown</b>
5 = 20" <b>31</b>	Right = 237"
6 = 15" <b>23</b>	Big Center = 347"
7 = 33" <b>52</b>	Left = 131"
8 = 30" <b>46</b>	
9 = 15" <b>21</b>	<b>Modification Options</b>
10 = 25" <b>38</b>	Left Modified?
11 = 15" <b>23</b>	(131" - 34" = 97")
12 = 15" <b>23</b>	
13 = 10" <b>15</b>	<b>Cancel length</b>
14 = 15" <b>23</b>	1=24" 12=10"
15 = 10" <b>13</b>	2=9" 13=33"
16 = 5" <b>8</b>	5=31" 14=38"
17 = 10" <b>13</b>	6=17" 15=20"
18 = 34" <b>52</b>	7=4" 16=7"
19 = 22" <b>34</b>	8=24" 17=18"
20 = 8" <b>13</b>	9=15" 18=34"
21 = 25" <b>39</b>	
22 = 8" <b>13</b>	Total=246"

RED= LED

(Figure 15)

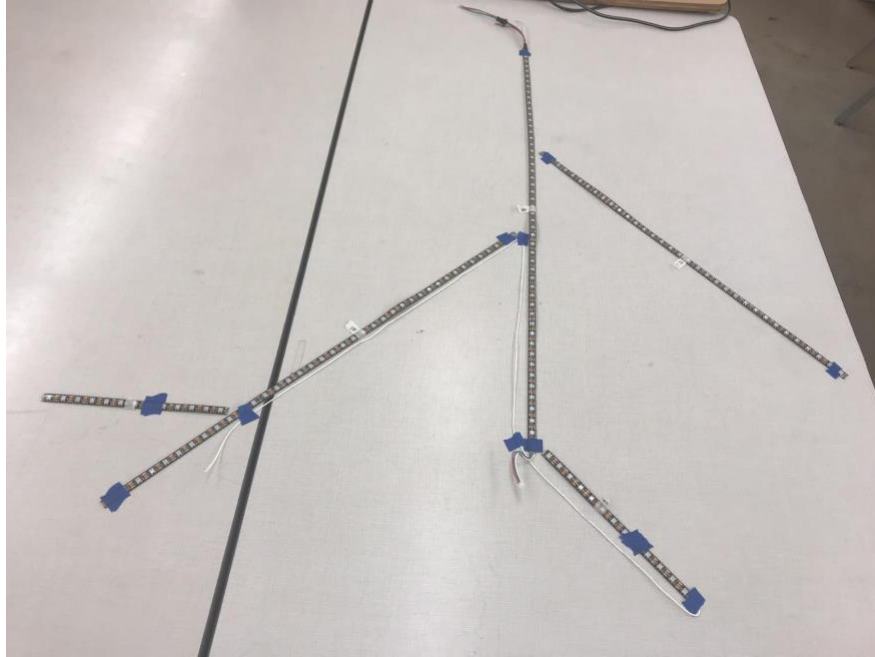


(Figure 16)



(Figure 17)



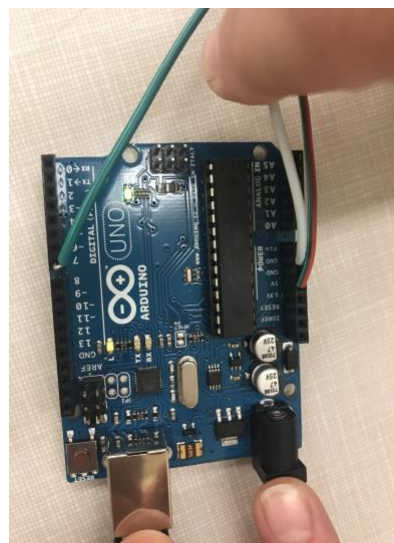


(Figure 18)

Second, the fabric cloud was produced, and testing began with the hydrophone (Figure 19). The hydrophone was planned to connect and run the LEDs on the same "Arduino" (Figure 20), which is a kind of hardware allowing the audience to interact with the sound created by the currents running through the water in the tank.

