

Reflection - MA Project in Choreography - Avgang 2023

“My name is Ruoxi”

By Ruoxi Yang

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Introduction

In 2019, I made a life-changing decision to become an exchange student at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHIO). At that time, there were no collaborative programs between my home university in Nanjing and KHIO or Norway. It was my own choice to complete all my exams and credits in Nanjing ahead of time in order to start a new life in Norway.

During my life as a student at KHIO, I gradually realized that people were curious about my culture because their knowledge of China was limited to martial arts, Tai Chi, and Jackie Chan. In Western art, some artists take inspiration from Tai Chi, but their understanding of it felt formulaic to me. Tai Chi, for me, is not just a symbol but a way of life. Suddenly, I felt a sense of obligation to do something to represent my culture and my identity. Looking back now, I realize that sometimes things and people you have overlooked, dismissed, or found unbelievable can suddenly appear in your life and hold significance. My story, my cultural background, my understanding of the world, and all seemingly insignificant concepts converged into my master's project, *"My Name is Ruoxi."*

In the following paper, I will divide it into three parts. The first part will elucidate the inspiration behind this project through a first-person narrative and approach. The second part will primarily discuss the theoretical books and references I consulted during the production process. The third part will describe various situations that occurred during the staging and rehearsals, as well as the final performance outcome.

1. The Motivation

The first three months of my life in Norway were incredibly challenging for me. The language barrier made it difficult for me to understand the classes, and I had to rely on body language to guess what the teachers were saying. Most of the time, my body was physically present in the circle of discussions and opinions at school, but my soul was immersed in my own world. During this period, I kept pondering how, as a foreigner who had just moved to Norway, I could speak as little as possible while still capturing everyone's attention and generating interest in my work. I wanted my artwork to convey who I am, where I come from culturally, and how I perceive the world around me.

1.1 The stories

After three months of living in Norway, I gradually began to understand what people were saying, and I became less afraid to express my own opinions. It's amazing how, when you develop an affinity for a country, any shortcomings seem less significant. Every day at KHIO was fulfilling for me. I was amazed by my classmates' perspectives, and I deeply realized that when a person grows up in different cultural backgrounds, their logic and perception of things differ.

On my first day at KHIO, I anxiously prepared my self-introduction, fearing that my English wouldn't be understood. "Hi, everyone. I'm Ruoxi, but you can call me Audrey. I'm from China, and it's nice to meet you all!" However, my classmates insisted on using my real name, finding it unique and meaningful. Eventually, we had a conversation where I shared the origin and significance of my name.

"Before the age of 11, my name was Yiqi Yang. After turning 11, I became Ruoxi Yang." When I was 10 years old, my sole ambition was to study at the PLA Academy

of Arts (The Military and Cultural Institute of National Defense University, People's Liberation Army) because China's most renowned dancers and artists had once studied there. Every day from the age of 10, I dedicated myself to rigorous training, all with the goal of being accepted into this prestigious institution. My parents and teachers supported my aspirations and recognized my talent. They made significant sacrifices, quitting their jobs and relocating to Beijing to facilitate my studies. Over the next three years, my goal was to pass the entrance exams for the prestigious academy. Despite the belief of many teachers in my talent, I faced repeated failures while less skilled classmates with privileged backgrounds gained admission. These experiences led me to doubt the world and myself. Concerned about my passion for dance, my parents decided to protect me from the darkness of society at such a young age. They suggested that perhaps luck hadn't yet favored me, and we eventually moved back to my hometown, Anshan.

One day, my mother took me to see a feng shui master named Jin(金)¹. She wanted to change my name for better luck. Jin, an old man with a white beard, asked for my birth details and gave my mother a paper with information about my birth and the five elements. He provided three name options, and I chose Ruoxi without fully knowing why. Upon returning home, my father blamed my mother, believing that we had been deceived and that it was superstitious nonsense. However, despite his words, he silently went to the police station and changed all my identification documents to Ruoxi. This episode was soon forgotten amidst the busy life of studying, and at that time, I had no idea that one day this story would become a significant source of inspiration for my master's project.

¹ In Chinese, Jin means gold and also the metal elements in the five elements.

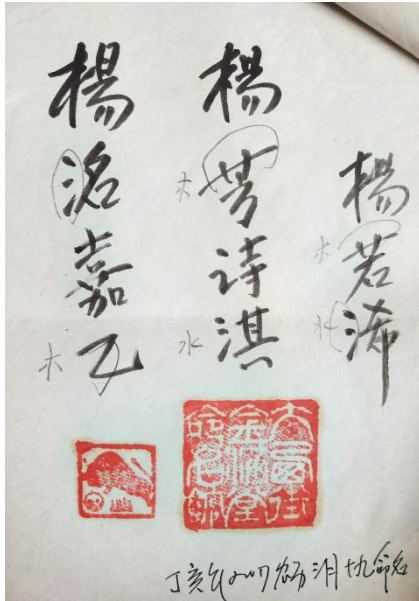


Photo by Feng xin

1.2 The book of change

The first year at KHIO quickly passed, and due to the arrival of the pandemic and a series of other reasons, I moved to Italy. At that time, I felt helpless and confused about the future, often reminiscing about my life at KHIO. One day, I suddenly thought of Janne-Camilla and our conversation. I had participated in a workshop for her doctoral project at that time. She asked me if I knew the book ²"Yi Ching" (Book of Changes). I looked puzzled and felt a bit ashamed. I was puzzled because I didn't understand what "Yi Ching" meant, and I felt ashamed as a Chinese person for not having read such a famous book. So, during the blank period caused by the pandemic, I began to read this book.

The initial process of reading was challenging because the book was filled with a large amount of classical Chinese language. However, as I became accustomed to this style of expression, I started to have a better understanding of the meaning behind each hexagram. The Yi Ching (Book of Changes) encompasses profound and simple natural principles and dialectical thinking. It can be regarded as the crystallization of the wisdom of the Chinese nation. I was amazed to discover that in ancient times in

² The I Ching or Yi Jing (Chinese: 易經), usually translated Book of Changes or Classic of Changes, is an ancient Chinese divination text that is among the oldest of the Chinese classics.

