

Volume VII
No. 1
September
2012

Library News

From the Dance Notation Bureau

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Library News is published twice a year
in New York

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The DNB gratefully acknowledges funding support from:

New York State Council on the Arts,
National Endowment for the Arts, The
Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation,
Alphawood Foundation, Capezio Ballet
Makers Dance Foundation Inc., The
Harkness Foundation for Dance, The
Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Jody and
John Arnhold Foundation, and our
individual contributors and members

Labanotation Translated into Chinese

《《拉班記譜法》》

by Mei-Chen Lu

The first foreign edition of *Labanotation* is to be published by the end of 2012 in China. We congratulate Bing-Yu Luo, the head translator, who completed this exciting project. Up to now, the study of Labanotation outside of English-speaking countries has been a difficult task, especially when there are very limited notation materials available in other languages. In China, for example, besides Mme. Dai Ai-Lian, author of *Eight Chinese Ethnic Folk Dance Series*, and Li-Xue Ma, editor of *Chinese Minjian [Folk] Dance: Teaching Materials and Teaching Methodology*, only Ming-Da Guo, an elder Labanotation scholar, had translated some Labanotation articles and published them in Chinese dance research journals.

Currently there are two dance departments in China offering Labanotation regularly in their curriculum – one is at Beijing Normal University and the other at Shanghai Normal University. Because there is no standard notation textbook available commercially in China, the teachers write or prepare their own textbooks and handouts according to their course description. The teachers may supplement notation examples of Chinese dance scores as well as foreign repertoires in ballet or modern dance. However, there is a problem: since most notation textbooks are originally written in English, French, or German, the terminologies and concepts are not standardized when they are translated into Chinese. This may confuse students who would like to pursue notation with different instructors.

Luo's translation of *Labanotation*, therefore, becomes vital, providing a new resource and standard for Chinese notation teachers and students; and this is how the translation came about.

In 2007, Luo was invited by Professor Jien-Min Wang to teach a graduate level course of Labanotation at the School of Ethnology and Sociology at Minzu University of China. Each student received handouts photocopied from *Labanotation* by Ann Hutchinson Guest, in English, while the lecture was given in Chinese. Although a majority of masters and doctoral students did not have any dance training, students found that Labanotation provided a valuable tool in studying and recording human movements for their ethnological or sociological research purposes. Bearing in mind the broader usefulness of Labanotation, Wang encouraged Luo to translate *Labanotation* into Chinese, so that students in different disciplinary areas could benefit from studying it in their native language. Moreover, more dancers, researchers, and scholars could then apply the system in their professions.

Guest was fully supportive of the translation project, and granted permission although she hardly knew Luo. Guest was also pleased that this would be the first translation of *Labanotation* into another language since its first publication in 1954. Guest immediately shipped the most recent edition of *Labanotation* to Luo. Perhaps she intuitively trusted Luo because she was a student of Mme. Dai.

Mme. Dai and Guest had studied notation together at the Jooss-Leeder School at Dartington Hall in England, and, like Guest who has been promoting notation in England and the United States, Mme. Dai was instrumental in introducing Labanotation to China.

It took Luo four years (2008-2011) to implement the project. Translating *Labanotation* is not a simple task. To Labanotation practitioners, it is a reference book, like an encyclopedia covering from elementary to advanced Labanotation theories. Luo and Wang gathered a group of Ethnology students from Minzu University who took the Labanotation course with Luo in 2007, as well as Yi Tang, a dance lecturer at Beijing Normal University, and Juan-Juan Sun, another dance lecturer at Beijing Dance Academy, to help with the translation. Luo played the role of coordinator, distributing chapters to be translated; Wang guided the whole team, providing advice on common errors that may occur during translation. Translation done by a large group of people with different disciplines has its pros and cons: the graduate students from Minzu University read English well, yet they lacked dance experience and had learned only basic Labanotation. On the other hand, the dance lecturers, Tang and Sun, who have learned notation as part of their dance studies, did not have experience in translating. Therefore, Luo set up the common terminology in Chinese for *Labanotation*, and the team built an online platform to share and discuss the process.

