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The Japanese Way of Becoming an Artist and Its Religious' Connotations. A Case Study of Teshigawara Saburō

Abstract

In Japan it is often the case that the process of mastering a profession, especially in the field of traditional arts and crafts, proceeds through a close relationship with one's master (*sensei*), who embodies an abstract ideal of a certain art, as well as concrete methods and rules indispensable to perform that art as a profession and to attain success in one's career. A 'proper' relationship with one's master and a given artistic milieu, hard work, effort and sacrifice certainly pay off. Nevertheless, some Japanese artists, regardless of the linguistic and cultural gaps, take the risk of deciding to pursue their professional career outside Japan. Based on an informal, semi-structured individual interview with the artist Teshigawara Saburō, this paper will examine a professional career of the dancer, who claims to have walked his artistic way (*dō*) alone, (in)dependently of the so-called community of Japanese artists. Analysing a traditional path to artistic success, which partly derives from the ethical and philosophical teachings of Confucius, I will discuss an alternative to the above-mentioned tradition. Namely, I shall argue that it is possible to become an established Japanese artist outside of the system, working as an outsider, an immigrant or an 'other'.

Introduction

The professional trajectory of artists pursuing their artistic 'careers' in the field of such traditional Japanese arts and crafts as *nō*, *kabuki* or *bunraku* theater, *ikebana*, *sadō* (the way of the tea), martial arts or *kaiga* (Japanese paintings) etc. is institutionalized partly on the basis of various 'religious', or I shall rather say, ethical-philosophical ideas and practices rooted in Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism as well as Zen (Buddhism)[1]. This paper aims at an analysis of the artistic 'way' (*dō*) of the dancer and choreographer Teshigawara Saburō in the aforementioned cultural context to see whether, and if so to what extent, the

[1] For more about Confucianism in Japan, see for example Charles Holcombe, 'Ritsuryō Confucianism', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 2, December 1997, pp. 543–573; Mary Evelyn Tucker, 'Religious Dimensions of Confucianism: Cosmology and Cultivation', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 48, No. 1, January 1998, pp. 5–45; John Berthrong, 'Confucian Piety and the Religious Dimension of Japanese Confucianism', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 48, No. 1, January 1998, pp. 46–79; Feng Youlan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy. A Systematic Account of Chinese Thought. From Its Origins to the Present Day*, Warsaw: PWN 2001; Nobuyuki Kaji, *Jūkyō to ha nanika* [What is Confucianism?], Tokyo: Chūōkōron-Shinsha 1990.

tradition of patterns in artistic education etc. have influenced his professional career, regardless of its predominant globalized aspect, and what consequences it has had, if any, on the shape of his career. Moreover, I shall also address the following issues: the problem of cross-cultural communication/cooperation between artists, and the question of success and recognition on an international/local level. Finally, I would like to question the myth of an artist as a cosmopolitan, stateless person, who exists along with the art he creates, beyond any borders based on state or civilisation, as someone whose talent and genius – an idea broadly discussed by Lehman and Ellias[2] among others, etc. – are universal, rather than particular, and as such strongly linked to the local cultural environment where the artist originates from. The goal of this paper is not to prove that it is so-called Confucian ethics which lies behind the idea of Teshigawara's artistic creativity and constitutes the very sense of it. This particular philosophical perspective, which underwent significant modifications when transplanted onto the ground of Japanese culture, shall be applied to an analysis of the professional trajectory of Teshigawara Saburō as a theoretical frame, whose structures will cast light on some aspects of his career, such as his artistic choices, his relations with other artists with whom he has collaborated, the sources of his esthetic inspiration, and the like. Ultimately my goal, within the limits of this short paper, is to reconstruct a general image of the artistic path Teshigawara is walking on, emphasizing at the same time the fact that, despite the international dimension of his artistic career, when investigated in detail it turns out to be deeply rooted in a specific culture – that is, Japanese culture based partly on Confucian ethics. Given the above, it is essential to formulate a temporary operational definition of the perspective of Confucian ethics, from which Teshigawara's professional trajectory will be examined. For the purposes of this paper, the concept of Confucianism is defined through two of its aspects: firstly, the relation with one's self intrinsic to one's attitude towards the surrounding world of nature; and secondly, relationships with other people. In the case of an artist, emphasis will be placed on relations with teachers (*sensei*) or masters, as well as co-workers and the public. Something which at first glance may appear strikingly different in this philosophy, when looking at it from a perspective of someone educated in the Western individual-oriented system of thinking, is the fact that the individual self must dilute oneself in a nexus of social relations and interactions, and surrender one's individuality to begin constructing it anew. This also seems to be the case for Teshigawara Saburō. The reason for selecting this particular artist for the following analysis was not the uniqueness of the form of his career. On the contrary, the way he has built up his professional career can in a sense be interpreted as a representative example of a generation of Japanese artists – especially in the fields of contemporary music, theater, painting, design, and even literature with Tawada Yōko as an exemplary model. More precisely, while cooperating with artists and institutions on an international level and performing in front of international audiences, he has managed to maintain a specific method of managing his interpersonal relationships, and his artistic works remained profoundly Japanese in terms of the rich references to his native culture which they contain. Keeping in mind the above-mentioned operational definition of the so-

