

Dancing Between Empires
Michio Ito, Ailes Gilmour, Yuriko, and Isamu Noguchi
The Japanese Diaspora and American Modern Dance

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Abstract

This article places Michio Ito, Ailes Gilmour, Yuriko (Yuriko Amemiya Kikuchi), and Isamu Noguchi on the same historical timeline to argue that the identities of artists connected to Japan were far from uniform within the structures of empire, racialization, and dance institutions. Ito drew upon Western expectations of the “Orient” while making his Japanese body and aesthetics explicit artistic resources. By contrast, Isamu Noguchi’s sister Ailes did not foreground Japaneseness in the surviving performance record, working instead as a practitioner of American modern dance and leftist dance. Yuriko experienced forced incarceration as a Japanese American, but after the war she established herself not as a representative of Japanese culture but as a dancer entrusted with the Graham technique. Isamu served as an axis connecting Ito, Ailes, Graham, and Yuriko. At the same time, although he was not subject to exclusion as a New York resident, his decision to enter the Poston Incarceration Camp voluntarily represented a different practice of belonging. Rather than subsuming these figures within a single narrative of “Japanese American artists,” this article shows that the state assigned them to different positions according to nationality, residence, ancestry, and visibility, while the artists themselves formed their identities through different strategies: mobilizing Japaneseness, declining to foreground it, or choosing a different dance language.

Keywords: Michio Ito, Ailes Gilmour, Yuriko, Isamu Noguchi, Japanese diaspora, imperialism, American modern dance, forced incarceration

1. Introduction: Refusing a Single Narrative of the “Japanese American Artist”

Discussions of early twentieth-century Japan often examine its imperial expansion critically alongside the imperialism of Western powers. At the same time, through my education in Japanese history, I learned an account in which Japan, confronted with the danger that Asian countries would be colonized by Western powers, was itself compelled to strengthen its military and adopt an imperial posture in order to protect its sovereignty and national security. The purpose of this article is not to choose between these two historical interpretations. Japan was

subjected to the pressure of Western imperialism while also becoming an empire itself. I begin by recognizing this duality.

This complex position also produced a struggle for Japanese and Japanese-descended artists working abroad over how to handle “being Japanese.” Some transformed their Japanese identity into a strength; others rejected being evaluated only through ethnicity and asked that their work be seen as the expression of an individual artist. Taking Isamu Noguchi—whose life intersected with those of numerous Japanese and Japanese American artists—as its central axis, this article compares the struggles, achievements, and differences of three dancers around him: Michio Ito, Ailes Gilmour, and Yuriko. In doing so, it reveals the different choices and conflicts over identity that have been concealed beneath the single designation “Japanese American artist.”

Michio Ito and Isamu Noguchi have been discussed respectively in the histories of American modern dance and American art. Ito has been positioned as a Japanese dancer who embodied W. B. Yeats’s *At the Hawk’s Well* and mediated between East and West in New York and Los Angeles. Isamu has been recognized as an artist who, through his long collaboration with Martha Graham, transformed sculpture into theatrical space that dancers could touch, pass beneath, and move around. Their best-known point of contact is the portrait and the mask for *At the Hawk’s Well* that Isamu made for Ito around 1925 or 1926. Yet when attention remains fixed on these two men, Ailes and Yuriko—the women who actually danced onstage—are easily marginalized as an introducer, a sister, or an assistant who preserved someone else’s work.

Previous scholarship has already established important arguments about each figure. Wong (2009) reexamines Ito’s racialized position as an “international artist,” and Cowell (2001) analyzes the use and contradictions of ethnicity during his Hollywood period. Riordan (2017) demonstrates how, after Pearl Harbor, Ito’s cosmopolitanism and artistic abilities—celebrated before the war—were legally reinterpreted as capacities for propaganda, espionage, and sabotage. Hayakawa (2018) offers a detailed account of Yuriko’s dancing inside and outside the camps as a negotiation of race, gender, and citizenship. Ailes, meanwhile, appears in scholarship on Graham and Isamu, but sustained comparisons of her artistic identity with those of Ito and Yuriko remain limited.

The originality of this article, therefore, does not lie in claiming to have newly discovered these four individuals. It lies in repositioning figures previously studied in separate fields within a single comparative history centered on dancers. In particular, I ask how bodies connected to Japan were read by audiences, critics, dance companies, and the state, and how the artists themselves used, avoided, or reconfigured those readings. Identity here is not treated as an

essence that follows automatically from ancestry. It is understood as a process in which self-understanding, public representation, institutional affiliation, and state classification may coincide or collide.

2. Analytical Framework: Two Empires and Four Distinct Positions

Cultural exchange between Japan and the United States cannot be explained solely through a binary opposition between an imperialist West and a non-Western Japan resisting it. During the period when Ito worked in Europe and the United States, Japan was both a country under pressure from Western powers and an empire expanding its territory and influence in Asia. As Azuma (2005) describes it, the belonging of Japanese immigrants and their descendants “between two empires” did not fit completely within either the American nation-state or the Japanese empire. This framework is not intended to equate Japanese imperialism with the American incarceration of people of Japanese ancestry. Rather, it allows us to examine how different operations of power classified members of the same transnational network in different ways.

This article distinguishes four dimensions. The first is self-formation: how each person identified themselves. The second is public representation: the degree to which Japaneseness was foregrounded in performance and criticism. The third is artistic practice: the dance languages and institutions to which the artist belonged. The fourth is state classification based on nationality, residence, and racial visibility. These distinctions prevent us from treating discrimination against someone as Japanese American as equivalent to that person’s creation of “Japanese” work. They also prevent us from immediately construing the refusal to foreground Japanese culture as assimilation or self-denial.

