The 5th Edition of Pointe to Point, the Asia-Europe Dance Forum explored the relationships between tradition and contemporary in urban and rural contexts, as well as the interaction between dance and music. Twelve choreographer-dancers and six composer-improvisers from Asia and Europe participated in this challenging twelve-day project which was held in Beijing and Guizhou, China. The project aimed to provide an avenue for new inspirations and to instigate questions. The film Amazing Grace by Dutch film documenters attempted to capture the impression and density of moments through observation.
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POINTE TO POINT
5TH ASIA EUROPE DANCE FORUM

Pointe to Point, as one of Asia-Europe Foundation’s (ASEF) Young Artist Exchange initiatives, aims to empower aspiring young artists from Asia and Europe to reflect upon their views of contemporary society through their individual artistic expressions. It is committed to providing young people with a process-oriented platform for artistic exchange and dialogue through the arts.

The thinking behind Pointe to Point, the Asia-Europe Dance Forum is to emphasize the significance of dance as an art form as well as a medium of communication that considers the constantly changing society. Thus, in the process, raising and articulating issues which encourage cultural dialogue and exchange.

The aim of the fifth edition of Pointe to Point was to provide an avenue for new inspirations, discoveries and to instigate questions. The project inquired into the relationships between tradition and contemporary, between dance in urban and rural contexts and also between dance and music. This year’s edition took place in Beijing and Guizhou, China. The project was realized by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) in partnership with the China Dancers Association (CDA). The China Dancers Association worked closely with the Guizhou Public Affairs department to realize the Guizhou research trip.

Twelve choreographer-dancers and six composer-improvisers from Asia and Europe were selected to exchange and collaborate. Departing from the busy capital of China Beijing, the group traveled to the remote rural areas of the province of Guizhou where the Miao Minority lives and has preserved their ancient traditions of dance and music. The visit was timed during the New Year festival of the Miao people. This project gave the Pointe to Point group a common experience of observing dance and music as well as the rural life in the Miao villages during a period of five days.

The participants were split into three groups each with four choreographer-dancers and two composer-improvisers. They came to call their groups as ‘families’, which was inspired by the Miao families who each have their own dance movements. Each Family explored aspects of the dynamics of urban and rural, traditional and contemporary and dance and music. Back in Beijing, each Family conceived, structured, experimented and rehearsed during a period of four days, towards a common dance-music collaboration.

Four artistic advisors - Susan Buirge, Wen Hui, Fabrizio Cassol and Joyce Koh - guided all the participants through the creative process. Three critical artistic observers - Jan Goossens, Seong Hee Kim and Jiang Dong - observed the process during the entire project. A Dutch documentary team - Jan de Bruin and Ans Kanen - observed and expressed their impressions in the documentary “Amazing Grace”.

The observations and impressions gathered in Guizhou served as food for thought to explore new ways of expression employing dance and music and each artist’s relationship to the questions raised. The project proved to be a dense, intense and rich experience questioning the themes of tradition and contemporary, researching dance in rural contexts by urban choreographers, and challenging the cooperation between dance and music. At the end of a few days of intensive collaboration in Beijing, the artists shared their combined efforts with the public. The project left a lot of questions behind regarding the need and the way of preserving intangible heritage while also stressing the importance of supporting contemporary creation.
THE MIAO MINORITY
GUIZHOU

Guizhou also known as Qian in Chinese is one of China’s lesser known provinces. The beautiful plateau landscape is cut by great gorges and canyons, terraced hillsides and enchanting views. Guizhou is a multicultural province with the fifth largest ethnic population in China. The Miao is the second largest ethnic group in China and the largest in Guizhou.

Much of the Miao area is hilly or mountainous, and is drained by several big rivers. The weather is mild with a generous rainfall, and the area is rich in natural resources. In the past, the mountain Miao relied on subsistence farming based on slash and burn. Rice, maize and some barley and buckwheat were mainly grown. Miao villages are comprised of a few families, and are scattered on mountain slopes and plains with easy access to transport links. With the general economic development in China, Miao villages have come into contact with urban consumer oriented society. Many Miao people left the countryside to work in the cities. The old crafts and skills begin to die as they become less valued in a society where money takes an increasing importance.

MIAO TRADITIONS AND WAY OF LIFE

The Miao of Guizhou are organised into about 20 overall clans through the male line, each of which has its own name, not often referred to as each Miao will also have a name given by birth. The Miao live in nuclear villages, usually in the mountains but sometimes in the river valleys, made up of several clans with a number of lineages.

Different house styles have developed in the province depending on the availability of building material. The Miao are particularly well known for their stilt houses built into natural slopes. Traditionally their ancestors’ altar is on the wall opposite the door. Rice, fish tails, chicken feathers, buffalo horns are placed on the shrine to ward of evil spirits, particularly at festival times. Today photos of political leaders hang alongside the ancestors and the family.

The Miao are animist and shamanist, believing the world to be inhabited by good and evil spirits. Various rituals exist to defend against the bad spirits and ghosts - a protective shrine of phallic stones might be set up near the entrance to a village or together and placed. Herbs and mirrors hang from doorways and women often keep parcels of herbs for the same reason. Springs are decorated with cut-out paper flowers to pay homage to the water spirits.