[2] See for example Harvey Christian Lehman, *Age and Achievement*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953; Norbert Ellias, *Mozart: Portrait of a Genius*, California: University of California Press, 1993.

called Confucian ethic, or system of interpersonal social relations, including the attitude to one's self, I shall base the core analysis of this paper around three issues in particular: a relational[3] individual self and its creationist potentiality (corporeality and art as bodily rather than conceptual practice); the role of the master-disciple tension/dependence/relation as well as reciprocity in achieving artistic success; and finally, the relations and interactions between artist and his audience. The reason why I focus particularly on these three problems is that in the theoretical perspective of interactionism (Blumer, Mead, Goffman, Becker, Hughes etc.) which I shall apply to my research, the formation process of a human's identity and his/her professional activities, which are based on the chain of interpersonal relations, are engendered in social interactions.

Furthermore, the core of such a relational self is constituted by a set of cultural determinants like behavioral patterns, beliefs, habits and the like (social determinism); yet these are the subject of constant negotiations and changes (social constructivism). It may be assumed that similar presuppositions about the nature of the social individual and the nexus of interpersonal relations which lay the foundations for the phenomenon of society establish the basics of Confucian thought. Namely, the aforementioned similarity lies in the fact that in Chinese philosophy too, as has already been pointed out, the emphasis is laid on the human individual as *homo politicus*, entangled –implying both active participation as well as passive connectedness – in a network of hierarchically organized relations of a patriarchal/mutual character. In the original, Chinese version of Confucianism the story of a human existence can be reconstructed only in the social context, where the latter is incessantly transformed by the former.

Methodology

Social research focused on the professional careers of artists can be based on the premise that there is no one pattern to be followed in that field, and that therefore each artist has to create (social constructivism) one's career (in)dependently. Such a manner of constructing one's artistic path in order to achieve professional perfection and success in the future should for some cases be analyzed in terms of broadly construed interpersonal relations and their quality, as already explained above. One's professional trajectory is constituted of a set of indiscernible details, acquaintances or events, and unveiling them in an analysis enables the researcher to reconstruct and better understand the social process of career-making. This area of social studies requires and justifies the application of qualitative methods such as (auto)ethnography, participant observation and structured or semi-structured interviews.

My research was conducted with the use of qualitative techniques: a semi-structured individual interview with the artist (in the respondent's mother tongue of Japanese), which took place in Warsaw on October 30, 2012, when Teshigawara was visiting Poland as one of the artists invited to perform at the Crossroads 2012 festival. The interview was supplemented by a participant observation, which I carried out at the Ujazdowski Castle

[3] The Japanese word for [human] (*ningen*) presupposes the relational nature of an individual – we exist only in relation to others. *Ningen* literally means space between humans. Jane M. Bachnik, 'Time, Space and Person in Japanese Relationship', in *Interpreting Japanese Society. Anthropological Approaches*, Joy Hendry (ed.), London and New York: Routledge, 1998, pp. 91–92.

