

LILY CAI
CHINESE DANCE COMPANY

Study Guide For Chinese Dance



Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company
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Artistic Director
Lily Cai

MEET LILY CAI

A former Shanghai Opera principal dancer and a 2000 Irvine Fellow in Dance, Lily Cai forges new images of Chinese dance in America. Since arriving to California in 1983, Lily has choreographed many new works, expanding traditional Chinese dance into contemporary theatrical settings. As Artistic Director of the Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company, Lily combines traditional, folk and classical Chinese dance with Russian ballet and American modern dance. Lily has received numerous grants and awards for her work, including an Isadora Duncan Dance Award, National Endowment for the Arts, California Arts Council, Asian American Arts Foundation, California Dance Educators Association, Irvine Fellowships in Dance, San Francisco Arts Commission, Rockefeller Foundation, Creative Work Fund, and the Bay Area Fund for Dance. Today, Lily Cai is considered a major authority and resource in Chinese dance.

ABOUT THE COMPANY

Elegant, sensual and captivating, the Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company melds ancient Chinese forms with modern dance in an artistic and inventive marriage of styles. Over the last decade, the Lily Cai dancers have become recognized for performing multi-dimensional images of Chinese women, from historical dynasties and minority folk dances to present day immigrant experiences. At the heart of Lily's works is the image of the Chinese female – be it the flying goddesses of *Dance from Tang*, the sensual and seductive *Straw Hat Girl* from the Dai minority, or the shy but playful village girls in *Bamboo Girls*, to the hard-working immigrants of *Begin From Here*, the luminous elegant beauties in *Candelas*, or the minimalist abstract figures of *Strings Calligraphy*. As Artistic Director and choreographer, Lily continues to draw on this rich history in expanding new roles, images and dance possibilities for Chinese American dancers. Touring nationwide, the Company has collaborated with the Grateful Dead, Chanticleer and the Alexander Strings Quartet, among many others.

“Many people said it was impossible for me, an immigrant Chinese woman, to continue as a professional dancer in the United States. But I came to America for the freedom to develop as a dance artist. Back in Shanghai, there is a limit for artistic development. But in America, I believe there is no limit.”

~ Lily Cai



Company in “Begin From Here”

SNEAK PREVIEW – WHAT TO WATCH FOR

THE MANY SHAPES OF CHINESE DANCE

In “Classical and Folk Dances from China”, Shanghai native Lily Cai and her dancers bring the movements of China alive in a captivating, truly unique dance narrated presentation, sharing their enthusiasm for Chinese culture, history and people. Using the traditional costumes of the Tang and Qing dynasties, colorful folk dance ribbons and fans of red, green and gold, big head masks and dangerous swords, audience members are invited to experience the elegance and mystery of one of the world’s most intriguing cultures. This production includes several dance performances narrated by Lily Cai and covers regional differences, cultural differences, and choreographic structures of several dances from China. Composer Gang Situ coordinates music designed for this program, which is presented in 4-6 minute segments. Several students will be invited on stage to participate.



Lily Cai in “Dance from Tang”

Performance 1: Golden Fans

Company dancers open the show with a high-energy fan dance demonstrating a popular form of Chinese folk dance.

Performance 2: Character Variations

Lily will portray various characters through dance – see if you can tell which character she is portraying: old man, lady carrying baby, catching a butterfly, a drunken man, village girl (with big head mask).

Performance 3:

Dance from Tang

Company dancers demonstrate a long silk ribbon dance of graceful celestial goddesses from 1,500 years ago. What kind of body shape is in the dancers’ movements?

Performance 4:

Dance from Qing

Company dancers demonstrate a royal court dance from 150 years ago. Can you see the difference from the last dance?

Performance 5:

Sword Dance

Lily demonstrates a different dance style by performing a classical Chinese Sword dance solo, with movements similar to those used in Chinese martial arts. Can you remember these movements?

Performance 6:

Silk Ribbons

Lily demonstrates a different dance style while Company dancers come out in colorful silk ribbons. Look for a special animal in the middle of the dance. Can you guess what animal it is?