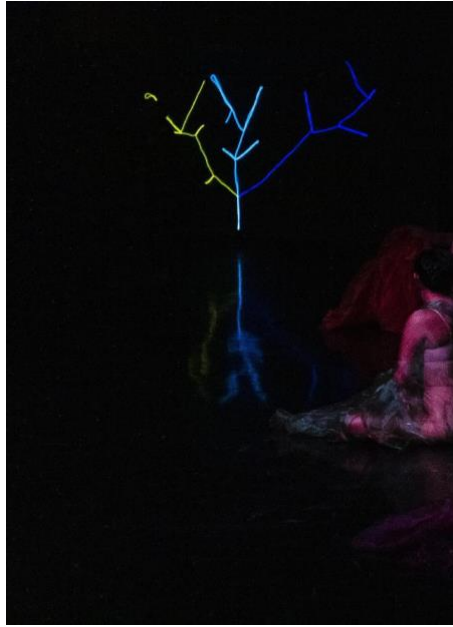


(Figure 19)



(Figure 20)

Due to the length of our production, the test and debugging time was too short. In September 2018, I found that the Arduino could only drive 30 LED lights. Since 715 LED lights were being employed, there wasn't enough time to debug this problem in prior to the show dates. At this moment, there was a big change in plans for this part of the interactivity. The decision was made to only keep the form of the lamp (LED Lightning), and switch to a different type of wire called Electroluminescent wire, often abbreviated as "EL wire," which is a thin copper wire coated in a phosphor which glows when an alternating current is applied to it. This was used to connect to the lighting system to show the flashing of the light for a lightning effect (Figure 21). The hydrophone was replaced with an overhead projector, symbolizing the movement of water. When the dancer onstage touched it with her hand images were projected onto the projection surface (Figure 22).



(Figure 21)



(Figure 22)

Sky:

In this part of my creation, inspiration comes from the universe and the stars. I wanted to interpret the sky with the art of installation and minimalist dance movements. I divided the working process into two parts, the design of the installation art and the rehearsal of the dancers. With the help of ASU scholarships, I worked deeply for a year with dance costumes and design. The costume shop teacher is a very experienced visual design artist in the dance program at ASU. She is very familiar with fabrics and all kinds of materials that can be used and her knowledge was a great support to my project process. I created many dance costumes with her. After I discussed my idea of the starry sky with her, we chose colored tulle as the material to make the planets (Figure 23). Since tulle is very soft and light, we needed to make a support inside to form the final sphere-like structure. We chose a plastic bubble to use as this inner support, (Figure 24) and then the

ball around the plastic bubble was entangled and hand-stitched (Figure 25, Figure 26, Figure 27). These spheres represent planets. In addition to the planets, we also created a "Star device". When it was completed, we drew a draft map to design how the three planets would hang in relation to the Star device (Figure 28).



(Figure 23)



(Figure 24)



(Figure 25)



(Figure 26)



(Figure 27)



(Figure 28)

While the materials of the installation were being completed, rehearsals with the dancers were also taking place. Each dancer played with fabric to create dance moves of different textures and qualities relating to the planets of Mars, Mercury, Venus, and Earth. For example, one dancer represented the planet Mercury. She wore a blue tulle costume and her choreography was expressed through soft, flowing movements. I chose this



because in the Chinese language, each planet is associated with an element. The character for Mercury is translated as water planet, while Mars is translated as fire planet.

### Frame/Structure

#### III/Three:

As I integrated the four separate parts of the project, I considered the logic and coherence of the work. I chose to merge the two parts together and the work's structure evolved into three big sections. All four parts were designed, but at this time I considered each part as independent of the others and divided the framework of the whole piece into three parts. The reason for dividing it this way is related to the *I Ching*. According to the *I Ching*, "three begets all things." In the *I Ching*, the number one indicates nothingness, or reason for being. Yet, "one begets two", meaning yin and yang from ancient Chinese philosophy. Finally, "two begets three", representing Heaven, Earth, and Man or yin, yang, and breath Chi. In choosing a three-part framework, I wanted to go from the figurative to the abstract. By starting with the earth (one) and ending with the sky (three), I inserted the middle part, creating a space where the audience could interact with all of the elements. I called it the "free space".

- I. The first part, Earth, is a complete dance.
- II. The second part, free space, includes the interactive Thunder design, the mountain film, water, and vibration and audience participation.
- III. The third part, the sky, is a combination of installation art and movement.