China, through the concepts of time, space, and Yin-Yang, it developed into a systematic worldview that explained all the changes in the universe and human society through the unity of opposites such as Yin-Yang, Qian-Kun, and strength-flexibility. It approaches the understanding and comprehension of the world from a holistic perspective, viewing the relationship between humans and nature as an interconnected organic whole, hence the concept of "harmony between heaven and humanity."

The Yi Cing is divided into three parts: Lianshan, Guicang, and Zhouyi. Unfortunately, Lianshan and Guicang have been lost, and only Zhouyi has been handed down. Zhouyi is built upon the foundation of the Yin-Yang dualism and provides a demonstration and description of the laws governing the operation of things. It classifies everything in the universe, applies the theory of the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches, and even makes accurate predictions about the future development of things. The familiar Bagua diagram³ originates from this book, where each hexagram represents a different meaning, and a part of the book explains the significance of each hexagram.

After reading, I understood why Jin gave me the name "Ruoxi." In Taoist philosophy, there is a concept of balance. In my Five Elements, there is a lack of the elements of water and wood, but there is an abundance of the earth element. The earth element also represents the spleen in the body, indicating that in the future, I need to control my bad temper. Anger can weaken the liver and kidneys, which happen to represent the elements of wood and water. The abundance of the earth element also suggests that my personality tends to be down-to-earth, loyal, and someone who keeps their promises. However, it also indicates that sometimes I may lack flexibility, speak too directly, and unintentionally hurt others with my words. Therefore, Jin hopes for a

³ The bagua or pakua are a set of eight symbols that originated in China, used in Taoist cosmology to represent the fundamental principles of reality, seen as a range of eight interrelated concepts. Each consists of three lines, each line either "broken" or "unbroken", respectively representing yin or yang.

favorable future for me and gave me the character "Xi," which represents water. The wood element represents the liver, and the liver is connected to the eyes. Jin advised me to take care of my eyes and rest them properly in the future. Wood also symbolizes gentleness and the ability to be flexible. Jin hopes that through the name "Ruoxi," my character will become gentler. All the answers were in this book. As I grow older and gain more life experiences, I gradually comprehend Jin's intentions. Nevertheless, I asked myself: Is it really a bad thing to lack these elements? Isn't this "lack" what makes me who I am? At the same time, who doesn't want their life to be lucky and happy? Who doesn't want their life to be lucky and happy? However, from a broader perspective of the soul, if my life is excessively smooth, wouldn't I have missed out on many life experiences that allow for personal growth and an artist's development?

1.3 The prototype

After returning to Oslo for a new semester, my ideas for the final project became clearer. I suddenly felt a strong sense of mission. I wanted everyone to know who I am and why I have this name. This name reminds me of my attitude towards the world, towards others, and towards my own body. I also want everyone to know that each person is unique from birth, and everyone has their own life script. You come into this world to learn how to grow into your unique self. The Five Elements have always been present in your life. It cannot achieve complete balance because it is through this imbalance that your way of dealing with things differs. This difference leads to the consequences that follow, and the outcome depends on the role you play in the development of events.

From the initial confusion when I first arrived abroad to the learning and reflection during the pandemic period, I finally clarified and found my own goal. With a clear objective in mind, I started to think about how to incorporate these stories and perspectives into my work and present them to the audience through body language.

2. The Making

In this part, I will mainly explain how I carried out and prepared my research before returning to Oslo, as well as the influence and inspiration of different artists and their works.

2.1 Preparation for the research

During the strict lockdown in Italy due to the pandemic, I spent most of my time studying the Yi Cing, practicing calligraphy with a brush, and watching various dance videos. Among them were works by one of my favorite artists, Lin Hwai-min, the Taiwanese choreographer who founded Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan. I had watched many of his works during my university years, including "*Cursive*"⁴ and "*Moon Water*".⁵ The concept behind the "*Cursive*" series is inspired by Chinese calligraphy, and the choreography incorporates dance movements derived from the brushstrokes of calligraphy: dots, horizontal lines, vertical lines, hooks, bends, strokes, and flicks, with each movement corresponding to the stroke's flow. This piece greatly inspired me, and I believe it stems from my own understanding of calligraphy.

During my university years, I took a calligraphy class as a freshman. At that time, I disliked the course because our dormitory was tiny, with only one table to write on, and we had to share it among eight people. It was easy to accidentally spill ink onto someone else's rice paper. Looking back now, those experiences cultivated my ability to focus when writing with a brush, and my current understanding of calligraphy stems from that time. When I started working on my graduation project at KHIO, I thought of Lin Hwai-min's work and the challenging circumstances I faced while learning calligraphy. In the subsequent section about "Movements", I will primarily

⁴ Lin Hwai-min (2001), *Cursive*. Choreographed performance, performed by Cloud Gate Dance Theatre.

⁵ Lin Hwai-min (1998), *Moon Water*. Choreographed performance, performed by Cloud Gate Dance Theatre.

describe the relationship between calligraphy and dance creation.

Another artist who has greatly inspired my work is Yang Liping. She is a Chinese dancer and choreographer of Bai ethnicity. I grew up watching her dance performances, and her artistic style has deeply embedded itself in my mind. As a member of the Bai ethnic group in China, her dance style carries a strong sense of authenticity due to her minority background. Her works are not focused on intricate dance techniques but rather utilize dance as an artistic expression to convey the relationship between humans, nature, and the divine. Yang Liping once said

"Some people's lives are for procreation, some for enjoyment, some for experience, and some for observation. I am an observer of life. When I come into this world, it is to witness how a tree grows, how the river flows, how the white clouds drift, and how the dew condenses."⁶

Both Yang Liping and Lin Hwai-min have had a profound impact on me in terms of creating my own works. They are like guiding figures in my exploration of dance art.