“My teachers at the Shanghai Opera House told me that my dance career could be at best only ten years. Since then I have made it as a dancer in America for more than 18 years. I have created an artistic place for Chinese dancers in the American professional dance field by forming a dance company that features the image of the Chinese female.”

~ Lily Cai



Company in “Dance from Qing”

CHINESE COSTUMES

The Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company boasts a colorful array of authentic style traditional Chinese costumes, all designed and hand-made by Lily Cai and her Company dancers.

Traditionally, a Chinese dancer not only has to learn how to dance the classical and folk dance forms, but also how to use and make the many different props used in Chinese dancing, including silk ribbons, fans, handkerchiefs, candles, straw hats, etc.

When it comes to costume design, color is very important because different colors can create different feelings and moods. See what Chinese costume you can design by choosing your colors for a Court Lady of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) pictured here from *Chinese Women's Fashion Paper Dolls* by Ming Ju Sun.

During the Qing Dynasty, the angular Manchu headdress, dress, and high platform shoes made these women look different from Han Chinese noble women, who practiced foot binding, a tradition begun during the Song Dynasty (960-1279).



Lily Cai in Qing Dynasty Costume

SPOTLIGHT ON THE ART



Company in "Bamboo Girls"

Lily Cai's Dance Technique & Philosophy

As an immigrant dance artist, Lily Cai has introduced, developed and transformed Chinese dance in America since 1988. Known for integrating her elegant Chinese dance style into American modern dance forms, Cai seeks "to give American dance a Chinese face", that is, to demonstrate the multi-dimensional qualities of the Chinese female.

Developed on her Company dancers over the past decade, Lily's dance technique is based on the Chinese concept of energy. Her breathing, barre and center exercises create "push" and "pull" energy pathways throughout the body to help her dance with grace and strength while her choreography blends the stylistic poses of classical Chinese dance, the turned out hips of Russian ballet, and the dramatic intensity of American modern dance.

As a result of her dedication in creating the first professional all female Chinese dance company on the West Coast, Lily's work has ushered in a new era for Chinese-Americans dancers in the world of professional American dance. Lily hopes to contribute her distinctive Chinese American dance technique to the field of professional dance, with the hopes that one day it will become a mainstream dance technique.

Questions for Exploration

1. What does energy look like in Chinese dance?
2. What in Lily's dances look Chinese, ballet or modern?
3. Notice the dancers focus – is it inward or outward?
4. When you look at Lily's dances, what 3 words come to mind?

“As an American artist, I want to give American dance a Chinese face. I want to show people more than just the beauty and ideals of being a Chinese woman and dancer. There is a dark fighting nature of the Chinese woman that I want to reveal too. I had to revolutionize my dancers into a dance style and technique to speak such emotions from my heart.”

~ Lily Cai

ABOUT CHINA

Chinese civilization is over 5,000 years old, making it one of the world's oldest living cultures. Until the 20th century, China's history was measured in terms of "dynasties". The first three ancient dynasties of China are the Xia Dynasty (2,100 –1,800 B.C.), the Shang Dynasty (1,700-1027 B.C.) and the Zhou Dynasty (1,027-221 B.C.). The great sages Lao Tze, Confucius and Zhuang Zi living during the Zhou Dynasty laid the philosophical foundations for Chinese thought. The first emperor of China Qin Shi unified China to form the Qin Dynasty (221-207 B.C.)

Chinese civilization developed from rice farming along the Yangtze River in 5,000 B.C. and the invention of silk around 2,000 B.C. The Chinese cultivated scientific knowledge and the arts long before many of their cultural inventions found their way into Western society. China's rich history includes the development of many art forms – landscape painting, sculpture, poetry, calligraphy, music, theatrical opera and dance, especially during

the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.). Different dynasties introduced a broad range of scientific inventions across the centuries from compasses in ancient times to paper (200 B.C.), printing (600 A.D.), gunpowder (800 A.D.) and porcelain (900 A.D.) and built great architectural wonders from the Great Wall (started in 215 B.C.) to the Forbidden City during the Ming Dynasty in 1406 A.D.