Marriages are usually arranged by parents, but unmarried young men and women have the freedom to court. Festivals are the most important of ways for boys and girls to meet each other. Young women from a host village gather to sing antiphonal love songs with young men from neighboring villages. If a couple is attracted to each other,
MIAO CULTURE: ARTS, MUSIC & DANCE

Miao men usually wear linen jackets with colourful designs, and drape woolen blankets with geometric patterns over their shoulders. Women's clothing varies even from village to village. Miao women and girls from different areas wear very specific costumes, hairstyles and silver ornaments. This strong identification through dress may have arisen because of the Miao's frequent migration in the past. Clothing defers somewhat for married and unmarried women. Festival dress indicates wealth and skill in a number of crafts such as weaving, embroidery and batik. These skills are judged important in the selection of a marriage partner, indicating a girl's diligence and domesticity.

Different Miao communities celebrate different festivals. The Miao New Year festivities include beating drums, dancing to the music of a lusheng (a wind instrument), horse racing and bull-fighting. Lusheng Festival is an important courtship festival that is held annually in the months of January or February.

The Miao have a highly diversified culture developed from a common root. They are fond of singing and dancing, and have a highly-developed folk literature. Their songs, which do not rhyme and vary greatly in length from a few lines to more than 15,000 are easy to understand and are very popular among the Miao.

The lusheng is their favorite musical instrument. Lusheng is a Chinese name for the Miao bamboo pipe and translates as 'reed instrument'. In addition, flutes, copper drum, mouth organs, the xiao (a vertical bamboo flute) and the suona horn are also very popular. Popular dances include the lusheng dance, drum dance and bench dance.

The Miao are renowned for their dancing, usually performed by the girls to tunes played on Bamboo Lusheng pipes and drums. The Miao are musical people and most have good voices. There are set songs for courtship and certain rituals. Music, whether sung or played information to the Miao listener who learns to interpret sounds in the same way as read a book.

The Miaos create a variety of colorful arts and crafts, including cross-stitch work, embroidery, weaving, batik, and paper-cuts. Their batik technique dates back 1,000 years.

[Source: Guizhou Province, Second Edition 2002 (Odyssey Illustrated Guides) by Gina Corrigan (Author)]
THE URBAN - RURAL DICHOTOMY

The concept of the first Family of artists attempted to put urban elements into the notions of the collective traditional dance of Miao. The group was influenced by the aspects of modern and rustic that seemed to intermingle in the Miao way of life. Upon returning to Beijing, the artists explored the streets of the city: walking together silently to absorb the use of specific codes, the notions of tempo, the perception of time, and the transmission of gestures. The city assumed as direct influence, a place of observation and a great place to extract choreographic and musical vocabulary. The next two days they worked together towards the creation of a gestural representation of their journey which was to be presented on the third day. They overcame their singular ideologies to merge in a creative process that echoed a collective endeavor.

Catherine on the concept:
Our concept was developed during our reflections upon the experience in Guizhou and the initial experience of becoming a Family and needing to establish some commonality. We felt that the community experience - literal, metaphoric and logistic - with shared rights and responsibilities, knowledge and tradition stored in community experience was what underpinned much of the tradition that we had seen and felt in Guizhou. We understood that this was both the root and the potential of these traditions. So we began to consider what unites us in our urban, muted and regimented environments where information that is stored, carried and shared is mostly in a state of constant flux from digital media and fast-paced environmental changes.

Emmanuel on the concept:
After the first part of the trip which was dedicated to meeting and speaking to the Miao families, the Family of which I was part of, focused on the double notion of urban and rural. It seemed to us that this idea appeared clearly through their collective memory. We felt that time had stood still for this minority and that typically urban elements were being confronted with the way of life of a more rural social organization: displacements of whole villages in new suburbs, ancestral ceremonies on basketball fields, external influences via television and constructions of motorways changing the modes of transport. After observing these facts, the concept of transmission was added as a basic concept to the first. It seemed interesting to us to see how such a community expresses this breach, forced or not, in the "modern" world.

Catherine on the process:
Our intention was to develop a common experience which could be stored in the phenomenon of experience beyond language. We grew as a Family as we shared a durational, muted walking trip around Beijing during which we only responded to each other in an effort to remain connected spatially and temporally. The unprecedented obstacles and facilitators which emerged during our trip became our stored knowledge and added dimensions of group feeling, sensation and knowledge. Upon translating this experience into a piece of composition we struggled as individuals with our individual and complex aspirations and concerns, and the community was lost again… We also struggled to place our concept within the prescribed physical (architectural) and temporal space of the urban (and western) performance conventions. We realised that we could no longer address this urban/rural dichotomy through conventional (urban) performance practices, where the viewer is so distanced and isolated from the activity and
the phenomenon. This brought us full circle, as we finally connected to the full experience of the communities of Guizhou.

Jing-xin on the choreography: During my creation process, my main focus was on the formation characteristics dealing with the transition from tradition to contemporary. In both the arts and lifestyle of the Miao people in Guizhou, the most impressive thing was its closeness to nature and purity. We saw two essential dancing styles of the Miao, first the ‘Circle-dance’, non-stop circular movement with strong ceremonial meaning. The second style involved traditional movements and rhythms repeated in dance, but with variations. These characteristics of Miao dance are from their tradition, but at the same time they are full of contemporary style.