In addition to Chinese artists' works, I also watch performances by Western artists, such as renowned piece *Café Müller* by Pina Bausch (1978) and Matthew Bourne's version of *Swan Lake* (1995). *Café Müller* was my first encounter with the fascination of contemporary dance. When I first watched it, I didn't understand what it was all about. At that time, my aesthetic sensibilities were still rooted in the elegance and narrative qualities of classical ballet. It wasn't until I saw the movie called *"Talk to Her"* by Pedro Almodóvar (2002) in which one of the film's main characters Marco cries while watching *Café Müller* that it began to make sense to me that when loving someone who doesn't love us, how we can create fictional stories to ease our pain of unrequited love. Maybe that's the beauty of the Pina Bausch dance theater - anything

⁶ Chai Jing interviews Yang Liping: A spectator of the world, 2012

can happen.

Among the various versions of Swan Lake, Matthew Bourne's rendition is my favorite. I first watched it in a dance theory class during my university years. As I watched, tears streamed down my face. Even after the video ended, I remained immersed in a state of sorrow. Though it has been nine years since then, I still can't forget the impact it had on me. I believe I have a fondness for stories, for listening to and telling stories to the audience. All these past experiences have shaped me and my artistic interests and work.

So when I was thinking about my MA work, I was mainly concerned with its attractiveness and interest to the audience, as well as its development and potential influence in the field of Norwegian dance. The central theme I contemplate is the possibilities and diversity that arise from combining dance with different cultures, while simultaneously attracting a broader audience. Through my own experience, I realize that for many audiences outside the dance arts industry, "art" can be abstract and difficult to grasp, resulting in many art performances catering to a small group of people or industry professionals. My aspiration is to create a piece that presents a readily understandable narrative and visual experience, aiming to break down people's perceptual barriers to art and foster new cultural experiences within the Norwegian dance scene.

2.2 Working method & Process of the creation

After finalizing the concept for my final project based on the Five Elements in my name, I want to integrate my personal experiences and stories into each section.

In the Water element, I want to incorporate elements of ballet. When I entered the professional academy at the age of 12, I joined the classical ballet department. Due to

some negative experiences at school, I developed a dislike for classical ballet for a period. However, I realized that it was not ballet itself that I disliked, but rather the teacher who instructed me and her outdated teaching methods. In the world of children, everything is possible, just like water. You can place water in different containers, and it will take on different shapes. Water is fluid, soft, and ever-changing. These qualities are similar to the graceful and expansive movements of classical ballet. Therefore, I believe that combining this story with elements inspired by ballet may yield results that I desire here.

In the wood element, I considered what Jin said to me. My five elements lack the wood element. What does wood represent to me? What associations come to mind when we mention Wood? In the philosophy of the Five Elements, Wood symbolizes growth, expansion, creation, and development. It carries the energy and vitality of life, closely connected to the origins, growth, and transformations of life. Wood is also associated with the liver and the eyes, symbolizing vision and broadening one's horizons. On a personal level, Wood represents a spirit of proactivity, adventure, and the pursuit of personal goals. It embodies perseverance, confidence, and determination, as well as the ability to develop personal talents and fulfill one's potential. Therefore, when contemplating the Wood element, I aim to convey themes of growth, creation, and development. I enjoy observing trees, as walking through a forest brings a sense of release to my spirit. Tree branches resemble human arms—soft and full of infinite possibilities during springtime, and firm and upright during winter, steadfastly braving the fierce winds, even if it means enduring the weight of snow on their branches.



Photo by Ruoxi Yang



Arian



Jenssen, Nicole Hultvi, Helene

Hundere, Hanna Hoida, Kajsja Jacobsen. Photo
by Tania Musina

In the Metal element, the first things that come to my mind are the associations to money. In Chinese, the words for "metal" (金属) and "money" (金钱) are written similarly; both contain the character 金 (Gold). Due to my experiences during my childhood studies, I deeply realized how important money is for an individual, a family, and an artist. As a natural element and resource, metal is just substance hidden beneath rubble, as part of nature. However, once it is extracted, it gains value due to its rarity and the difficulty of mining. It is this rare value that entices us. The metal itself transforms from a material into a medium for power and monetary exchange. I believe artists, to some extent, are like metal. Just as there are different types of metals, there are also different types of artists. Many talented artists in the world remain undiscovered or "unmined," but over time, certain artworks are cherished and appreciated by the public, becoming rare and valuable.

For the element of Fire, my concept is completely different than the previous. I am contemplating what kind of unknown 'second persona' lies hidden within my character. I have always considered myself to be a good student to my teachers and a good child to my parents. Behind this goodness, however, there are moments when I yearn for rebellion. Beneath the surface of every person I encounter, I conceal various aspects of myself that are unknown to others. It can be rebellious, dark, or restless. In this segment, I aim to address the complexities of human identity, the intricacies of the inner world, and the multifaceted nature of human beings.

The final element is Earth. Earth represents stability, grounding, and practicality. It symbolizes the power of the land and a solid foundation. The Earth element is closely connected to the body, nature, and real-life experiences. It also represents practicality, patience, resilience, and reliability. I'm considering the similarities between Wood and Earth. Trees take root in the Earth, and it is the solid foundation of the Earth that allows trees to thrive and grow. In this segment, I aim to address the relationship between art and nature. The inspiration for an artist's work often comes from life itself,

and only through a profound understanding of the essence of life can resonant works be created. Just like the relationship between Wood and Earth, a tree cannot grow without roots. Unfortunately, due to time, actors and other issues, the earth element did not appear in the actual performance, but was synthesized with the wood element.

After organizing the themes of each section, the overall framework had gotten a shape, the next step to assemble my team.