Luo received the first draft several months later in 2008. She was aware that the translators had different abilities in English, which complicated the process. First of all, English grammar is very different from Chinese, especially in the tenses and the sentence structure. Secondly, in addition to reading English fluently, those doing the translation needed excellent skills in Chinese literature and writing. Sometimes English expressions cannot be translated directly into Chinese. Thirdly, translation must be as close as possible to the original intent, without adding a translator's point of view or a new meaning.

It turned out that only half of the chapters passed the preliminary inspection. The translators received comments from Luo, made the necessary corrections, and then their jobs were done. As for the remaining chapters that did not pass the first review – word meanings, sentences, paragraphs, and punctuation did not match the English content – Luo had to work on these chapters. Fortunately, a number of people stepped up to help her in completing the project. Zheng-Fu Chen, an M.A. from Minzu University, modified and edited the Chinese text and punctuations, and Tang of Beijing Normal University continued to assist Luo in translating. Moreover, Luo's oldest son, Xuan Zheng, made suggestions on translating French terms to Chinese as well.

In 2009, Luo gathered all the chapters that were complete, including a translation of Guest's biography and her newly added "author's preface for the Chinese reader." She felt ready to move forward to start proofreading. Throughout the proofreading process, her husband, Yan-Chang Zheng, offered valuable feedback, so that the content would not sound odd in Chinese after translation.

Luo had revised the content five times by 2011. Guest had been a great force and supporter since the beginning of the project. There were countless exchanges of emails for terminology clarifications, notation questions, and wording choices. Luo described a "friendship" growing between them out of the direct access to Guest, the original author. Luo had remembered the frustration she felt in her earlier student days with notation, when she could not understand some theories in Albrecht Knust's *Kinetography Laban* because the text was in English, and it was impossible to ask Knust for clarification. Luo not only learned notation more deeply from Guest during the course of this translation, but also felt privileged to be able to study directly with Guest, the pioneer in the notation field.

All those involved in the project were volunteers. In an effort to make the publication possible, Luo handles pre-publication affairs by herself, from obtaining rights from Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group) to contributing her own funds for printing the first translated edition, as well as finding a publishing company willing to print a small quantity of books when today's Chinese book market can easily reach millions per printing. Luo has decided to print 2000 copies for now, and it will be distributed through China Translation and Publishing Corporation. The book is priced at 89 RMB (\$14 U.S. Dollars) and will be sold within China only via Amazon.cn, dangdang.com, and 360buy.com. At this point, its global distributor remains to be determined.

Luo is hoping to promote *Labanotation* to people in different fields, such as anthropology, dance education, dance therapy, physical education, and psychology. She also hopes that when more notation professionals are trained in China, a new Labanotation organization, functioning as Mme. Dai's China Labanotation Society had in the past, will be established. Chinese notation professionals will then have a forum to discuss notation theories and promote use of the system. Luo hopes that more notation professionals will join in translating notation books and articles into Chinese in the future so that Labanotation can be developed further in China. As Guest says in her Preface to the Chinese Labanotation Readers, "I am particularly happy that, through publication of the Labanotation textbook in Chinese, many more people will have access to the system itself, as well as to the wide heritage of dance works that have been recorded in a 'language' we can all 'speak.'"

Labanotation – The Textbook

by Ann Hutchinson Guest

It is exciting to know that the Chinese translation of my 2005 Labanotation textbook is to be published soon. For me, so centrally involved with production of Labanotation textbooks since 1954, it is particularly rewarding to know of this recent development. I am so grateful to my colleague Luo Bingyu, who has so patiently and devotedly worked on the task of translating this book into Chinese.