Emmanuel on composing the music: From one musical point of view; as a musician, questions were especially raised, more than answers. I for example did not feel a community of spirit compared to the other musicians. As an instrumentalist and a composer, I especially saw around me various attitudes and even conceptual philosophical standpoints which made it difficult to come to an agreement. ‘The East West’ does not have anything to do with this situation, in my opinion. I felt that the singularity of the view and the artistic character, and with little time, the positions of each one stiffened a little.

In addition, the concepts of improvisation as defined and then executed were in a way diametrically opposite. This process was a challenge for me. Should the music be repeated, should it be structured? Is necessary it to leave aside the aspects of Western musical language? Or on the contrary is it necessary to support the musical idioms jointly? Does one have to rest on the shoulders of the improviser for the “success” of a sequence choreographically? Is the research a constant balance between tensions and resolutions, between dance and music - Is that a universal value?

Artistic advisor Susan Buirge on ‘Family A’:
As dancers (and certainly musicians also) information first filters through the body and then is connected to reflection and/or to feelings. From Miao rural communities to Beijing streets, the Family thus had two direct body intake experiences, and in a very compact period of time. This is a great deal of information for each individual to filter through, and for six people the quantity is even greater.

It was quite remarkable how the Family as a whole was able to sift through the vast amounts of perceptual materials and arrive at a simple choreographic structure that so well embodied the contrasting ideas regarding rural community living and individual city behaviour. And yet, the piece had its own identity, being neither from the Miao nor off the streets of Beijing.

Artistic advisor Jiang Dong on ‘Family A’:
To me, the Family A’s work has a full meaning to convey the fruits of relationships. I still have a good memory of their work, there is a circular moving orbit which seems to have a certain purpose. And I assume that they got the idea from the Miao village. Yet it gives me an idea: Life is a circle but with a purpose. Indeed, we all have a life of our own, and they all have their purposes. Our lives contribute to a life of the human being as a whole. And that’s the purpose of any life. In my eyes, the four choreographers/ dancers and the two composers/ musicians in the group, expressed their thoughts in an individual way through their own artistic thoughts and imaginations, yet all of them contribute to a common ideal and a general goal towards the life - a goal which can be shared by a wider people through this communication.
THE MYSTERY OF REALITY

They approached their project more philosophically, questioning the concept of reality, “the mystery of what is real.” They attempted to search for what is real and is it the same for everyone, tried to understand this better and expressed their questioning through their performance.

Benoit on the Concept: the concept of our Family was an interrogation on the nature of reality, a question which we found could be comprehended in many ways, as what is real, what is my reality, what do I consider to be real and why - all these different nuances and graduations, which were brought up from our encounters with the complexity of the Guizhou experience, and all its different levels of readability. How the “otherness”, the feeling of difference also brought us to fundamental, more universal questions about the definition of our own identity and reality/realities.

We wanted to explore these questionings with movement and sound material which would highlight these graduations, induce a feeling of the different levels of layering and displacement - how modern metal spoons and tableware could become ritualistic symbols as a parallel to Miao silver ornaments, or how the sounds of a plastic toy guitar could become the voice of a lovesong to a certain community, for instance, ways to show and open interrogations on our own symbolic and ritualistic references.

Mei-Yin on the concept and creative process: The complex definitions of these two words - tradition and contemporary - reveal an inner conflict of the Miao people and us the artists. For the Miao people it is regarding preservation of a tradition culture in contemporary world. And for the artists it is our definition of our own identity in an increasing global society.

Unlike antique objects, music and dance are live arts forms which are constantly evolving and influenced by the surrounding environment. For the contemporary Miao people, their music and dance which is closely connected with their ritual and slowly drying out due to urban migration of young males, is now going through a transformation that involve dance competition, tourism and technology. Every Miao household we visited has TV audio system in their main living space where ritual ceremony used to take place. And for the artists, a lot of us been working and living in more then one country, our identity is a multi layer of our existence in the different countries and cultures we live in.

So part of Family B’s question of authenticity / reality also involves the questioning of transformation/mutation. Does the transformation provide a more authentic experience? What influences the transformation? How to create an organic mutation and still keep the authenticity of the culture?

With these discussion in mind, we, the choreographers have created the ending sequence, where the ‘chorus’ evolve and mutate through influences of different cultures, style and decision making of the artists involved. It is an open ending that is full of uncertainties and possibilities.

Olivier on the process: At the beginning, there were exchanges of individual feelings, on the questions that came up during the first days, when we were still in the province of Guizhou. Back in Beijing, I remember a discussion where each one expressed what he wanted personally.
to defend in our common process of creation. It seems to me that the aspect that proved to be common to all was the idea that during our encounter with Miao, our point of view had often been influenced, directed in various ways and scrambled by a certain number of filters in the access to information (speech, translations, interpretations, censorship?) The Family wondered on the concept of authenticity, the actual values of the Miao culture and about what they agreed to show us, to make us feel. It seemed obvious to us that a significant part of their “mystery” had remained inaccessible to us.