Infinity/ Guide:

Up to this point, I had the work's framework. But was grappling with how to connect the sections all together. When I was confused, my committee chair gave me very important guidance. She asked me: "Have you seen Alice in Wonderland? White rabbit, do you know him? He directs Alice like a tour guide." At first, I wanted the dancers to show the audience the way through the whole work, but I was inspired by the White Rabbit image. I thought, why don't I use this method as a guide for my entire work? I found a dancer specializing in text to be a narrator to speak through the piece, cueing the audience for their movement through the work as it evolved. She was called "The Infinity".

I worked closely together with her to write the script, fusing language and performance. This was helpful to let the audience understand because most of the audience did not know the *I Ching*. Since the performance venue I chose was a large open studio space, my hope was that the audience would move around in the open space during the middle section of the piece. Information was given to the audience by this Infinity guide to invite the audience to freely explore the space. The Infinity dancer's role became a very important presence in the whole work, because as a speaker she made the audience more willing to believe her and feel invited to engage with the performance. Therefore, in this capacity, the dancer speaking provided a way to explain information to the audience.

Because this was not a traditional performance set up where the audience always sits in their seats to watch, the audience might not know what to do next. With the Infinity, we used a lot of open prompts so that the audience could choose to participate or watch. After the audience felt that the overall environment was comfortable, they were more

willing to believe the Infinity dancer and follow her lead. Thus, the Infinity dancer is the core of the whole work, connecting the sections of the piece, and acting as a guide for the audience.

The following is an excerpt from the Infinity text:

1. “Hello everyone, welcome, I am the Infinity. The reason you are standing here today is because time and space lead you to me. ME? Well, I come from the creator 3. I have a reason for being, and you have a reason for being. This is 1, this too is nothingness. From nothing comes 2, a balance of yin and yang. From 2 comes 3 and 3... well 3 begets all things. 3 made sky & earth, wind & rain, water & fire, thunder & mountain. This space, right now, in this moment, holds sky & earth and thunder & mountain. Just as we experience life individually you are welcome to experience these 4 natural elements for yourself. I am here as a pathway guide so if at any moment you get lost in time you may turn to me as your reference. I am here to help you navigate the space. I will also be the keeper of time. When it’s time to move, transition, or if at any time I need your attention I will ring this bell (BELL sound). I welcome you to follow me as we begin. Those who cannot physically join or would like to have their own space and not follow, are welcomed to stay down here on ground level as we will return in just a moment. Will you please join me upstairs?”

*[At this point the audience traveled to the upper balcony in the studio space to view the Earth Section.]*

2. (BELL) “Earth has given us space, space to see her and all that she is. We witnessed earth from up above and now she invites us to be one with her.



Join me as we change our perspective and enter a space that is hers... down below, down below, down below.”

*[Following Infinity’s invitation, the audience follows Infinity to the ground level again to explore the free space.]*

3. “Here time is not invisible, but it is fluid. I invite you to get lost in space as you individually explore these experiences. In the back-right corner, you will be visually stimulated by the power of the mountains while on its balancing side, the left, you will see the elegance of the human hand. As you walk around stars may fall from the sky and these black boxes that are placed in each corner are filled with energy which will release vibrations created by thunder. As I mentioned before, time is not invisible, but it is fluid, you may spend the next few moments exploring and when you hear my bell you will know that it is time to gather your bodies away from the center of the room and over by the chairs.”

*[After the final bell sound, the audience returns to their seats for the culminating section of the performance/installation.]*

## CHAPTER THREE

### Analysis

Throughout this whole project, I gained a lot of experience with interdisciplinary art making. There were many processes that worked and there were also many places that didn't work. In the following section, I will analyze these one by one and speak a bit about what I learned from this project.

In the Earth section, the process of creation was very smooth. In the last two months of rehearsals, I lost two dancers who were no longer able to participate in the work. When they left, I was inspired to create the plant solo in that section. Although I didn't originally plan it as a solo, doing so made my work richer. By creating the solo as a plant, it showed the continuous evolution of life over time. The departure of these dancers helped me learn that there are a lot of factors beyond my control in the creative process. I learned that I needed to remain flexible during transition in order to accept the facts quickly and plan the next step. I always believe that when God closes a door for you, another window will open. This showed me that I could benefit from a "plan B" at the time of creation.