Center for Contemporary Art during the artist's talk with the audience on October 29, 2012. The meeting with the audience was interesting in terms of its structure, which enabled the artist to reveal many facts from his professional career, concerning his educational background, his first steps into the dance world, his physical training, his choreographic imagination and his international encounters with other dancers.

In addition to that, I saw three dance performances by Teshigawara – two in his native Tokyo and one in Warsaw – during which I concentrated not only on the form and the subject of the performance itself, but I also tried to grasp the atmosphere and the reaction of both types of audience – the Japanese and the Polish – to what they were watching on the stage. Two of the performances were actually two versions of an approximately one-hour piece entitled *Miroku* (the name of a Bodhisattva), rich in references to Japanese culture and religion, a semi-improvised dance, based on a Japanese novel.[4] The other was a loose adaptation of a short novel written by a Polish writer Bruno Schulz[5], entitled *Haru, Ichiya ni shite. Bruno Schulz Haru yori* [Spring, in one night – inspired by Bruno Schulz's Spring].

As I have already mentioned, all my fieldwork was carried out in the Japanese language. Since this is not my mother tongue, when it came to the formulation of the hypotheses and results of the survey, I had to challenge several dilemmas related to linguistic issues, such as the adequacy of my questions, in terms of proper interpretation and/or understanding of intentions of the interview; my correct understanding of the responses; and the relevance of the data acquired which will be presented in this paper, and the validity of my conclusions etc. Most of the problems I have just enumerated can be solved by the following measures: recording an interview, repeating conversations and asking the respondent for further clarifications or explanations of his statements. Moreover, the validity of the data may be also confirmed through either written materials (other interviews with the artist, critics, essays, books both by and about him, etc.) or conversations with people from the artist's environment, as well as with persons who originate from the same culture and whose professional activity is related to the world of the art of dance.

In this paper, I combine empirical data with theoretical deliberation in order to reconstruct the path which led Teshigawara Saburō to where he is today as an artist. My intention is neither to retell the detailed biography of the artist while presenting all the data I have collected, nor to evaluate the professional achievement of my respondent in terms of success or failure. Having analyzed the information I have acquired by means of the methods described above, I plan to focus on three aspects of the career-building process itself, and to attempt to investigate the impact which the Confucian ethic might have had on the way Teshigawara shaped the network of interpersonal relations within which his career evolved. This research has been conceived as an idiographic and ethnographic description[6] of one particular professional path in the world of art[7], and is a part of a larger survey about professional careers pursued by Japanese artists on an international level. The following

[4] Taruho Inagaki, *Miroku*, Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1946.

[5] It was based on the short novel by Bruno Schulz entitled *Spring*.

[6] Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, Polish edition, Warsaw: PWN, 2003, pp. 45–49.

[7] As a part of *Lebenswelt* or 'life-world', a concept used in phenomenology (Edmund Husserl) and in sociology (Max Weber, Alfred Schutz, Jurgen Habermas).

case study has an explorative character, and serves as a preliminary insight into the question, thus possibly leaving the reader with a feeling of insufficiency. On the one hand this survey has a limited range of deductions, but on the other hand it could help to formulate some hypotheses which will be tested in the course of further analysis.