Tomoko on the process: On the first day of the creation process, we went through different exercises/workshops proposed by each one of us. There was one exercise, where everyone came up with 3 words signifying or symbolizing each of the following: our past or home, the present, and the future. Then we improvised based on these keywords, first to establish the personal language, and then to create a common language. We also did another exercise where we together wrote down words and images describing the changes in our emotions/thoughts/perspectives throughout the course of our journey in Guizhou, following the chronological order of the travel itinerary, on big pieces of paper. As we shared our impressions in this exercise, it became clear to us that one of the key themes surfacing from our shared experience in Guizhou was “the mystery of what is real.”

Tomoko on composing the music: Based on this concept, we, the composers, constructed the music by accumulating and dislocating different layers of sounds, which displaced and hid, as well as celebrated a love song. This love song was a simple melody composed with inspirations from Miao love songs (such as their scales and the call and response structure), and this became the basis of the whole composition.

Rannva on choreography: Through different approaches and exercises we set our movement material mainly by using words as our inspiration source. One approach was to find 3 words that represented our past, present and future. First we created the material individually and then we learned each others movements which we made into one phrase that everyone learned. For the presentation this movement sequence eventually culminated in a joint adventure where all the 6 composers and 12 choreographers joined the group to create a ritual like ceremony.

Olivier on the choreography: The dance was built rather easily, I must say; cho-
experiences and environment, and I find it quite beautiful that this rich density of individual responses should be expressed in a common stage presentation. After all, engines need friction to create movement, action, and this often proves to be a metaphor of our human and artistic encounters.

**Artistic advisor Joyce Koh on Family B:**
Family B’s dynamic worked well. They shared similar pre-occupations (artistic, social and cultural!). They were curious about what was not made explicit during the Miao showcase. They successfully instilled a sense of ‘mystery’ in their work by infusing layers of symbols which functioned either as pointers or filters. What was left for the audience at the end of the presentation was a sense of wanting to find out more!

There was clear movement in the work process from concerns of the individuals to the community. This was achieved I reckon by first expressing what is for each individual meaningful and personal and then attempting to establish a common language from the resources.

The Family showed respect for the disciplines of music and dance. A good effort was evident in allowing each of the discipline to breathe. This was done so by working separately after discussion. The relationship between music and dance was thus not completely investigated. The disciplines remained independent. The crossing-overs or relationships if any had been intended were not made explicit. There was an interesting sonic aspect in the work - the clattering of the cutlery. This concrete sound held my attention and I personally would have wanted it to continue, perhaps transformed or integrated in the musical soundscape.

Benoit in fact, had expressed that he would have liked to research and experiment with ideas he had not tried before at the forum. The pressure of the presentation did not leave him space to experiment and discover. He did at the end what he knew before in order to put up a performance. Olivier too, has also expressed that he would have liked the space to try out different musical ideas and see how he, as a dancer could respond to them.
This Family included dancers/ choreographers: Harati (Indonesia), Tae Sang (Korea), Ula Sickle (Poland) and Vincenzo Schiavulli (Italy) and composers: Young Gyu Jang (Korea) and Artur Vidal (Spain)

TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE OF SPACE

This Family attempted to make a collective work to translate a ritual art form to contemporary stage with all the symbols and images, based on their trip to the Miao villages. They approached their concept by using the foyer and seating space of the auditorium to stage their performance. They were influenced by the traditional dances they watched in Guizhou which were performed among the people today in a tourist context, and approached this concept with a contemporary attitude.

Artur on the Concept: I think that all the elements of my Family were united by the charm of our encounter with the traditions of the Miao people, which was new to all of us. We approached this with contemporary art in mind and the binomial relation between traditional art and contemporary art came up as the first point. We approached this first of all beyond arts concepts. We thought it would be interesting to create an art piece after something so complex and strong with so few time.

Successively we analysed the motivations underlying this subject and analysed what was really important to extract and make visible. Our idea is space oriented, taking into account theatre as a social echoing of the complicated social order, we noticed in the Miao villages. In a rela-

tively classical manner (avant-garde of the sixties) we decided use in most cases spaces outside the stage in order to change the viewing order in theatre. Our idea is based on taking the theatre as a social space, echoing the complexities of the people in the Miao villages inside the Chinese contemporary society.

Ula on the Concept: Our Family decided from the beginning to create an event or ‘happening’ that would use the whole theater, from the entrance to the auditorium to the stage. Rather than representing our experience on the stage the way the Miao were forced to represent their rituals as staged performances, we wanted to create an experience for ourselves and the public: a welcome and greeting ritual to initiate the spectators. We wanted to transform the theater (a space more familiar to the Chinese public than to us the visiting performers) into something strange and unfamiliar. We wanted to take over the space for the duration of the show and make it into our 21st century village!

Harati on the process: Starting from our first meeting in our last day in Guizhou each of us answered the same question “what was our first and overall impression of the Miao”. We felt that the ceremony was structured and we did not feel the ritualistic experience during the performance. It felt more as though they were performing for tourism therefore I felt like a tourist myself. We were receiving an offering of cultural experience not exploring the culture.

We as Family were more concerned with our own ideas, during our conversations lots of concepts came up from the Family members. However we agreed to choose a performance concept that could be performed in two days. We decided not to use the stage but the foyer and auditorium as the platform to express the ritualistic artform that we had experienced in Guizhou.