2.2.1. Collaboration

Scenographer:

I first met Ayana Ishaihara in 2019 when Per, as the Head of the MA program, introduced her to us as an undergraduate student studying scenography at the Norwegian Theatre Academy. In 2022, when I returned to Oslo, there happened to be a performance by Thai artist Pichet Klunchun titled "*NO,60*"⁷ at the Dansens Hus. While waiting in line at the entrance, I encountered Ayana once again. Since then, our contact became more frequent. Ayana is an excellent listener, and we share many ideas about artworks. She was also the first artist to join my team.

Composer:

Music plays a crucial role in my creative process, and it can be said that it is the key to my artistic creation. I have a habit of collecting a wide range of music that is suitable for choreography. For me, one of the sources of inspiration for my creations is listening to music. Sometimes, I don't focus on themes or concepts; I simply feel that a piece of music offers me vast imaginative space and a wealth of emotional expression. From there, I extend my understanding of the music to develop the meaning and concept of the dance piece. If a piece of music fails to stir any ripples in my heart, I find it challenging to create dance movements and imbue them with significance. Therefore, I spent a considerable amount of time searching for musicians

⁷No. 60 is a treatise on Pichet Klunchun's two-decade-long research on the language of traditional khon. <https://www.dansenshus.com/forestillinger/no-60>

and composers. Finally, through a sound workshop at KHIO, I met Alexandre. He was our workshop instructor and recommended one of his students, Torben Busche, or Ben among friends, who is based in Trier. We had never met before, and Ben hadn't even been to Oslo. However, when I heard his compositions, I knew I wanted to collaborate with him. And so, my team welcomed its second artist, Ben. Our way of working is primarily through Zoom meetings, given the distance between us.

Photographer& Light designer:

Tania Musina, the photographer, was recommended to me by fellow student Sulekha (Ali Omar). As a newcomer in Oslo, it was challenging for me to hire a good photographer with a limited budget, so I'm very grateful for Tania's work.

Fortunately, KhiO and the MA programme helped us by hiring Eirik Lie Hegre as a light designer for the productions which saved us a lot of expenses. Eirik was an excellent listener and light designer. His expertise and experience made the performance look more complete.

Costume:

Due to limited funds, I was hoping to collaborate with a graduate student studying at KHIO. But in the process everything was not as smooth as I thought, so I ended up choosing to buy clothes in China and choose the style related to this project myself.

2.2.2. New inspiration: Dancers

After assembling my team, I finally had the opportunity to meet with my dancers. During this meeting, I gained a general understanding of their backgrounds and areas of expertise. Five of them are from the jazz department: Hanna Hoida, Kajsa Jacobsen, Nicole Hultvi, Helene Hundere, and Johanne Juel. Two dancers come from the contemporary dance department: Arian Jenssen and Sara Sandvik Arnestad. Lastly,

there is an external dancer, Torill Kolsrud, who was in the further education course Performative Practices at Dance at KHIO in 2022/2023. Each member of this team is irreplaceable, and they all have important roles to play during rehearsals.

To better understand the characteristics of these dancers, I decided to participate in their jazz dance classes. Within one class, I was able to roughly assign roles to each individual. For instance, Nicole is the perfect fit for the water element. She has a tall and slender physique, along with some ballet dance experience, which I believe will fit the story I want to convey with ballet elements. As expected, during our collaboration, I discovered that she is a dancer who constantly seeks "a little more" in her movements. "A little more" refers to her dissatisfaction with stopping at the end and always wanting to extend a little further. This quality of movement is something I truly admire, and her presence during rehearsals added a lot of brilliance to the water element. In this section, Nicole takes on the role of the lead dancer and has a short solo segment.

When I started collaborating with Helene and Hanna, I realized they would be the lead dancers for the fire section. I had never formally studied jazz dance, so I felt a bit lost when working with them initially. However, as I got to know their styles, it suddenly struck me that they perfectly embodied the essence of fire! Their style was completely different from mine, but they ignited my 'alter ego' and revealed my hidden attributes. In their movements, I saw the unrestrained and passionately blazing fire. That's when I thought, why not incorporate some jazz dance moves into this story? Why should it be strictly structured, elegant, and detached? I believe it would add more vitality and diversity to the narrative. In this section, Helene and Hanna will perform as a duet.

In the wood element, we have Arian, Sara, Johanna, and Kajsa as the main performers. There are two dancers with a background in jazz dance and two dancers with a

background in contemporary dance. Despite coming from different backgrounds, they have remarkable synergy and coordination. During our rehearsals, I could strongly feel the immense individual strength emanating from each of them. Their body movements were filled with incredible energy, and their presence inspired me greatly. Many of the dance movements originated from their improvisations at the beginning, and I added some Chinese folk dance based on their improvisations, ultimately solidifying the choreography.

Lastly, I would like to mention Torill, the dancer who joined our team last. She is a highly experienced professional dancer, and her presence exposed the undergraduate students in our team to the world of professional dancers "outside." During our daily warm-up sessions, she introduced many innovative warm-up techniques. Her methods and expertise greatly enhanced the quality of our movements and attention to detail in our piece. She took on a solo dance in the Metal section of our performance.

In this project, I believe the most challenging aspect to address is the dancers' understanding of Chinese dance culture. Their bodies are not accustomed to these types of movements. However, simultaneously, this can also be seen as their advantage. It is precisely because of their unfamiliarity that they can showcase the diversity of this work, while also enabling me to re-examine the movement techniques of Chinese classical dance from a fresh perspective.

2.3 Movements

In my creative process, I utilize two main approaches to movement. The first involves improvisation, where dancers are given the freedom to spontaneously create their own movements within certain parameters and guidelines. This allows for individual expressions. The second approach is more structured, where I teach the dancers

pre-designed and fixed movements that I have choreographed in advance. This ensures precision and synchronization among the performers. Improvisation was used mainly in two forms: As solo improvisation, where dancers explore movement individually based on specific requirements, and as contact improvisation, where they engage in spontaneous movement interactions and connections with one another.