The most difficult part of the process was the work to create the Thunder Section, because it took a lot of time for technical debugging. I regret not being able to use my original design plan. Although the final effect was very good, it did not meet my highest requirements for my project's vision. I struggled with managing my time, but I learned that I should focus on this in the future and decisively seek the help of professional people in this area well ahead of my production date. For example, if I knew that there was a problem with the production of LED lights, I could have sought help in time to get more accurate

information. If the technology is not supported, the plan should be changed immediately. But I did the best I could give the limitations of my knowledge at that time.

In the Sky section, the framework I designed was a sequence ranging from proximity to distance. For example, at the beginning I let the dancers play the planet (Mars, Mercury, Saturn, and Earth). In the process, the dancers slowly moved away from the audience into the distance. I wanted to imply a setting with great distances and create the entire galaxy through the expansion and contraction of the audience's perspective. In my first committee showing, the feedback I received was that the repetition and minimalist dance movements were limited, as the audience might prefer to have more content. Although the final presentation was a lot richer than the initial showing, I think if I re-work this part, I will focus more on how to play with the perspective of the audience.

Overall my understanding of artistic methods and my artistic identity has not changed. Because these problems are details in the creative process I have encountered, I think that they can be overcome. If I were to re-visit this project, I think the overall framework and content would not change much. The part that I most want to address is the Thunder section, and I hope to one day complete the original idea using a combination of LED lights and hydrophones. Because Thunder is part of the audience's independent exploration, there could be more interaction possible. The audience might have more of a sense of the vibration coming from the sound of thunder and the flash of lightning by playing with water. This design of the Thunder section was meant to allow the audience to participate more than what actually happened in the final project. The experimental nature of this work, my growing courage to develop my interests in the field of interdisciplinary art, and my willingness to show my choreography in non-traditional spaces all are

important to my artistic identity. I hope to continue to expand on this in the near future. It has become an integral part of my research and will influence all of my future work.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion

In conclusion, I think the whole work was successful, but I would like to improve many details. I learned a lot from the whole process and gained a lot of experience. I think this is just the beginning of what I might create in the future. At the same time, it will take a lot of knowledge to lay a solid foundation for my future creations, such as a development of my technical and choreographic skills, along with a focus on contextual research. I learned how to find inspiration; how to communicate with people and share my thoughts; and how to build my own methods for the creative process. These make me even more convinced that I will continue to work in this direction in the future. In my understanding, there are not many artists in China who are doing cross-disciplinary works of art. First of all, I think that it is a very big challenge for me. I need to understand how different art fields work so that I can better integrate them together. Secondly, I want to let more Chinese audiences and scholars who don't understand fusion art know that art can be created in this way. Finally, I want the audience to be left with a heightened sensory experience. It is precisely because people's lifestyles are much faster than they used to be. It is difficult to have time to calm down and think. When I created the work of *III*, the thought process I brought was to slow down my own pace, to use every sense of my own to feel every subtle detail of the world, including time, space, and the relationships between people. This is the original intention of what I wished to share with the audience when I started creating this work.

I think my next step will be to add more details to my work *III*. First, I will incorporate the remaining four natural elements. Second, I will go back to China to perform this work. I will communicate with art galleries, as I hope that my work in China can be presented in alternative performance settings like galleries, museums, etc. I think that my project is part of the development of Chinese contemporary dance, because the combination of modern and traditional expression techniques is the current trend of development within that field. I hope that my project will enable Chinese audiences to experience dance in new ways. I think that my work is not unique to China, because many people are also trying to understand the traditional culture with the identity and vision of modern people. But my experience in the United States is different from these artists. I think my difference is that my integration and conflict are multifaceted. For example, I have different educational backgrounds in the United States and China. I focus on the fusion of choreography and new media. And I use contemporary art forms to interpret traditional culture. And I want to continue making interdisciplinary dance work combining Chinese and Western cultures.

During my creative process on my thesis project *III*, I began to develop a network of Chinese artists who are working in a cross-disciplinary way. And upon my return to China after graduation, I aim to find a collaborator to continue my research with – ideally someone with a similar background in dance, technology and design. I believe this will be a very good re-entry point back into my culture and for the next phase of my artistic development. I imagine expanding on the ideas I have been researching in my project *III* to create increasingly collaborative, interdisciplinary works to be presented in China and

abroad. My hope is that my projects and new ways of making, will be impactful in my own country and in the overall field of contemporary art and dance.

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