Artur on the process: From our first meeting
on our last evening in Guzhou, we collectively agreed that we cannot simply focus on insulated artistic facts to approach the themes of Pointe to Point (tradition, contemporariness rural, urban etc.). With this note, we were influenced by our presence in the village and felt the necessity to introduce an artistic role in theater following the ideas of our real life experience there by emerges the idea of staying away from the stage.

In a general way we decided to reconstruct our experience by underlying the space order in the theatre (separation of the artist and the public for instance) and by using the other parts of the theatre instead of the stage to perform and create a situation of accidental interactions with the public (for example the welcoming ceremony we had experienced at Guizhou). In the course of the first few days countless proposals were formulated in a diverse and incoherent manner. In the end two proposals stood out; the idea of crossing a space and that of living in a space. We finally decide to unite them by centering our intervention in the public space, by starting by giving oranges to audience at the entrance, performing among the audience and then the performers used the stage to exit.

Through the language of the body and sound we decided to create in the central space of the theater situations where the global and the local juxtapose, where the public are confronted by the feeling of strangeness and familiarity at the same time.

**Ezio on the process:** I think that the major difficulty was putting oneself under discussion, by considering that all (no matter who) choreographer and composer, since it is an inborn need to defend his ideals and that the artistic ego plays an important role. The fact that ideologically and geographically different, delayed enormously work, but this type of difficulty, I think is part of the charm of the experience.

**Ula on the performance:** The tourist wants authenticity and preserved culture, exoticism and otherness, but is it fair to ask a people to preserve a way of life that keeps them out of sync with the rest of the world? How can a people hold onto their ‘roots’ and rituals while in the process of becoming contemporary global citizens?

These questions were very present when we began to work in Beijing. I think the performance we created reflects this - for example in our wanting to create a feeling of strangeness/otherness for the public as they entered and in our desire to create a ritual that uses a contemporary vocabulary - a vocabulary that draws upon sensations of fragmentation and disruption (vibrating and shaking) while at the same time creating a positive and energizing experience for ourselves and the public.

**Harati on the performance:** We started our performance in the foyer by giving away mandarins to the audience to express our openness, the floor of the auditorium; we shared with the audience, where we performed for them. The stage was used as the exit.

The music for our performance came from two different artistic methods, where one composer improvised using different items to make music while the other musician created his music through a computer. It was a wonderful mix of some recorded sounds
from Miao and sounds created by using everyday items like plastic glasses.

**Ezio on the collaboration:** A getting together, development of ideologies, a sense of mutual understanding, to have dialogues, learning how to communicate (although with time limitation) and overall getting to know and respect each other are the other concepts of our Family.

Based on this true life experience, being setup as a Family, for us was a surprise as there was no choice towards the Family nor who constitutes its members. This in reality was a form of union and an absolutely interesting artistic encounter, to form different small families from a big Family, and all with artistic respect to each other. Even in small groups there is sometimes a convergence of thoughts and at times diverging thoughts from each other. The importance was to find one common idea, understand each other's desires and find a common direction.

**Artistic advisor Wen Hui on Family C:**
The piece which this group has contributed to, gives me a strong idea of a "contemporary" quality. The contemporary theatre stresses openness - openness towards daily life and towards people. So to me, the artists in this group have showed an openness to the audience. Before the show started, they designed all the dancers to be mixed with the audience. They welcomed the audience entering the theatre and also had a mutual communication face to face with them. Then, they started their dance right in the audience and this gave the audience something very new and special. In one sense, placing the performers in the audience's space breaks the traditional structure of theatre, that of the proscenium stage, and in some ways it came closer to traditional dance, such as rural and village dance, where the audience and performers share the same space. The artists told me that they hoped to show to the audience what they'd learned and got from the rural life in Guizhou's Miao village. Thus, I assume the trip to the Miao village has influenced each of them deeply.
INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

The Pointe to point programme started in Guizhou, China with an eruption of diverse experiences of cultures, artistic identities and sensibilities. The participants were drawn together with their collective inquiry into a tradition and culture of the Miao people, which was a new experience to all of them.

This diverse group of artists made the creative process more complex. The job of the artistic supervisors was challenging, the role played by some of them was not always clear to the participants. Many of the participants felt that the time scheduled for this complex project was not enough especially with the pressure to share their artistic process with the public on the last day.

The artists came together to develop an artistic collaboration, where on an individual level they clashed in artistic responses and where many thought their idea was more important. On a collective level the collaboration between the dancers and musicians was a difficult challenge for all three Families. But some how they found a way to collaborate, to mesh their different ideas and thoughts to present a collective artistic expression, that was well received by the audience.

This rich experience will help the artists to look at the things from a different perspective and the collaborations helped the participants gain a plethora of experiences in life and artistic development and future collaborations.

Below are some of the thoughts from the artists on their experiences and ideas they took back with them.

**Jing-xin (China):** I have made a lot of friends and “Family”. Different ways of living and working approaches were found in this “Family”, it serves like a source of knowledge or a think tank, which can nurture my artistic creation in the future.

In this project has provided us a good starting point/ a good communication
form for all the participants. We still need to have deeper mutual understanding, after all we can move to another step for project collaboration opportunities.