At the beginning of rehearsals, I taught everyone how to write my name in Chinese. Ruoxi, this is how it is written in Chinese, “若滢”. Yang is my family name “杨”. In China, the surname comes first and the given name comes after, so my name is Yang Ruoxi which is “杨若滢”. In Chinese, the strokes of a name should be written in a specific order. For example, for the surname Yang (杨), the left half of the character is formed first with a horizontal stroke, followed by a vertical stroke, a left-falling stroke, and finally a dot. These strokes represent the left half of the character, which is 木 (wood). Once everyone learned how to write my name with a pen, I asked them to embody it with their bodies. For example, they drew the 'horizontal' stroke with their arms. They raised their right arms and drew a horizontal line in front of them from left to right as if they were moving through three-dimensional space. Next, the dancers kicked and drew a vertical line with the movement of their legs, representing the 'vertical' stroke. Then, they performed the 'left-falling' stroke with their torsos tilted to the left. This involved leaning their center and body to the left, inhaling from a standing position, exhaling while bending their left leg backward, and falling to the left side until they were lying on their side, all done smoothly and quickly. Finally, they represented the 'dot' stroke by quickly moving their heads to the right. In the end, every dancer has their own version of "Yang Ruoxi". Afterwards, I instructed them on how to write the characters for metal, wood, water, and fire, and we integrated the corresponding movements into our performance. By combining the writing of these Chinese characters with choreographed movements, we created the performance piece *"My name is Ruoxi."*

The second form of improvisation used in the performance is based on contact improvisation, which is evident in different segments representing each element. For example, during the emergence of the water element, there is a section where we blend our movements with the sound of water droplets. I asked everyone to imagine themselves as individual droplets of water, and our gathering represents the flow of a small river. Each droplet is inseparable, and the river is formed by the collective contribution of every droplet. Learning to blend and embrace one another with our bodies became an essential part of our rehearsals. Similarly, in the segment depicting the fire element, when the red scarf prop appears, everyone starts running around. One person throws the scarf, and another person catches it and passes it to the next dancer. This section is playful, resembling a children's game, where the scarf must not touch the ground. The scarf is incredibly light, requiring dancers to anticipate its movement. Amidst the chaotic running, establishing a connection between the dancers and the prop, using different parts of our bodies to catch the scarf, requires practice and a strong sense of coordination.

After the improvisation exercises, I began teaching everyone some fundamental concepts and movements of Chinese classical dance. For example, the concepts of "Lifting and Sinking", "Marching and Leaning", "Harbouring and Protruding", and more. All the movements of the upper body in Chinese classic dances are manifested in these six elements.

"Lifting and Sinking": The so-called 'Lifting and Sinking' movements refer to the process of bring down your trunk and spine. Exhale and bring down your body, then draw yourself up. In the performance of classic dancing the movement of the trunk plays a vital role, especially the lifting and sinking movements. It's the core of all Chinese classical dances.

"Marching and Leaning": In addition to Lifting and Sinking, leaning forward to one side (normally leaning forward to 2 position or 8 position in foundation training) is

Marching and leaning backward to another side is

Leaning (normally leaning backward to 6 position or 4 position in foundation training)

"Harbouring and Protruding": Harbouring and Protruding is the movements of your chest. In addition to Sinking, bringing the chest downward and head down to the chest is Protruding. In addition to Lifting, bring the chest forward, the head upward and look upward.

Once everyone became familiar with these essential elements of Chinese classical dance, I proceeded to teach them a choreographed sequence that I had prepared based on these six elements. This sequence eventually became part of the concluding segment of our performance.



Photo by Kajsa Jacobsen

The above description provides an overview of the process behind my Master's project, *"My Name is Ruoxi,"* covering the initial inspiration, team formation, and the creative process of body movement. Building upon this, the next chapter will delve into further development on stage and explore the intricate details of rehearsal and performance.

3. The Performance

In this chapter, I will mainly go from the selection of props, costumes, music, makeup, etc. to the process of making the actual performance, and then to the meaning of this work and its future development.

3.1 Props/ costume/ music

Props:

In this project, I chose silk scarves, fans, ropes, fog, and a metallic brick as my main props, each representing an element.

In the water element section, I initially wanted to use sand to portray the feeling of a waterfall. Jin mentioned that I had too much earth element and lacked water, so I thought sand would be a great material to express my depleted water element. At the same time, using sand to depict the ambiance of a waterfall also closely resembles the presence of water element, and the sound of sand landing resembles the sound of rain. Therefore, I believe that combining these two contrasting elements can create a contrast in both visual and auditory aspects, potentially providing an interesting experience for the audience. Before Christmas 2022, I asked the stage manager, Are, to help me find suitable sand. We suspended it above the stage in KHIO stage 4, allowing a small amount to continuously sprinkle on the dancers' bodies through the gaps in the roof beams. It looked incredibly beautiful and mesmerizing, almost like the sound of rain when we closed our eyes and listened carefully. Unfortunately, due to practical concerns, the stage technical team ultimately didn't allow me to use sand as a prop for the water segment. It was disappointing, but I understood the limitations of the stage technical staff, and I didn't want to cause any trouble, so I let go of my idea. Until one day, I had a conversation with Per, the Head of the program, and he suggested that my desire for a water element without directly showing real water as

material to the audience. So why not try using fog, which is water in another form? Following his suggestion, I contacted Eirik, the light designer, and we borrowed a haze machine from KHIO to explore its effect. This led us to the decision of placing the machine on the beams and connecting it with a large pipe, resulting in the effect of fog descending from above.



(Left): From exploring the effect of sand. Photo by Ruoxi Yang. (Right): From exploring the effect of fog. Photo by Ruoxi Yang.