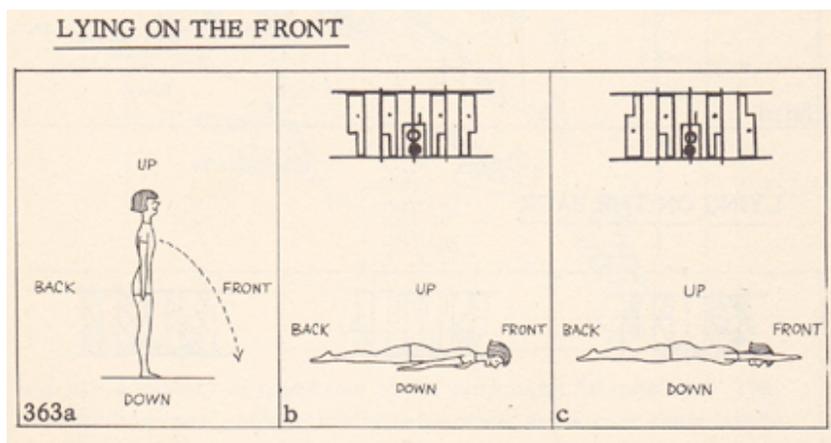
Maybe this is the time to look back to the early books on the Laban system. The first publication in German, *Schrifttanz* (written dance), came out in 1928; a second, slightly different edition in French and English came out in 1930. Having become fascinated by other, newer ideas, in 1933 Laban magnanimously gave his fledgling *Schrifttanz* to the world. With no established father figure to guide its development, it was up to devoted students, Albrecht Knust and Sigurd Leeder in particular, to carry on. Over the years differences in usage and in the meaning of symbols inevitably arose. In New York when Ann Hutchinson (a protégé of Leeder's), Helen Priest (a student of Knust's) and Henrietta Greenhood and Janey Price (students of Irma Otte Betz, who had studied via correspondence with Laban) met and encountered various differences, they realized that to teach the system, they needed to establish unification. At the suggestion of John Martin, dance critic for the New York Times and a strong believer in notation, The Dance Notation Bureau was formed as a clearing house and information center. Because the Laban system is like a language, it is expected that new ideas, new usages would arise; but the solid foundation must remain intact for the sake of communication and continuity. For example, in English the word 'cat' must not suddenly be switched to refer to a dog. Even with slang a certain amount of consistency is needed. Depending on which side of the Atlantic you are, the expression "It went off like a bomb" can mean a resounding success or a dismal failure – an example of total absence of communication.

During those early days we debated - should we delay teaching and writing a textbook until the many inconsistencies were sorted out? In 1942 John Cage – then on the Bureau Board (as was also Merce Cunningham) – advised us: "You need to teach the system to find out in which way changes need to be made." How wise! The need arose to have a registered name for the system we were teaching. 'Dance Notation' was too generic a term. At the Jooss-Leeder School it had been called 'Script'; in Europe it was called 'Kinetography Laban'; we would tell people we were using Laban notation. By making it one word: 'Labanotation', we could submit it for official registration.

Because of copyright problems we could not produce a textbook for some time. The original publisher of *Schrifttanz*, Universal Editions in Vienna, claimed to have all rights, but their copyright had been confiscated by the American Army at the end of World War II and it now resided in Washington, D.C. By 1952 the matter had been sufficiently settled and the first textbook was published in 1954. Through the help of George Balanchine, who in 1948 had started having his ballets notated, and Lincoln Kirstein we were able to get a Rockefeller grant to cover textbook expenses and a publisher, New Directions.

Bearing in mind the enormous advances in present-day book preparation, how we operated in 1952 was positively quaint. I engaged writer and dance historian Selma Jeanne Cohen to help with style and the organization of the material. Making lists of headings: first, second, third, really helped the flow in logical presentation. Subsequently Robert MacGregor, director of New Directions, brought in a retired editor from the *New York Times*. He mainly tightened my sentences; each correction being a welcome lesson in word arrangement. Colleen Wilson typed the text on an IBM proportionally spaced electric typewriter, using special paper and a dense black ribbon. As each sheet was completed, she whipped it out of the typewriter into the hallway and, holding her breath, sprayed it with special fixative. Text mistakes had to be typed correctly on another sheet and then 'cut in from the back'. Marian van Loen drew the Labanotation examples in black ink; each was then pasted in with the figure number placed close by. Doug Anderson's amusing figure drawings (based on my originals) were similarly slotted in. For the paste-up we used rubber cement, learning only much later how it eventually stained the paper. Later I learned the professional use of hot wax which allows the item being pasted in to be moved, readjusted even days later. A gift that I was born with was awareness of the white space on a page and, by eye, to center and line-up the inserts. When we had ten chapters finished I took them to MacGregor, who was delighted with the professional job. His book designer, having seen some earlier pages that had not yet been spatially organized, had thrown up his hands, "What can you expect from a bunch of girls?" Now he was full of praise.