**Catherine (UK):** I gained much from both the cultural and artistic exchange. My ability to understand, assimilate and (most crucially) commit to a progressive process experience has been enhanced by this forum. I was so struck by the commitment of the artists to connect with and through their media; through the enormous and unique breadth of this experience, I have been inspired. I have been able to further refine and focus my own observations of the traditions (particularly working process) which are typical to both Asia and Europe. I have enjoyed connecting these conclusions with previous, less intensive experiences of working between Asia and Europe. I have been moved (again!) by the magnitude of the distinction between the artistic and cultural formulations of historical development in Asia and the concept-based science and technology economy of Europe. Attention to the preservation and contemporizing of people, cultures and habitats has been moving and enlightening. It has developed for me a more realistic awareness of our histories, identities and our roles as artists, as communities and as individuals. This knowledge of the Miao and their traditions and landscapes is a gift. In the light of experiences in both locations, the processing and the performance outcome in China, there is a very real sense of urgency to move forward to preserve artistic consciousness within an increasingly product oriented world.

**Arco (Germany):** I think some of the group discussions were too focused on the official presentation and the practicalities around them. Group discussions were very emotional and provocative, that is one that speaks out, that makes a statement and pushes. I felt that especially for some of the Asian participants, this approach has not created the confidence that is necessary to collaborate or even to discuss. I have missed in depth discussions and analysis of the actual process of collaboration in each Family.

**Tomoko (Japan):** I feel that the major challenge of the project was the fact that there was not enough time to really work through and delve into each one’s unique creative process, which is of course deeply influenced by one’s cultural background. If there was more time, I believe the intercultural exchange in the core creation would have been much deeper. With the time pressure, it was especially challenging to engage the creative processes of choreography and composition, which inherently use different languages, together. I am very grateful of the opportunity to have worked so closely with another composer, and I sincerely learned a lot from the experience, but it was much more difficult to share such intensity in creation with the choreographers. Still, I think the project was a great start for such an exchange, and I look forward to pursuing its process in follow-up projects.

**Ula (Poland):** The experience was very rich on many levels. The strongest impression was that of seeing contemporary China, both its rural and urban spaces. This was already a lot of information to work with and digest.

Our collaborations were interesting, but more of a first meeting than an in-depth exchange. The difference between choreographers and composers was less striking.
then the cultural differences of the different participants. Our Family focused less on the dance/ music exchange and more on an interpersonal/ intercultural exchange. There could have easily been artists of other disciplines participating.

The experience helped me to sharpen my communication skills as well as to define more clearly my artistic vision or standpoint. When you meet people with such different points of view, it helps you to define your own. Especially if you are in a situation where you have to defend what you think or feel.

Jang (Korea): It made me think about the opening and protection of minority’s culture, what kind of method would bring what kind of result…

Although it was a short period, I had a wonderful experience meeting choreographers, composers from different part of the world and shared our opinions.

Benoit (France): I think I gained from the overall human experience and through sharing of work processes, and the dynamics of shared composition. The main question being how does one develop a common language in such a diversity of individual approaches without falling into patchwork like construction. From a more external point of view, this experience also seems to highlight the social and political dynamics of art and society, whether this is in a Miao village or in a Beijing Theatre.

Artur (Spain): To work with artists from very different cultural horizons, during a relatively short period of time and by the experience of visiting the people of Miao which, for all of us was a first represented for me a challenge. I was very satisfied because of the visit to Miao, which none of knew much about and this made it possible to use our energies to work collectively. Leaving aside our respective concepts and concentrating on the experience at Miao in order to create by confronting our individualities, we tried to work together and this particularly marked the project. To create ways to organize, to communicate, to produce something different to pre-established structure of our respective cultures constituted a privileged moment. So with a certain isolation, within our village, we approached our work to elaborate in a language easily understood, intended for a larger audience.

Olivier (France): I obviously realized that to work together, in a real preoccupation of equality and a general comprehension, between people of so different cultures, raised a true challenge. I believe that all the participants returned home with memorable memories, a new force and satisfaction to have had fabulous encounters, but also with a strong feeling of frustration. As we noticed in the discussion of assessment, Westerners and Asian do not express themselves with the same facility within a group, respect the other differently within the exchange. I was surprised to experience these differences in human relations. The context of a work, even perhaps the exploration of an artistic action, requires a particular structure of communication and I did not feel that we were all in the same level of comfort with relation to the language, the speech, the proposal or the initiative. To meet one another represented a great opportunity, to discover the Miao culture was another outstanding opportunity. Working together with the development of a joint project seems to me henceforth an admirable experiment and extremely enriching but I imagine better what that implies moderation, of humility and patience.
Mei-Yin (Malaysia): I overcome my identity crisis/confusion in this forum, and gain more confidence or who I am (Malaysia Rojak). It was interesting to find out that my multi-layer global background (Chinese Malaysian, East, West) has the advantage of not only to help in translating for other Chinese participant, involve them in deeper working relationship with European participants, but also help me to voice my opinion as an Asian artist.

Ezio (Italy): It was difficult to communicate because of the differences in languages but finally we were supported by the one common language: the body, as a means of communication. In this group of much diversity, I think respect for each other was the basis for an excellent work of collaboration. The virtues of the project in China, were, knowledge, observation, the meeting, the confrontation. To understand other people who are in the same profession, learn how to listen, to observe and to express you because words in the social scenario play a very important part.

