

早稲田大学審査学位論文

博士（スポーツ科学）

概要書

Exotic Image, Healthy Exercise, Modern Beauty and
Traditional Virtue:
The Glocalization of Belly Dance in Taiwan

台湾人女性とベリーダンス：
変容する女性らしさに関する人類学的研究

2014年1月

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Confucian values strongly influenced gender stereotypes in Taiwan in the past. According to traditional stereotypes, women were relegated to the domestic sphere, and the ideal “good” woman was expected to be modest, frugal, virtuous, caring and filial. In contrast, expressing femininity, charm or beauty outside of the household was considered indecent. Women who danced in public might be regarded as “dancing girls,” i.e. members of the “bad women” category. The prosperity of the mass media and beauty industry brought about the “body beauty” boom in Taiwan in the 1990s, which has resulted in the “leisure exercise for body slimming” trend of Taiwanese women leisure exercise. Belly dance was introduced to Taiwan in 2002, primarily marketed as a “body slimming exercise” with a sense of Middle Eastern exoticism.

The dance was taught in Community Universities in the beginning, the well known adult education system where mature women comprise the majority of students. It is claimed to be a low-impact exercise that offers enough “exercise results” that most participants desire. Previous studies assert that belly dance has become an emerging leisure dance in Taiwan. According to these studies, weight-losing, body-shaping, exercise and exotic image are the main motivations for most participants. While these studies generally regard “the development of belly dance in Taiwan” as a popular fad, this study locates the population of belly dance in the historical context of Taiwanese society, aiming to give a deeper interpretation of this phenomenon.

The first purpose of this study is to explore the developing process and localizing features of belly dance in Taiwan. By analyzing the promotion strategies of pioneering advocates, news reports, and collecting firsthand data from fieldwork and interviews, I conclude that there are five features of the present development of belly dance in Taiwan: 1.Numerous community based belly dance classes and performances 2.Mature women as major participants 3.Highlight the effects for body-beauty and femininity enhancing 4.Hybrid representation of the Middle East 5.Competition for health and national pride. Besides, I argue the prevalent media discourse of women’s empowerment through external changes, the marketing strategies adopted by the pioneering promoters of belly dance, and the government’s policies on sports, health and diplomacy play important roles in shaping the cultural landscape of Taiwanese belly dance.

The second purpose of this study is to identify the connections between belly

dance, women's gender practice, and the idea of womanhood in present Taiwanese society. Contrary to traditional gender expectations, the display of the body and femininity is encouraged in belly dancing. Previous studies showed that married or older Taiwanese women are still more constrained by traditional gender expectations; interestingly, they have become the majority belly dance participants in Taiwan. To defend their involvement in belly dance, I found most interviewees flexibly coordinate the traditional and the modern, taking their ideal women image as one that combines the modern notion of beauty with the traditional notion of goodness. Asserting that their motivation to belly dance is for exercise or leisure activity (rather than for money or pleasing men), a frugal and natural approach to acquire femininity and beauty, interviewees differentiate themselves from the "bad others"—i.e. dancing girls, social butterflies, material girls, and artificial beauties—to construct a "beautiful-and-good" female image. By creatively integrating traditional and modern gender images, Taiwanese belly dancers show that traditional virtues can be maintained even while participating in a dance with feminist connotations and erotic stigma. The ideal women image identified by belly dancers corresponds to the studies of womanhood in modern East Asian discourse.

Taking belly dance as its central subject, this dissertation can contribute to the study of cultural interaction between global and local spheres. Moreover, this study shows how women negotiate various gender role expectations as well as their practice in body-beauty and health consumption in a society that went through rapid social change and a process of compressed modernity. The results may enrich the scholarship of anthropology, sociology of leisure sport and the gender studies in Asia. Moreover, it can fill a gap in the literature because most of the former studies concerning belly dance have focused on the United States and the Middle East.