Theoretical background. (In)dependent creation of a professional trajectory

The question of the artistic career in the world of Japanese art shall be approached from the theoretical perspective of Confucian or Neo-Confucian ethics, with emphasis put particularly on those aspects of this philosophical system which touch upon the social role of an individual, including the importance of education or practicing virtues. The book of Chung Yung says that God created nature, and human duty is to live in accordance with nature, called the path of reason or *tao*.[8] This path (*tao*) is cultivated by means of education; in other words, "it is through education that we try to comprehend nature and cultivate the path of reason".[9]

Walking one's own path means perfecting oneself in the virtues (Japanese: *toku*) in order to live in harmony with nature and other social individuals. Furthermore, the ideogram of the character *toku* is composed of five components which express the sense of the word: a man pursuing his path and practicing skills through multiple repetitions of an exercise, all over again and again to achieve perfection, and individual as well as social harmony of mind and body.[10] The path is of a seemingly paradoxical nature, since being shaped individually it is at the same time immersed in the path of one's ancestors, with whom the living are bonded by one of the four virtues, namely the filial piety (Chinese: *sìzì*). It is also through the process of education that a human being attains the unification of past knowledge and the fruits of self-improvement.

The aforementioned nexus of interdependences between individuals which constitute the foundation of society are hierarchically structured, and as such can be also traced back to the idea of the five bonds, according to which an individual is assigned to a particular place in the social order. Knowing one's place and role means being aware of one's duties in relation to others which arise from it, and is important in a sense that it guarantees social harmony – a central concept in Confucianism. The top position in this echelon of social relations belongs to the ruler and the ruled, and the second to the father and son. These two categories in particular shall be taken into consideration when examining the issue of the relationship between master (*sensei*[11]) and disciple (*deshi*), in the world of art generally, but especially in the context of Japanese culture.

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[8] Leonard Shihlien Hsu, *The Political Philosophy of Confucianism. An Interpretation of the Social and Political Ideas of Confucius, His Forerunners, and His Early Disciples*, London: Curzon Press, 1975, p. 201.

[9] Ibid., p. 201.

[10] Anna Iwona Wójcik, *Wolność i władza. Filozoficzne idee cywilizacji liberalnej i konfucjańskiej w próbie międzynarodowego porównania*, Kraków: Collegium Columbinum, 2002, p. 41.

[11] For the purpose of this paper, the term *sensei* is defined in a broader sense than its initial meaning, that of a teacher. Here, it also indicates a network of institutions which predefine conditions and determine one's professional path in a the world of art (e.g. *nitten* in the *kaiga* field of Japanese paintings).

This relation constitutes a core element of the *iemoto*[12], a hereditary system whose beginnings date back as far as the Heian period (794–1185), when practices already existed for transferring orthodox knowledge about specific skills within a line of a family from father to son. However, its mature form and the most distinguishing features of the *iemoto* institution as we recognise it today developed in the eighteenth century.[13] A literal translation of the term *iemoto* would give a combination of words meaning approximately the 'house (*ie*) of origins (*moto*)', that is, a familial environment where certain art/skills of creation have been worked out. This hierarchically organized institution for the study and practice of traditional arts and crafts is strongly associated with feudalism, paternalistic kinships of subordination, and relationships of power and control over the way some unique competences are disseminated and used both within and by society at large. Moreover, the authority of the great master, who stands on/at the top of the pyramid, guarantees his position and stable income, since he is the one to certify the competency of his disciples and the local teachers who have practiced under his supervision. The master also determines the standards as well as the criteria of artistic accomplishment[14], and retains exclusive rights to reject any deviations from the set norms.

The *iemoto* system was adopted in the world of the tea ceremony (*chanoyu* or *sadō*), *ikebana*, calligraphy (*shodō*), the worlds of classical theater such as *nō*, *kabuki* or *bunraku*, Japanese dance (*buyō*), and martial arts. Even nowadays it is still present in many institutions where Japanese people learn fine arts and crafts, among which the tea ceremony and *ikebana* attract particularly large numbers of students. What is also striking about the *iemoto* system is that it permits only one *iemoto* at a time, which sometimes leads to the creation of new 'houses' or 'lines', often in contradiction to the main line. In practice, this means that there can be only one recognised master, whose title of *iemoto* is hereditary, usually transmitted from father to son by direct line or by adoption. Such rigid organization of this institution, where the position and role of every newcomer is predefined by a set of rules, rather than the actual skills or talents of the apprentice, is often a subject of harsh criticism for its undemocratic or non-meritocratic, authoritarian and nepotistic character; and thus many artists practicing traditional arts and crafts consequently reject participation in this system.