In the wood element section, I wanted to embody the primal and growing power of nature. Ayana, the set designer, came up with the idea of using ropes, as the material and appearance of the ropes resembled tree roots—being both "shackles" and a source of energy for the tree's growth. With the presence of roots, a tree cannot easily move, but it can grow taller and larger without anyone hindering its upward flourishing. We found the following rope at KHIO, but ultimately, we didn't choose it because it was too heavy and not easy to conceal. However, during rehearsals with the dancers, they provided me with great insights and together we created a new rope. It was made by weaving two different shades of green and was lightweight, allowing it to be wrapped around the waist and used as a decorative element.



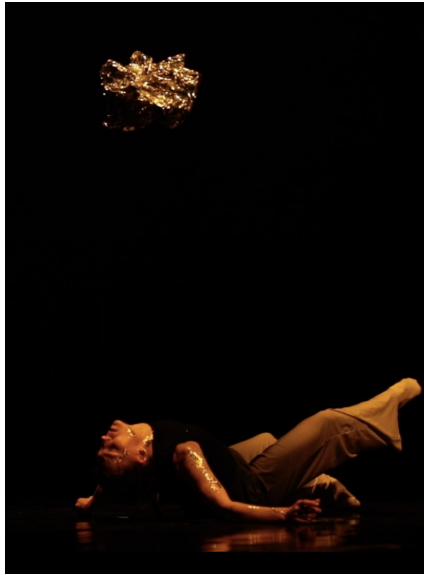
(Left): Exploring the thick ropes found. Photo by Ayana Ishaihara. (Right): The thin threads used in the actual performance.

Arian Jossen and Sara Sandvik Arnestad. Photo by Tania Musina.

Initially, I considered using banknotes as props for the Metal element. They would be suspended from the ceiling with fishing line and slowly descend. I chose banknotes because I wanted to convey the idea that a piece of paper, although light, holds significant value. It represents how someone can be impoverished due to the lack of a thin sheet of paper, while others can be wealthy because they possess many banknotes. It's like "the straw that broke the camel's back," where a banknote can either be the final blow that crushes a person or the opportunity for victory, depending on whether they can rise again after being crushed. In my own upbringing, if my parents had spent a lot of money to ensure my successful study at the PLA Academy of Arts, my life would have taken a different course. That's why I initially wanted to hang banknotes.

However, the situation changed because banknotes are small and it was challenging for the audience to understand the connection between banknotes and metal. I firmly believe that dance is meant to be understood by the audience on their own, not through me telling a story. So, once again, I had a conversation with Per. He

suggested that, in his understanding, the heavy connection between metal and wealth could also have other expressions, like diamonds or gold. As a result, Ayana created a large piece of tin foil that appeared heavy and shimmered like "metal." Meanwhile, I purchased some gold foil and had Torill apply it to her arms and face to enhance her metallic texture.



Metal element– Torill Kolsrud. Photo by Tania Musina

In the Fire element, I chose two lightweight red scarves as props. The scarves are light and when thrown into the air, they create the illusion of flames. In the choreography, I instructed the dancers to suddenly throw the scarves into the air amidst the chaotic running, creating a momentary surprise resembling the ignition of a matchstick. The red color of the scarves also resonates with the red fans used in the final segment. I also asked the dancers to draw flame symbols on their arms to further embody their representation of the Fire element. This gesture aims to bring them closer to their identification with fire.



Fire element- Helene Hundere and Hanna Hoida. Photo by Tania Musina

In the final segment, I chose traditional Chinese long silk fans as props. As the work is titled "My Name is Ruoxi," I have been contemplating what kind of ending would best highlight my name, my cultural background, and my story. Ultimately, I selected two fans, one red and one black. They can represent yin and yang, the perceived me and the true me, my past name and my new name—hence offering many possibilities for interpretation. After the emergence of these elements, they come together to form Ruoxi. The elements are unbalanced, unwilling to be confined. They strive to break free from their predetermined destiny. The appearance of the "fans" is like a dawn in a chaotic world. Like the light of dawn, these elements allow us to see a path, a path called undefined.



Johanne Juel and Kajsa Jacobsen. Photo by Tania

Musina

Costume:

Since I didn't have a costume designer, I felt it was best to order the costumes according to my own vision. Overall, I leaned towards simple styles because there were a lot of movements in this piece. If the costumes were too complex in design or had excessive decorations, it wouldn't align with the elements I had in mind. Additionally, in each segment, there were duets, solos, and group dances, which meant that dancers represented different elements at different times.



Photo by Ruoxi Yang

I downloaded and cut out pictures of costumes I found online, allowing me the freedom to mix and match and see which combinations worked best. For the pants, I chose a black and white ink-style design because it was challenging for me to define which elements should be represented by black and which by white. The black and white combination also had similarities to the yin-yang symbol.

Music:

I could only work together with Ben, the composer/musician through Zoom conversations as he lives and studies in Germany. For the water element, I gave him some keywords: ballet, classical, and elegance. Initially, I chose 'The Dying Swan' as

the music because I felt it could express my memories of my ballet career and symbolize my lack of the water element. However, during the open rehearsal, many audience members felt that using this piece would create unconscious stereotypes and contrasts, which I wanted to avoid. So later on, I found the current piece, 'The Dawning.'

For the wood element, I wanted a steady, profound, and energetic composition. The dancers once again helped me greatly during our training sessions, where we liked to play music to expand our imaginations. One day, Arian found a piece with drumbeats that I found incredibly lively.

For the metal section, Ben created a music piece that is perplexing and vibrant. Torill also provided some insights for this segment. Her understanding of it was inspired by the song 'Are You Having Any Fun.' The lyrics of this song resonate with the theme.

Are you havin' any fun?
What y'gettin' out o' livin'?
Who cares for what you've got
If you're not havin' any fun?

I was wondering, what is the purpose of our lives? Does my life make me happy? Does having a lot of money bring happiness? What kind of life do I truly desire? As the element of metal, when it is buried in the earth, it is merely a pure material. It is humans who give metal an additional layer of meaning. So, after discussing with Ben, he and his girlfriend, Louisa Oberhauser composed this piece together.