MacGregor had given us a deadline – February 18th, 1954. As the day drew nearer, Marian van Loen and I slogged away, correcting the many mistakes we were finding. On February 17th we were up all night, fortified with coffee and orange drink from Nedick's. At 9 a.m. we took the completed book pages over to MacGregor. "Good Heavens! What are you two doing here?" he asked, only to tell us that authors were never on time and he did not expect us for about two more weeks. Relieved to have less pressure, we spent this extra time making more corrections. The book was published in April, just in time for the Juilliard students to have it on hand prior to their end-of-year notation exam. Of course, the first student to open the book had turned to page 57, where the captions for 61a and 61b had been incorrectly pasted in; this despite our having had five proofreaders, two for the text and three for the notation. But proofing is a special skill; too easily one reads what one is expecting.



Dough Anderson's amusing figure drawings, based on Ann Hutchinson Guest's original, with Marian van Loen's hand-drawn notation examples in the chapter of "Kneeling, Sitting, Lying" from 1954 edition of *Labanotation*

Fast forward to 1966: the textbook had been much used in teaching Labanotation and Bureau members' comments had been collected in an office copy. The original casual, user-friendly style that I had used needed to be replaced by clearly stated rules. Would I consider working on a revision? As Allan Miles, with a curious reluctance, handed me the Bureau copy, I wondered. Then it hit me. Almost every page was covered with pencilled notes. I was stunned; it was clearly a re-write job. Well, if it had to be done – it had to be done.

I persuaded Philippa (Pippa) Heale to return to London from Australia, promising her a six months job. It turned out to take nearly three years. Production was slowed down because, for this edition, every chapter was sent to selected readers for their input. If our Labanotation teachers were to use the revised edition, they had to be happy with what went into it. Contributions were made by Lucy Venable, Mireille Backer, Billie Mahoney, Allan Miles and Muriel Topaz. Also involved were European members of the International Council of Kinetography Laban such as our notable colleagues Maria Szentpál, Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Edna Geer. Production was also slower as our workers were spread geographically. Maggie Burke (now Lewis), who drew the notation examples this time, had returned to New Zealand; Doug Anderson was in New York; while the hub, the 'factory', was in our dining room in London. To save time and to be sure to get it right, I sometimes had to 'doctor' Doug's drawings with a sharp razor blade, for instance to slice off the top of the supporting leg at the hip and then re-set it so that the figure was clearly standing in balance. Or soften the angle of the ankle joint so that the foot did not look extremely pointed, the complaint having been made that Labanotation was ballet-based because the figure illustrations indicated such pointed feet. Whereas in New York we had had a student with long finger nails to paste in the figure numbers, in London Mary Ann Jones, a nail-biter, had to become adept with tweezers.

Three years into the process, in October 1969, Pippa Heale had suddenly to return to Melbourne, her father being gravely ill. Others came in to help with the final stages of book preparation. This included two college girls who checked every item in the index to be sure that it was on the indicated page. A letter arrived from the Bureau informing me that a much-needed grant was not forthcoming because of the delay in my producing the revised textbook. This led me to double my efforts. Then my back gave way. I had been sitting on a stool with no back support, unaware that, over time, this might cause physical problems. At that point stopping production could not be considered, so I slogged on. In February I put all the precious book sheets in a shopping bag with wheels and never let it out of my sight as I limped aboard the plane for New York. I stayed with Irmgard Bartenieff who gave me valuable connective tissue work to relieve the pain. Once the book was delivered to George Zournas, the director of Theatre Arts Books, which had taken over from New Directions as publisher of *Labanotation*, I escaped to Florida to recuperate while staying with Ted Shawn and his associate John Christian. Shawn had long supported the teaching of notation at Jacob's Pillow.