My hypothesis is that some of the main distinctive characteristics of the *iemoto* system, which grew from within the Confucian or Neo-Confucian ethic, pervaded and influenced the shape of the Japanese system of education and also the modern arts in general, whether classical music or film education, and even the worlds of literature and theater. This problem is too complex to be elaborated on in this paper, but I shall briefly outline some questions indirectly related to the role which the *iemoto* system has played in the professional career of Teshigawara Saburō, when discussing the aspect of master/disciple relations.

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[12] For further information about the '*iemoto* system', see Francis L.K. Hsu, *Iemoto: The Heart of Japan*, New York: Schenkman, 1975.

[13] Eiko Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility. Aesthetic Networks and the Political Origins of Japanese Culture*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 165.

[14] Ibid., p. 165

In the course of a path which will supposedly lead to artistic accomplishment, the aforementioned interactions or ties emerge as a determinant factor, in the sense that a successful relationship with a great master opens up the possibility to follow one's artistic vocation or 'professional career'. Here, the latter term is used in the meaning given to it in the perspective of the sociology of labor, namely as a set of stages coming one after another, of which one's artistic way (*dō*) is composed. These stages can be differentiated from one another in terms of the quality of the interactions[15] which a person gets into with the so-called significant others, whose appearance at a certain time prompts a turning point in their career.

Given all that has been said so far about the conditions of career-making within the limits of the Japanese *iemoto* system, it is quite clear that in the professional biographies of Japanese artists, especially those whose careers develop on their native ground, one relationship prevails upon any other encounters, that is, meeting and working with the right *sensei* (teacher). Is that also the case for Teshigawara Saburō? Before I answer the question, I will introduce the artist in one short paragraph, and outline the broad scope of his artistic activities.

The case of Teshigawara Saburō and 'Karas(u)'[16]

Teshigawara Saburō studied plastic arts and initially planned to be a sculptor. Ultimately, he became a very special kind of 'sculptor', one who uses his own body as material to create dance performance on the stage. His adventure with dance started in 1981 in a private ballet school, located by a railway station in his native Tokyo. Unsatisfied with the rigidity of ballet, whose methods did not suit Teshigawara's body, he soon quit the school. In 1985, as we find out from his homepage, he formed a group called KARAS(u), and started his individual career independently of any artistic institution, where he could master choreography and dance techniques. Teshigawara's work is recognised in Japan, where he has established his position not only as an artist but also as a *sensei*, teaching movement theory (*sic!*) and conducting workshops at the Department of Expression Studies, in the College of Contemporary Psychology, St. Paul's (Rikkyō) University. Furthermore, throughout his professional career he has also set up a wide network of artistic relations on an international level, cooperating with artists from England (S.T.E.P.), France (Paris Opera) etc., which has contributed to his artistic reputation on a global scale. Teshigawara's creative activity is not limited only to dance; he has also won increasing international attention in the visual arts field, with art exhibitions, films/videos, as well as the set design, lighting and costume for all his performances.

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[15] See Everett C. Hughes, *The Sociological Eye. Selected Papers*, New Brunswick: Transaction Books 1971; Howard Becker, *Sociological Work, Method and Substance*, Chicago: Aldine, Press of Glencoe 1970; Anselm Strauss, *Professions, Work and Careers*, New Brunswick, NY: Transaction, Inc., 1975.

[16] This part is based on information from Teshigawara Saburō's homepage: http://www.st-karas.com/en/index.html (accessed 10.02.2013).

The official name of the group is KARAS; adding 'u' in brackets is intended to emphasize that the name comes from the Japanese word *karasu* meaning 'raven'. The reason for removing the last vowel is to give the name itself a more international sound and bring it a 'career' outside of Japan.