In the element of fire, as I mentioned before, I often choreograph based on music. I have a playlist, and one of the songs in it is called "Come & Get It." This piece of music resonates with the theme, so after discussing with Ben, he rearranged the music

to include more sounds of matches striking, emphasizing the birth of flames through burning.

For the ending, I chose Zoe's "We Insist" and my own humming. The humming comes from a lullaby in northeastern China. When I was a child, my mother used to sing this song to put me to sleep, and it holds memories of my childhood. I hope that through this piece of music, the audience can be transported back in time from the present. When I was born, these elements intersected and created an imbalance, shaping another Ruoxi. They accompanied me as I grew, and my character and destiny are influenced by them. Every newborn has their own elements, their own new life. The wheel of fate starts anew, and the cycle of life never ceases.

3.2 Composition

After everything was ready, on April 27th, we started the premiere.

"All the performers sat in a circle, listening to the sound of their breaths, and I felt that moment was truly beautiful," something the feedback from many audience members confirmed. This idea and suggestion come from my external supervisor, Yukiko Shinozaki. She said, "Why don't you try not playing any music and let the dancers' breaths be the melody? Audiences are always patient at the beginning of a performance." Yukiko told me this.



The performance began with everyone sitting in a seated position on the ground, forming the shape of the Bagua diagram. After some basic techniques of Chinese classical dance breathing, the storyline took a turn. As the five elements awakened and emerged, we transitioned into the

water element section through simple and slow breathing movements. The quality of the movements became softer and more flowing, conveying the characteristics and emotions of water. The music also transitioned from the sound of water droplets to classical cello melodies



Photo by Ruoxi Yang

Following Nicole's solo dance segment, all the dancers transformed from individual "water" entities with a singular texture into a part of a river. They became water droplets, waves, and streams, constantly changing. Subsequently, with the music of water droplets, everyone melted onto the ground, regrowing and forming tree shapes with their arms, while the lighting changed to green.

After the dancers transformed into trees, a background music with a gentle breeze played, causing their arms to become soft and dispersed like dandelions, transitioning to the next segment. While four lead dancers continued with their main dance sequence, the remaining dancers stayed in place, transforming into stones.



Photo by Tania Musina

Once the main dance segment of the four dancers concluded, everyone gathered in a circular formation, resembling a ritual ceremony in a forest. At the center of the circle was a green rope symbolizing tree roots and the growth of all things. The movements focused on generating power from the feet, maintaining bent knees, and seeking the sensation of being connected to the earth and tree roots.

After a brief moment of darkness in the lighting, everyone once again transformed into trees, except for Torill, who remained lying in a corner, preparing for the metal segment.



Torill Kolsrud. Photo by Tania Musina

During the second breeze, everyone exits the stage as the metal prop slowly descends from the roof. The prop shines with a metallic texture, and the lighting becomes yellow, resembling a cascade of golden light. Simultaneously, Torill is drawn towards the metal element and begins to move slowly, commencing her solo performance. After the main solo segment concludes, all performers reappear from the wings,

transformed into lifeless beings driven by their desire for power and wealth. Torill approaches the crowd, embodying the deity of the metal element. The crowd raises the symbolic representation of wealth and power, the "Metal," and walks towards the prop while the sound of money scattering fills the background. Torill is placed on the ground, and everyone makes wishes, hoping to transfer the power of the "Metal" onto themselves.



Photo by Tania Musina

At this point, two individuals representing the fire element leave the crowd and prepare for a duet segment, while the rest of the crowd fades into darkness following the direction of the metal element. After the duet of the fire element concludes, everyone reappears, now representing flames. The movements of the sparks vary in intensity, and the style of movements is more inclined to jazz dance and street dance. In this celebration of fire, everyone unleashes their alter ego.



Johanne Juel. Photo by Tania Musina

After the conclusion of the fire element, the stage once again fades into darkness,

transitioning into the final ending segment. The music continues to play as the darkness conceals the dancers, who swiftly change positions. With the lights rekindling, the major elements realign and divide into five groups, representing the five elements. This section aims to guide the audience's memories back to the birthplace of the elements. As the dance progresses, fans emerge amidst the chaotic scene, resembling a beam of light and a form of order, leading the elements back to their respective positions. This section incorporates a fusion of Chinese classical dance movements and contemporary dance styles. In the ultimate culmination, each person spins and settles into their initial positions, forming the Bagua diagram, symbolizing the eternal rotation of the wheel of destiny, never ceasing.



Kajsja Jacobsen. Photo by Tania Musina

After everyone has taken their seats, Kajsja/Sara (The two of them rotate in different performances) remains at the center to perform a solo of traditional Chinese folk dance. I provide the accompaniment with my vocals. The dance movements in this section draw inspiration from my hometown, Anshan, while the dancer represents the past within my memories and the unknown future.

3.3 Potential

In "*My Name is Ruoxi*", in addition to the apparent meaning of my name, I aim to convey the diverse understandings of culture and its influence on human society. For instance, in the philosophy of the Five Elements, these elements interact through

processes of generation and restraint. The concepts of generation and restraint emphasize the dynamic interplay and balance among various forces in nature and human existence. This dynamic showcases how elements mutually support and regulate one another, creating a harmonious and ever-changing energy and transformation cycle. This understanding finds reflection in today's society, where the relentless pursuit of capital development often overlooks the impact on the natural environment, and the single-minded pursuit of political victories disregards the future development of society as a whole. This principle also applies to the realm of art, where the relentless pursuit of political correctness and novelty can neglect the genuine reflection of ordinary people's lives through artistic expression. I believe that art should not merely serve as a showcase for the privileged few; instead, it should originate from real-life experiences and serve as the voice of the general population.