Harati (Indonesia): The main challenge for me was how to interact with everyone, with my barely adequate knowledge of English. With the language barrier and with every one wanting their idea to work, I found it difficult to express my thoughts in such a short time. As in a short time we had to work toward a presentation with 6 creators who had the different background and different disciplines. It is an important experience, as we can meet many artists from Europe and Asia to exchange and share experience and information.

Rannva (Denmark): Apart from gaining a rather diplomatic mind (at least for those two weeks) I have met a lot of very interesting people with whom I have experienced two very interesting weeks in Guizhou and Beijing. The most frustrating collaborations I have been involved in the past have also been the most inspirational experiences for me artistically. I think that this Pointe to Point program has been very challenging and I have come home with a lot of good memories and impressions that need to be digested.

Susan Buirge (France/USA): Many images remain of this very rich and complex project. In the morning sun on a mountain peak, a black butterfly (the ancestral symbol of the Miao) flies over the dance area and a village woman says, “This is a very favourable sign.”

The warm hearted smiles as those of Europe and Asia join hands with the Miao people in a giant circle dance. And suddenly, the buoyant sensation that to dance is the same for all peoples.

The enthusiasm of the hundred devoted and talented children proudly showing their dances in the school yard where later the dancers and musicians learn some of the same dance with similar joyfulness. The collecting of materials for a project yet to come is continuous and the possibilities endless.

In a studio in Beijing, the intensity of a musician’s body as he observes a dancer trying a movement phrase. The many unanswered questions of the relationships between music and dance ever floating in the air.

The acute look in the eyes of a dancer as he listens to the proposition of a member of his “Family”, a Family recently constituted of artists from different cultures. The potential is overwhelming, yet how to find a path that will bring all together.
In the end, more than images, what remains is a feeling. What made this project possible as a human and artistic adventure, and what made it come to completion as a laboratory with a public presentation was true open hearted generosity.

Be it the Asia-Europe Foundation with its willingness to experiment new formats for artists to come together. Be it the China Dancers Association which whole heartedly partnered such an endeavour never yet undertaken. Be it the choreographer-dancers and the composer-musicians who genuinely attempted to find proximity of concerns that would carry each individual, each “Family” and the community project to fruition.

The compassionate generosity exemplified here is the noblest of manifests, a sign of hope.

**Jiang Dong (China):** The program has made me be aware of the several pairs of relationship: east-west, traditional-modern, urban-rural, dance-music and individuality-collectivity, etc. It happens during the mutual communication and understanding between the different peoples under a circumstance of globalization. This communication is so important not just between the different peoples, but because we are individuals of the society. From the Miao trip we realized that no one can escape of his own life and destiny, while we can share it with others, because all lives are meaningful and full of wisdoms. And all wisdoms contribute to a wiser and a better circumstance of the world. We do need this communication, because in this world, the life experiences and styles are so different from each other, and individuals are different, too. An occasion like this provides us a colourful scenery of different life styles and a platform to show them.

**Joyce Koh (Singapore):** I was impressed with the collective spirits displayed by the dancers despite the groupings of the participants were determined for them. Most of them had come with professional training and experience, yet were able to shift the focus away from a personal will to accommodate a larger self.

The dancers mainly concentrated on the physical and spatial parameters while the musicians worked on their own to interpret the concept in musical terms, void of what the physical movements, gestures etc of the dancers would be. This was for me a gap in the artistic investigations of the forum. Music was not equal to dance, or even had a chance to drive dance. To arrive at this status of equality or change of perspective, one would need to experiment and research.

**Wen Hui (China):** Communication and exchanges are so important. Pointe to Point brings people to China and let them confront directly the life of the Chinese ordinary people. I think this is spectacular, because this can set up a link between people of the different backgrounds and let them understand each other. And it’s also good for an event like this to be held in China. An experience like this is an eye-opening occasion for the Chinese dance field. I especially think it’s good that there are some Chinese individuals in the dance area to participate an event like this. I believe this is going to do good not only to these participants themselves but also to the development of the Chinese dancing career.

This event is a fruit of communication.
AMAZING GRACE

The Asia-Europe Foundation invited two independent filmmakers from the Netherlands to observe and document Pointe to Point: 5th Asia-Europe Dance Forum in China. Given the full freedom to express their ideas on the exchange, producer Jan de Bruin and director Ans Kanen captured their observations into the film, Amazing Grace. This 55-minute long film explored the reflections of the participants, as well as the creative process that went behind the project.

Ans Kanen and Jan De Bruin on ‘Amazing Grace’:
Amazing Grace attempts to capture the impression and density of moments through observation. It is a composition in which image and sound are assembled and merged, while focusing on the delicate elegance of encounters between people and their surroundings; believing that this elegance is not always directly recognised.

The film observes the experiences of artists from Asia and Europe, situated in a social-cultural setting unfamiliar to most individuals involved. The exchange took place on many levels, assuming that each individual perceives and reacts in their own way. During the project’s progression, their impressions and reflections grew more complex and showed how each person deals with thoughts and emotions; contemplating while being a part of an event, and dealing with the amazement of the moment—followed by adjustment and reflection.

The objective was to portray atmospheric spaces that need little explanation and have an intensity that speaks for itself. We aim to make the viewer feel like they’re part of the film by drawing them into something that is unknown to them. Not so much through an approach that is factual and knowledge-based, but more so by looking for the charge of a situation: the characteristic that cannot be put into words. Thereby, partially relying on the performing arts as a form of expression.