The corporeal dimension of art

This part of the paper will focus on Teshigawara's 'bodily practices' (*dō*, derived indirectly from Zen and Confucianism), which are meant to help an individual to develop and perfect human virtues (*toku*), such as artistic expression among others. During the 'artist talk', given at Ujazdowski Castle in October 2012, Teshigawara stressed several times that for him everything in dance has its beginning in the physical body, which also becomes the main source of inspiration for all of his performances.

> We went to the mountain, a group of dancers, to practice outdoors in harmony with nature, which would help us – we believed – to get to know the edge points, limits and possibilities of our physical bodies. A part of this training was to let oneself be buried up to the neck in the ground and stay in this state for quite a long time. That is how I really became conscious of all parts of my body, the breath, blood running in my veins. (…) Nowadays, when I work on a new performance, what I attempt at is always getting over the limits of my body. I recall the moments I spent practising ballet figures. Those techniques were against the natural movements of my body, and so I decided to quit the school and switch from ballet into a kind of free modern dance. I exchanged the restraints of ballet techniques for the physical restriction of freedom of action, which on the other hand, can be in a way liberating. Yet, even today I seek for these moments, when my body says 'no', resisting my mind, I try to work them out, and I am inspired by them.[17]

This direct, physical experience of 'great nature' was crucial in the dancer's professional career, because that was the first time he thought of himself as a part of a larger universe, the macrocosm, and thus developed the need for harmonic existence with the natural world. Teshigawara concentrates very much on action, on the act of dance throughout which he becomes a dancer. What counts for him in his career is the constant effort he undertakes everyday while working with his body. Teshigawara considers dance, as he explicitly stressed in the interview, as a way (*tao*/*dō*) of living. It is through dance that he (re)creates himself also as a part of the community whom he identifies himself with. Consequently, his very body serves as a means of communication with others, a tool that goes beyond cultural or political – Teshigawara equates both levels of social life – borders. Visible influences of Japanese culture can be observed when analyzing the elements of which the choreography created by Teshigawara is composed. The entire dance is horizontally oriented, there are hardly any movements requiring any step of elevation, no springing into the air, but instead the dancer remains close to the stage, as in the traditional *nō* theater, trying to give an impression that he dissolves in the space rather than dominating it. Differences between classical *nō* theatre and ballet are described by the Japanese philosopher Suzuki Daisetsu, who thereby juxtaposes the syncretistic and unifying nature of the East with the dualistic, individualising West.[18] According to Suzuki, the Oriental

[17] Based on the notes from the 'artist talk' which took place at the Ujazdowski Castle Center for Contemporary Art on October 29, 2012.

[18] For differences between ballet and Japanese dance which reflect differences between the Orient and Occident, see Daisetsu T. Suzuki, *Zen i kultura japońska*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 2009, p. 92

mind tends to perceive things in their totality and unification, integration within the world, while the Occidental mind seeks differences between things, highlighting their individual and unique value. Teshigawara Saburō's professional career as a dancer involves the persistent pursuit of artistic perfection, where the stress is put not on the final achievement but on the process itself. On the one hand he 'dances' his own individually crafted biography, yet this biography does not evolve in a void. Through his attitude to nature, his body and the people with whom and for whom he performs – as I shall discuss in the next paragraph of this paper – he proves that the path he once stepped onto and is now walking on is but a continuance of the way of his ancestors, at least in the ethical-philosophical dimension. Furthermore, the presupposed individuality and independence of the institution of *sensei* seems only to be an apparent one.