For some reason, the element of earth is not presented to the audience in a separate chapter, but I have some ideas for the future development of this element. As I mentioned in the "Working method & Process of the creation" chapter, "Earth" symbolizes stability, grounding, and practicality. It is intricately connected to the spleen, stomach, muscles, and skeletal system. In this chapter, my objective is to explore the relationship between the dancer's body and the earth or gravitational force. Gravity is an ever-present factor for dancers, but in Yoann Bourgeois⁸' works, he frequently portrays the interplay between weightlessness and balance. One notable example is his piece "*He who falls*,"(2014) in which the stage rotates, swings, and rises while the six actors function as a unified entity. There exists a sense of mutual support among them, devoid of jealousy or conflict. Their challenge lies in maintaining balance on the flat stage. I deeply admire this work as it collectively represents humanity's pursuit of balance on the global stage. Ultimately, humans are mere specks facing the imbalance between natural progression and human society, and inevitably, everyone will experience a fall. This theme aligns with the message I

⁸ Yoann Bourgeois is a French dancer, choreographer, and artist.

aim to convey in the earth element. The advancement of the world necessitates stability and balance, and humans must exercise self-restraint to harmonize with it.

Conclusion

In this reflection paper, I have shared my personal growth story and my name, and described the process of transforming my inspiration into a work and presenting it on stage. Through creating the piece "*My name is Ruoxi*," I embarked on a journey to explore and express my understanding of culture. This paper aims to delve into the development and potential impact of this work in the Norwegian dance field, focusing on fostering creativity, attracting a wider audience, and cultivating cultural experiences.

In Part 1, I delved into the significance of stories, the Book of Changes (Yi Ching), and the prototype, laying the foundation for subsequent sections. Part 2 explored the process of production, including research preparation, working methods, collaboration, and inspiration from dancers and supervisors. Part 3 centered around the performance itself, discussing elements such as props, costumes, music, composition, and the significance of development and culture. Throughout this creative process, I found it to be a journey of self-discovery, as my perspectives became more diverse due to different cultural backgrounds.

In summary, "*My name is Ruoxi*" serves as a starting point, incorporating Chinese classical dance rhythms and elements of Chinese calligraphy, set against the backdrop of Chinese culture, to explore how humanity can achieve a balance between the natural environment and social development. Simultaneously, it emphasizes the importance of bridging cultural gaps and making art more accessible to a wider audience. This project demonstrates the power of dance in promoting cultural exchange, innovation, and enriching our artistic landscape.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has supported and assisted me. I am grateful to my mentors, family, friends, as well as all the artists, dancers, supervisors, and supporters in the Norwegian dance field. Your guidance, encouragement, and support have allowed my research and creative process to progress smoothly. Thank you for your selfless dedication, which has made the realization and development of this work possible. Thank you all!

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[-review-yoann-bourgeois](#)

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Barbican Theatre, London International Mime Festival; 6th February 2016

Appendix 1: Program notes

Avgang 2023: My name is Ruoxi 若滸

The performance “My name is Ruoxi 若滸”, is based on Taoist philosophy as described in “The Book of Changes” and examines the origin of the choreographer's name and the relationship between the five elements found in nature (metal, wood, water, fire, and earth).

The name Ruoxi was given by a Chinese feng shui master who combined the time and the date of the choreographer's birth to calculate the missing cosmic elements to give her a new name which is more in balance with the Universe. This name would go on to signify her new birth and a new path to a lucky future.

“I was Yiqi, but my name is Ruoxi.”

In this project, Ruoxi Yang uses her name and her own growth experience as a starting point to explore where human beings come from. She cites the rhymes of Chinese classical dance, the elements of Chinese calligraphy and uses the Chinese cultural background to find out how human beings can strike a balance between their natural environment and their social development.

Co-creators and performers

Concept & Choreographer: Ruoxi Yang

Co-creators/performers: Torill Kolsrud, Hanna Hoida, Sara Sandvik Arnestad, Kajsa Jacobsen, Nicole Hultvi, Arian Jenssen, Helene Hundere, Johanne Juel

Composer & sound design: Torben Busche, Nicole Hultiv

Scenographer: Ayana Ishaihara

Light designer: Eirik Lie Hegre

Costume concept: Ruoxi Yang

Artistic guidance: Anne Grete Eriksen, Yukiko Shinozaki, Per Roar

Documentation: Tania Musina

KHiO Technical Department: Ida Lome Brevik, Are Engebretsen, Kjetil Skåret, Olaf Stangeland

KUNSTHØGSKOLEN I OSLO
OSLO NATIONAL ACADEMY OF THE ARTS

DANS
THE ACADEMY OF DANCE

ENGLISH

Meny

Søk

PUBLISERT 21.03.23

FORRETLING

Tid:
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28.04. 19:00-19:45
02.05. 18:15-19:00
03.05. 18:15-19:00
04.05. 18:15-19:00

Sted:
Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo, Scene 4

Årsting:
Dance



AVGANG 2023 >>>

Photo: Tanja Musina

Avgang 2023: My name is Ruoxi 若溪

The performance "My name is Ruoxi 若溪", is based on Taoist philosophy as described in "The Book of Changes" and examines the origin of the choreographer's name and the relationship between the five elements found in nature (metal, wood, water, fire, and earth).

The name Ruoxi was given by a Chinese feng shui master who combined the time and the date of the choreographer's birth to calculate the missing cosmic elements to give her a new name which is more in balance with the Universe. This name would go on to signify her new birth and a new path to a lucky future. "I was Yiqi, but my name is Ruoxi."

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Relatert informasjon

Nyhetsbrev og invitasjoner Del
Meld deg på Del «Avgang 2023: My name is Ruoxi 若溪»

Appendix 2: Video link

Full performance video

<https://youtu.be/bl6VjT8zXy4>

Documentary

<https://youtu.be/GEmWslkpXCc>

Rehearsal video in the studio

<https://youtu.be/00x-wrP6BWl>