In 1949, China became the People's Republic of China under Communist Mao Zedong, while Nationalist Chiang Kai Shek and his army flees to Taiwan to set up the Republic of China as a democratic government in exile. From then on, the arts in China served the communist government, especially during the Cultural Revolution 1966-1969. Since the 1980s, China has undergone profound economic changes, although artistic freedom still has limits today.

In the Lily Cai Company's full-length evening concert, the Lily Cai dancers will perform dances from the Zhou, Tang and Qing dynasties.



Source: Yahoo! Reference

A CHINESE DYNASTY TIMELINE

DYNASTIES	TIME	HISTORICAL FACTS	LILY CAI'S DANCES
ANCIENT CHINA			
Xia Dynasty	2100-1800 B.C.	Oracle bones	
Shang Dynasty	1700-1027 B.C.	Bronze casting; Writing system; Jade carvings;	
Zhou Dynasty	1027-221 B.C.	Sage Lao Tze, Confucius, and Zhuang Zi lived	Lily Cai's "Dance from Zhou – Basket Girls"
EARLY IMPERIAL CHINA			
Qin Dynasty	221-207 B.C.	China unified under first Emperor Qin Shi; Great Wall started 215 BC	
Han Dynasty	206 B.C.-220 A.D.	Paper invented 100 AD; Taoism spreads; Silk Road opens 139 BC; Great Wall completed 214 AD	Lily Cai's "Spring Overture" silk ribbons dance
Three Kingdoms	220-280 A.D.	Compass developed 271 AD	
Jin Dynasty	265-420 A.D		
Southern & Northern Dynasties	420-588 A.D		
CLASSICAL IMPERIAL CHINA			
Sui Dynasty	580-618 A.D	Printing invented in 600 Re-unification of China by Sui Dynasty Grand Canal completed	
Tang Dynasty	618-907 A.D	Music influences from North West China Empress Wu steals the throne in 690 Gunpowder invented in 800 Porcelain invented in 900	Lily Cai's "Dance from Tang"
Five Dynasties & Ten Kingdoms	907-979 A.D	Landscape painting	
Song Dynasty	960-1279 A.D		
Liao Dynasty	916-1125 A.D.		
Western Xia Dynasty	1038-1227 A.D.		
Jin Dynasty	1115-1234 A.D.	Genghis Khan establishes Mongol empire in 1206	

LATER IMPERIAL CHINA

Yuan Dynasty	1279-1368 A.D.	Kublai Khan brings all China under Mongol rule in 1279 Marco Polo journeys to China 1271-1292	Lily Cai's "Static & Dynamic: Thousand Hands of Buddha"
Ming Dynasty	1368-1644 A.D.	Rise of drama Forbidden City built	
Qing Dynasty	1644-1911 A.D.	The Manchus conquer Perking in 1644; Britain defeats China in Opium War of 1842; Boxer Rebellion in 1900; The last emperor of China gives up through 1912	Lily Cai's "Dance from Qing"

MODERN DAY CHINA

Republic of China	1911 A.D.	Dr. Sun Yat Sen establishes Republic of China	
People's Republic of China	1949 A.D.	Mao Zedong establishes Communist China; Nationalist Chiang Kai-Shek takes Republic of China to Taiwan; National minority arts revived and encouraged; Cultural Revolution; Lily Cai trains at the Shanghai Opera; Economic reforms in China occur	Lily Cai's "Straw Hat Girl" from Dai minority Lily Cai's "Bamboo Girls" of village girls from Southern China
Chinese in the United States		Lily Cai immigrates to California in 1983	Lily Cai's "Common Ground", "Chinese Myths Cantatas", "Begin From Here", "Candelas", "Southern Girl", "Strings Calligraphy", "Detours", "Silk Cascade", and "Portraits of the Chinese Woman"



Company in "Candelas"



Lily Cai in "Static and Dynamic"

A HISTORY OF CHINESE DANCE

The origins of Chinese dance can be traced back to primitive Neolithic cultures that pre-date the ancient Chinese dynasties of Xia, Shang and Zhou (2100-771 B.C.) These primitive societies created communal group dances depicting different animals, military dances related to martial arts re-enacting victorious battles, and ritual dances that venerating Heaven, Earth and Ancestors. During these ancient dynasties, shamanic dances evolved for rain, harvest and exorcisms, courtly ritual music, dance and rank developed for priest kings to establish their political authority, while a class of dancing slaves flourished for the nobles' entertainment.