Tension between the master and his disciple

Teshigawara does not mention any *sensei* or master who would have had any significant impact on the process of his artistic formation, considering himself in large part a self-made dancer. Nevertheless during an interview with the audience in Warsaw, he associated his artistic practices with people like Ōno Kazuo (founder of the *butoh* dance style). Additionally, in the story of his professional training it is possible to track down traces of institutions, norms and customs characteristic of Confucian teachings, as already discussed above. These are related to the practices of self-improvement, education and achievement of perfection in virtues. The conclusion which may be drawn from my interview with Teshigawara is that on the one hand, his professional career has developed in relative independence of the institution of a proper *sensei*. Yet, on the other hand, the 'way' (Japanese: *dō*) in which this dancer shapes his career, from the corporeal techniques he has used to train his body and mind, through his attitude towards the tradition of Japanese stage performances (such as the techniques of *nō* theater) and dance masters (Ōno Kazuo et al.), up to the themes or motives (the spatial organisation in *Miroku*, which was supposed to evoke a room in a Japanese traditional house with the sliding *fusuma* paper doors) he refers to in his artistic creation. All these aspects suggest the visible presence of these so-called institutions in his professional activities (of which Teshigawara is only partly conscious – as far as I could understand from the interview – and this is related to the fact that he does not treat himself as a reflective but rather as an active subject when creating a new performance).

Another interesting point which was revealed during the interview, and which requires further investigation, is the fact that Teshigawara used to work as a professor at Rikkyō University in Tokyo. He taught not only dance techniques, but also lectured in the field of psychology, and additionally has experience of conducting workshops, including with international students. Moreover, he is the author of several books in which he draws on his experience to lay out his own dance theory (e.g. *Tsuki to suigin. Teshigawara Saburō no buyō* 1988 [Moon and Mercury. Dance of Teshigawara Saburo]), including the notion of the body and mind of a dancer and similar related issues. The conclusion that arises from the above is that on the one hand, Teshigawara claims to reject any institutionalised 'patriarchal' form of dependence such as *sensei*. Nevertheless, he works within a network of dance artists, cooperating with other dancers on an international level, and has created himself as an '*ie*' (house of origins), where his disciples practice

the art of dance, as defined and performed by Teshigawara. Therefore, rather than existing outside of the Confucianism-based *iemoto* system, this artist admittedly crafts his own professional path individually, while referring to this very structure. Even though his attitude towards it is critical, his criticism is expressed within the system, at the university where he used to teach, or on professional stages of theaters in Japan, where he performs. The last question which should be asked is about the audience: Does Teshigawara need a recipient for his art?

The artist and his public. In search of mutual understanding

> An artist needs his public, needs to grab its attention and interest it in what he is doing on the stage. An artist must curry favour with his audience, because he does not exist without it. (…) On the other hand, it is of less importance whether the audience is capable of grasping the cultural context of the performance, whether they can spot and understand the uniquely Japanese motives in it. (…) Besides, the very Culture is a part of politics, a useful tool to make politics, a soft power, something that is sold, and therefore I don't like the word itself. (…) In my performances I refer to something which is beyond national cultures.[19]

According to Teshigawara Saburō, communication with the audience does not necessarily have to be mediated through culturally defined language in both the spoken and corporeal forms, but it is also possible beyond cultural constraints and determinants. The very 'culture' and its products (*manga*, *anime*, J-pop and even classical *kabuki* or *bunraku* theater etc.) are perceived as a political tool, a kind of 'soft power' which serves the country to promote its ideology and strengthen its position on global markets. Yet, when pointing out the importance of the contact between the artist and his audience, Teshigawara refers somehow to the Confucian philosophy of social virtue, a virtue of living in harmony with the other, in this case the audience. In the interview this idea was expressed more explicitly, when he said that during performance he becomes a servant, offering his body and mind to the public and hoping for empathy-based mutual understanding, which is a *sine qua non* of a successful artistic communication.