Amazing Grace is a work that underlines the void between the familiar and the unknown. Perhaps we can assume that, to some extent, cultural life fills this void. What we see or what we experience is what is essential for this project. From this point of view, you can look at the work as an initiative to take on a new experience to be perceived and thought about.
At the end of the Pointe to Point project artistic observer Jan Goossens concluded with the following words:

Of course deep down we all know that miracles exist and happen all around us every day. This performance, however rough and unfinished and probably precisely thanks to that, is the fruit of many small miracles of all sorts happening every day during the ten days of the Pointe to Point project. Open-ended encounters, generous exchange, daring transmission and hopefully deep transformation; those were the ambitious goals. Encounter and exchange between Asia and Europe. Also between the tradition, of the Miao-minority in Guizhou, and the contemporary, those two sides of the same coin that are very much connected and deserve equal support. On one hand the tradition needs to be preserved. On the other hand it shouldn’t be preserved as a safe and folkloric museum piece, but as a rich and very much alive nurturing ground for every new generation of contemporary artists. But first and foremost this project has been about encounter and exchange between individual artists from different disciplines, generations, countries and cultures. We had our fair share of obstacles and misunderstandings. But they never really stood in the way of an honest and committed search for a common ground and language. We may be from different countries and cultures, we all share one world.

The encounter that definitely deeply marked all of us here on stage was the one with the Miao-people in Guizhou. To be most generously welcomed and embraced with open arms in so many villages; to be confronted with communities that find most of their dances in nature, that make music every day to reconnect with their ancestors and that come together in rituals and ceremonies that are worshipings and offerings to the gods; to feel the spiritual power and the radical hope of collective souls in a rapidly transforming and individualising world, a world that rocks the very foundations of their beliefs and practices and that doesn’t necessarily want to share their experiences but would rather turn them into pretty images - all of that inspired us, made us feel grateful and humble, but it also unnerved us and made us ask many questions about the future that we are all responsible for. The way in which we manage to truly understand, value and keep alive the cultural traditions of all ethnic minorities in this world says a lot about us human beings in general. The way we manage to preserve these traditions and at the same time invest deeply in contemporary and often critical artists says a lot about a truly democratic society.

I would like to end with a quote from a great artist of another ethnic minority, African American feminist poet June Jordan, who once said: “We are the ones we have been waiting for.”

We are all, as artists and human beings, gifted, talented and lucky, but we also have huge responsibilities in a fascinating and very complex world.
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**Participants:**

Shi Jingxin (China), Arco Renz (Germany), Jethro Pioquinto (Philippines), Catherine Seago (UK), Emmanuel Baily (Belgium) and Wu Na (China).

Mei Yin Ng (Malaysia), Rannva Justinussen (Denmark), Olivier Gabrys (France), Wang Mei (China), Benoit Gazzal (France) and Tomoko Momiyama (Japan)

Harati (Indonesia), Tae Sang (Korea), Ula Sickle (Poland), Vincenzo Schiavulli (Italy), Young Gyu Jang (Korea) and Artur Vidal (Spain)

**Advisors and observers:**

Susan Buirge (USA/France), Wen Hui (China), Fabrizio Cassol, (Italy/Belgium), Joyce Koh (Singapore)

Jan Goossens (Belgium), Seong Hee Kim (Korea), Jiang Dong (China)

The Pointe to Point, 5th Asia-Europe Dance Forum is a cooperation between Asia-Europe Foundation (www.asef.org) and the China Dancers Association.

**Asia-Europe Foundation**

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) seeks to promote better mutual understanding and closer cooperation between the people of Asia and Europe through greater intellectual, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges. These exchanges include conferences, lecture tours, workshops, seminars and the use of web-based platforms. The major achievement of ASEF is the establishment of permanent bi-regional networks focused on areas and issues that help to strengthen Asia-Europe relations. Established in February 1997 by the partners of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), ASEF is the only permanent physical institution of the ASEM process. ASEF works in partnership with other public institutions and civil society actors to ensure its work is broad-based and balanced among the partner countries: www.asef.org

The Cultural Exchange Department (CE) seeks to provide young artists and cultural professionals with a unique environment for dialogue that can evolve into positive artistic interventions, dynamic cultural networks and cultural policy development in and between Asia and Europe. CE’s areas of cooperation are young artists’ exchange (new media, photography, dance, music, commix) oriented platforms and networks (museums, independent cinema and autonomous cultural centres), dialogue on policy and culture, and a vision for an Asia-Europe Cultural Portal (Culture360). www.culture360.org

**China Dancers Association**

The China Dancers Association (CDA) is a membership organization formed by dance professionals from China who are active in the field of dance performance, choreography, theoretical research, dance education and dance criticism. Established in the year 1949, its principal aim is to promote dance creation, to encourage theoretical and academic research and criticism on dance, to discover and cultivate dance talents through professional dance competitions (e.g. Lotus Prize), festivals and conferences and to organize international exchanges in dance. As member of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, CDA plays an important role in bridging the government with dance professionals nationwide. www.chinadancer.org
From China Federation of Literature and Art Circles, China Dancers Association and Guizhou

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