During the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, or the Spring and Autumn Warring States periods (770-221 B.C.), folk songs and dancing at festivals and ceremonies grew in popularity, and a class of singing and dancing girls developed to provide entertainment for the court and the nobles. The Qin and Han Dynasties (221 B.C.-220 A.D.) gave rise to popular variety shows featuring acrobats, martial arts, magic, and comedy performances, music recitals, singing and dancing for feudal rulers and court banquets, including dances such as "Duke Huang of the East Sea" and "The Gathering of the Celestial Troupers". Dancers from the lower classes, now professionally trained from an early age, perform with long sleeves and silk scarves such as the "Seven Tray Dance", "Tray Drum Dance" or the "Scarf Dance". Silk ribbon dancing came into vogue during this time.

During the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-588 A.D.), variety shows continue to be popular at folk, courtly and religious activities and increased the popularity of Buddhism during this time. Also, as the Han people moved southward, minority nationalities from the Western Regions of Central Asia, India, and Korea migrated to Central China,

bringing with them their ethnic music and dance.

The exchange of song and dance between the Han and different minority nationalities from Central Asia via the Silk Road further diversified the arts during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.), the golden age for court dance in China. Grand compositions and lavish court spectacles incorporating foreign dance and music influences such as those in the "Melody to the Prince of Qin Breaking Through the Ranks" with 120 dancers. Other popular dance forms include the energetic "Whirling Dervish Dance", the "Sabre Dance," the "Mulberry Branch Dance", the "Tartar Prancing Dance" as well as the soft "Green Waist Dance".

During the Song Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.) folk dance dramas during festivals and dancing troupes for courtly ceremonies became the precursors of traditional Chinese opera, which grew increasingly popular during the Yuan (Mongol) Dynasty (1279-1368 A.D.), Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.) and Qing (Manchu) Dynasty (1644-1911 A.D.).

Although China today is predominantly Han Chinese (90%), China also includes many different nationalities -- over 50 different national minorities -- from the Mongol, Tibetan, Uygur, Miao, Korean, Yi, and Dai people, to name a few. Each group has their own history, language, and traditions, along with distinct customs and styles of dress, repertoire of folk dances and songs. Together, these distinct folk dances as well as court dances from various Chinese dynasties make up what we know today as traditional Chinese dance.

Condensed by Yafonne Chen from Wang Ke Fen's *The History of Chinese Dance*

ACTIVITIES GUIDE

BEFORE THE SHOW: Orientation Suggestions

1. Go over the Theater Etiquette page. (See page 12)
2. Review the page About the Company (See page 1)
3. Discuss the production in advance (See page 2)
4. Learn the Vocabulary List (See page 11)
5. Discuss Chinese food, holidays and customs to establish cultural familiarity.
6. Watch a video about Chinese opera to see Chinese acrobatics, martial arts and dance.



Company in "Spring"

DURING THE SHOW: Watching the Dance

1. Watch how the dancers focus on stage.
2. What shape(s) are the dancers making with their movements?
3. Notice the dancers' hands and eyes coordination
4. Notice how the dancers handle each different prop

AFTER THE SHOW: Follow Up Suggestions

1. Discuss what the students saw on the stage. Was it different from their expectations? What new things did they learn? Discuss the dances in the Lily Cai concert, focusing on the style of the dancers and their cultural and historical context.
2. Have (K-5) students reflect on their performance experience through drawing and writing about the dances they saw. Older Students can describe one of the dances from the concert in detail, compare two dances in the concert, or write a review of their experience.
3. Learn more about China. (See Pages 5-7). Located China on a world map. What countries, mountains, and oceans surround China? What are the major provinces in China? How does the natural landscape affect the lifestyle and artistic development of people living in different province?
4. Research Chinese dance (See page 8) What is the role of dance in Chinese culture? What important roles did dance play in Chinese history?
5. Design a short dance using an everyday object as props. Decide what shape your movements will take, how fast or slow your timing will be and what kind of path will you travel in space circular, square, zigzag, etc. Work on exaggerating your movements so that others can see your dancing clearly from far away or so you can distort the movement into something new.