More book-producing experiences were yet to come. Notation discussions at ICKL conferences, theory discussions at the Bureau, new ideas and contributions to the DNB Bulletin Board – an online forum for exchanging ideas about Labanotation and Motif Notation – had indicated where changes or modifications were needed. By 2002 there were requests for another textbook revision. An important point that had come to our attention was the need to keep the language simple because, for many of our readers, English is not their first language. As our publisher we now had Routledge who had taken over from Theatre Arts Books.

Technology now demanded that everything be done electronically; gone was the cut-and-paste on our dining room table. A completely revised text was produced on my computer in London; the Labanotation examples were drawn using the Calaban (Computer-aided Labanotation) program developed by Andy Adamson at Birmingham University; and the many figure illustrations were scanned in. As before, I had readers on both sides of the Atlantic who sent in their comments on each chapter. They were Lucy Venable, Ray Cook, Ilene Fox, Sheila Marion, Allan Miles, Jacqueline Challet-Haas, János Fügedi, and Jane Dulieu, as well as input from members of the production staff: Lynda O'Reilly, Shelly Saint-Smith, Helen Elkin and Lauren Turner. Billie Mahoney contributed tap dance reading material and Spanish dance specialist Felisa Victoria contributed examples of Spanish footwork. All this material was sent to New York electronically to be assembled by the publisher. The Routledge man in charge of this project had no faith in women's capabilities; my experience in having already produced 16 other books in the form of camera-ready-copy counted for nothing. We were not to know the font size, the image area dimensions, etc. In fact, to offset the mistakes that were being made in New York, or rather in Florida which is where the work was actually taking place, we produced mocked-up pages of the whole book to indicate where illustrations or notation should go. We later learned that these were never used because computers can't read! Routledge finally acknowledged that they had never had to cope with such a complex book, and realized they should have incorporated our expertise from early on.



1954 *Labanotation* publication party (from L to R): Selma Jeanne Cohen, Katrine Hooper, Martha Hill, Ann Hutchinson Guest, Eve Gentry, and Maria Tallchief

Creating a textbook of this kind is a complex operation with many challenges. Translating the text from English into Chinese is in itself a daunting task. In addition there is the arrangement of the information on the page, also a difficult, demanding undertaking. Our admiration goes out to Luo Bingyu and all those who worked with her. We can imagine the kind of problems they have had to face and we extend to them our warmest appreciation and thanks.

Preface to Chinese *Labanotation* Text

Capturing movement on paper is important for the many forms of dance in China as well as for movement studies of many kinds. Above all, as Labanotation is an international 'language', it opens the doors to world-wide knowledge and information. For dance, recreating the movements for performance from the written score is a skill that allows works from the past or from other centres of culture to be available to present-day students and professional performers.

Learning Labanotation early during my dance studies provided me with dance-literacy, the ability to read and write dance, an ability which has been remarkably useful to me in my career as a dancer, teacher and as a dance notator. Through this skill I have recorded for posterity the classical ballet training programs of the Bournonville School (Danish), the Cecchetti Method (Italian) and the Royal Academy of Dance (English). I have also been able to make available important choreographic gems from the past through publication in Labanotation in the *Language of Dance Series*. A study of the lists in the *Laban Notation Scores – An International Bibliography* gives an idea of the wide range of works notated over the years by many colleagues in different countries.

Through exploration and analysis of movement of all kinds, I codified the basic 'building blocks' of movement, of which all movement is comprised. This list, the **Movement Alphabet**, is the basis of the **Language of Dance**, a universally applicable, generic approach to exploring and understanding movement. Language of Dance incorporates simple Labanotation symbols, known as Motif Notation.

I am particularly happy that, through publication of the *Labanotation* textbook in Chinese, many more people will have access to the system itself, as well as to the wide heritage of dance works that have been recorded in a 'language' we can all 'speak'.