The main problem which should be addressed at this stage of the analysis is the possibility and necessity of communication and mutual understanding between an artist and his audience in a situation where the cultural background of the performer is categorized as different, but the substance of this difference (such as the sense of time and space, culture/nature as well as body/mind dualisms etc.) remains obscure and ambiguous, and therefore very often tends to be ignored. Before the 'artist talk' at Ujazdowski Castle started, I eavesdropped on a conversation between Teshigawara and his Polish translator, during which the artist was explaining the philosophical background and source of inspiration for the performance entitled *Miroku* which he was going to give the following day. Apparently, the main idea of this work was to play with the Buddhist concept of light and enlightenment. Initially, the dancer planned to explain the ideological dimension of his choreography to the public, but eventually gave this plan up, being convinced that his explanation would not be understood anyway. In this

[19] Based on the notes from the interview conducted on October 30th 2012.

situation the artist must be satisfied with any form of active presence from the audience. According to Teshigawara, complete mutual understanding is neither possible nor really necessary. Nevertheless, the artist is presumably convinced that the public's awareness of the cultural context enriches the reception of the dance and thus enhances the quality of the mutual contact – even though this conclusion cannot be found *expressis verbis* in any of his statements. Therefore ideally, a culturally competent audience would react vitally to the performance, thereby actively participating in the creative process as a subsequent source of inspiration for the dancer. This active participation is especially important for Teshigawara, whose dance performances are in a way *aleatoric*, as there is always a moment of improvisation. In this sense, he needs the audience and he is "desperately seeking" for its response. However, we may also imagine that he could keep on practising dance even without having anyone to admire his work. Why? That is because for Teshigawara, dance is a (Confucian) way (*tao*/*dō*) of living and because mastering artistic expression for him actually means achieving control over the body and mind, or striving to live in better harmony with one's self within nature. We can thus assume that this process does not need any witnesses in the form of an audience. This statement finds corroboration in what the dancer said during the interview, that he rarely thinks about the audience when he is working on a new performance. Once they are sitting there watching him dance they become important, but at the first stage of the creation process Teshigawara mainly focuses on a certain topic or problem that troubles him. Then he selects the elements, techniques and means of bodily expression appropriate to speak about a given subject. Contact with the audience takes place later on. The public seemingly has no impact whatsoever on the topic Teshigawara selects for the play, yet during the performance the public becomes an inspiring part of it. If the dancer seeks mutual understanding and communication with his audience, it is because he exists as an artists as well as a human being only within a society which. with its response, confirms his artistic and individual identity.

Conclusion

To sum up, the goal of this preliminary and idiosyncratic survey was to present the professional career of the Japanese dancer Teshigawara Saburō within the ethical-philosophical frame of Confucian thought. This philosophy had a great impact on the institutional organisation of the Japanese art world as well as the Japanese education system in general, especially in terms of the relation between the master and his (rarely her) disciples, but also as far as an overall vision of the world's order and the concept of human life related to it are concerned. The data presented in this paper comes from research conducted with the methods of qualitative sociology (a semi-structured interview with the artist, participant observation and ethnography).

The problem was approached from the perspective of the sociology of labor, which analyses a professional career as a set of phases in a biography different in terms of encounters with the people who propel a turnover in the trajectory of one's professional life. The sociological approach was combined with elements borrowed from Confucian philosophy which refer to the interpersonal relations and social education of a human being. Given this, the analysis of Teshigawara Saburō's artistic pursuit was focused on three problems: the relation with the master and his position within the Japanese art world

(including his attitude towards the institutions of this world), his artistic education and vision of himself as an artist, and finally his relationship with the audience.

The paucity of data does not allow definitive conclusions to be drawn, but nonetheless some hypotheses can be formulated. As I have tried to show, Teshigawara Saburō and his idea of art as a way of self-improvement and striving for perfection may be explained in the context of Confucian philosophy and ethic, where emphasis is put on respect to ancestors and other members of the society, as well as leading a life in harmony with great nature. All these virtues are to be achieved by proper training or education (*dō*), which should be performed under the supervision of a master. Teshigawara claims that he has not trained with anyone who would have had any particular impact on his artistic expression, although when he speaks about his profession he mentions Ōno Kazuo, and also refers to various symbols, rules and notions which stem from certain Confucian concepts of the human being, a vision of nature and social order. The image of an artist that arises from this survey is an image of a craftsman, rather than a genius, who makes hard efforts every day to take yet another step further in his artistic achievements.

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