VOCABULARY FOR CHINESE DANCE

abstraction – an idea of concept, conveyed through movement, which is removed from its original context, often used to encourage originality and make movements more interesting.

ballet – a classical Western dance form that originated in the Renaissance courts of Europe.

Chinese dance – a wide variety of traditional courtly and folk dances from over 50 national minorities in China, often use props such as silk ribbons, fans, handkerchiefs, bells, candles, etc.

choreography – the art of composing dances, including shaping movement, structuring phrases, and revising and finishing dances.

classical dance – dance that has been developed into a highly stylized form within a culture usually developed within the court or circle of power in a society.

dance – a performance using the human body and movement as artistic expression

dance style – the manner or method way of performing movements characteristic of a group, individual, dance form, region or historical period.

dance technique – a particular way or method of moving or doing a set of movements, practiced by dancers to increase their ability to move or dance in a certain way.

dynasty – a succession of rulers from the same family or line; a family or group that maintains power or position for several generations

folk dance – dances created and performed by a specific group within a culture, usually developed by those outside the circles of power with a society.

modern dance - - a 20th century dance form created in rebellion against steps and positions and valued expressive and original or authentic movement.

motif - a distinctive and recurring gesture used for thematic purposes and to unify ideas

props – stage objects used by Chinese dancers to enhance their movements or create interesting patterns and stage effects, such as silk ribbons, fans, handkerchiefs, bells, candles, etc.

qi – natural breathing energy used in Lily Cai’s dance technique, such as the basic breathing exercises, an important energy principle used in all traditional Chinese arts.

rehearsal – the act or process of practicing in preparation for a public performance.

**Blending
Ancient Forms
with Modern Dance.**

RESOURCES FOR CHINESE DANCE

INTERNET

The Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company <http://www.ccpsf.org>

RELATED BOOKS

- Ebrey Patricia Buckley. *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*. (London: Calmann & King Ltd., 1999)
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- Mackerras, Colin. Ed. And Elizabeth Wichmanin. *Chinese Theater from its origins to the Present Day*. (University of Hawaii Press, 1989).
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CREDITS

Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company

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Choreography by Artistic Director, Lily Cai

Music arranged by Composer, Gang Situ

Photos by Marty Sohl

The Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company is part of the
California Arts Council Touring and Presenting Program.



The Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company tours nationally performing for Theater, Festival, and Special Event audiences. The Company offers short- and long-term Residencies.

Represented by Kamstar Artist Management of San Francisco

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HOW TO BE AN AUDIENCE MEMBER

To be a good audience member, a person needs to:

- be open to new sights and sounds
- let go of expectations and pre-conceived notions
- be willing to suspend belief, and
- focus attention on the stage

1. An usher will show you where to sit. Walk slowly and talk quietly as you enter the theater.
2. After being led to your seat, use the restroom and/or get a drink before performance begins.
3. Once you are seated, you may talk quietly to the people next to you until the performance begins.
4. When the lights in the theater begin to dim, it is the signal that the performance is about to begin. You should stop talk and turn your attention to the stage.
5. Stay in your seat throughout the entire performance.
6. During the performance, listen quietly and watch closely. Talking during the performance will disturb others around you. They won't be able to concentrate on the performance and the performers will think you don't like the show.
7. If you think something is funny, it's OK to laugh. If you like something a lot, applaud. This will let the performer know that you are enjoying the show.
8. At the end of the show, applaud if you had good time. Applause is how you say thank you to the performer. The performers will bow as you applaud. That is how they say thank you for coming.
9. When the lights get brighter in the theater, the show is over. This means it is time to leave. Watch for an usher who will help your group exit the theater.
10. Please remember that the taking of photographs and the use of recording devices are not allowed. Remember that you are only one person among several hundred in the audience. Please respect our fellow audience members!
11. Please inform your adult chaperon that ushers will be available to help you throughout the performance if there are any problems with students from other schools or difficulties in general.