Table 1. Comparative Axes Distinguishing the Positions of the Four Figures

Person	Prewar position	Artistic use of Japaneseness	Wartime position	Postwar / historical visibility
Ito	Transnational dancer of Japanese nationality	Used as an explicit artistic resource	Detained as an enemy alien by the Department of Justice; sent to Japan in 1943	Receded from the American canon
Ailes	New York dancer born in Japan and raised in Japan and the United States	Rarely foregrounded in the surviving record	Not subject to mass exclusion; the cause of her loss of work requires further examination	Often obscured by her relationships with her brother and Graham
Yuriko	Japanese American dancer from the West Coast	Did not make Japaneseness a professional brand	Forcibly incarcerated, first at Tulare and then at Gila River	Graham dancer, teacher, and reconstructor
Isamu	American citizen and artist raised in both Japan and the United States	Continually negotiated his name and belonging	Not subject to exclusion, but entered Poston voluntarily and then encountered difficulty leaving	His artworks and photographs have been extensively preserved

Note: This table summarizes analytical differences; it is not intended to fix the self-understanding of any of these individuals.

3. 1903-1939: Bodies That Mobilized Japaneseness and Bodies That Did Not Foreground It

3.1 Yone Noguchi, Yeats, and Ito: How the “Orient” Became a Resource for Modern Art

Before Ito and Isamu met, another route—mediated by language—had already developed between Isamu’s father, the writer Yone Noguchi, and W. B. Yeats. Yone met Yeats in London in 1903, and in his 1907 essay “Mr. Yeats and the No,” he argued that Noh could resonate with Yeats’s theatrical ideals. This exchange should not be understood as the pure transmission of Japanese culture to the West, but it likely contributed substantially to Yeats’s interest in Asian aesthetics and Noh.

Ito left Japan in 1911 and, after passing through Paris, encountered Dalcroze eurhythmics at Hellerau in Germany. The outbreak of the First World War brought him to London, where he met Yeats through Ezra Pound, who was studying Noh, and began collaborating with him. In 1916 Yeats wrote the Noh-inspired play *At the Hawk’s Well*, in which Ito performed the hawk who guards the well. Ito did not simply reproduce tradition as a Noh performer. He combined bodily sensibilities acquired in Japan, the study of rhythm at Hellerau, and European theatrical experience, translating a textual understanding of Noh into performable time, stillness, walking, and gesture.

In this act of translation, Ito's Japaneseness was not only a constraint but also an artistic weapon that he consciously deployed. While accepting the mysticism, stillness, and antiquity that European and American audiences expected from a Japanese body, Ito reorganized those expectations within his own modern dance. Yet this cannot be called entirely free self-expression. Japaneseness held value partly because Western Orientalism desired "the East." Ito's agency should therefore be understood not as existing outside stereotype, but as a practice of exploiting and displacing its expectations (Cowell 2001; Wong 2009).

3.2 New York: Connecting Ito, Isamu, and Ailes

Born in 1904 to Yone Noguchi and Léonie Gilmour, Isamu did not grow up in a harmonious household blending Japanese and American cultures. His father's absence, his mother's unstable circumstances, and his movement among multiple names and languages made belonging uncertain from an early age (Marx 2013; Herrera 2015). After returning alone to the United States in 1918, he went by Sam Gilmour, and in 1922 he began studying medicine at Columbia University. At the time he met Ito in New York, neither his path as a sculptor nor his public name had yet been settled.

According to Isamu's recollections, Ito welcomed him into his studio and social circle and encouraged him to use the name Noguchi as an artist (Noguchi 1973). When Isamu left for Paris in 1927, Ito provided him with letters of introduction and materially assisted his entry into the international art world. The portrait of Ito and the mask for *At the Hawk's Well*, made around 1926, were among the earliest theatrical objects to emerge from this relationship. Noguchi's later work with Graham cannot be reduced to a linear influence from Ito, but it remains important that, before collaborating with Graham, he had already encountered through Ito's theater the body as a form in space.

Adding Ailes to this account prevents the connection from becoming a simple inheritance between two male artists. Born in Yokohama in 1912 and raised with exposure to both Japanese and English, Ailes returned to the United States with Léonie in 1920. In 1929, at the age of seventeen, she entered the Neighborhood Playhouse on scholarship and soon joined Graham's group. In Gilmour's later recollection, Graham was seeking young dancers whose ways of using the body had not yet been fixed by the established vocabulary of ballet. Ailes was therefore not recruited as a finished star with a fully formed technique. She was selected as a young artist capable of participating physically in the experiments through which Graham's own dance language was still being formed (Gilmour, in Horosko 2002, 8-9). She recalled introducing Graham and Isamu, while Isamu stated in an interview at the New York Public Library that Ito

had introduced them. Rather than treating either account as the sole point of origin, it is more plausible to understand these introductions as multiple points of contact within the small New York art world where studios, families, and dance companies overlapped. This selection, however, guaranteed neither economic nor institutional security. Dancers in Graham's early group received little compensation and often supported themselves through other employment while continuing to rehearse. The 1932 Radio City Music Hall engagement in which Ailes performed *Choric Patterns* lasted only one week. Gilmour also recalled that when Léonie's health deteriorated, she left Graham's group to care for her mother. Léonie died at the end of 1933. Leaving Graham did not end Ailes's dance career; she subsequently shifted her activities to the New Dance League and to dance and theater productions supported by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a public employment program under the New Deal.

The difference between Ito and Ailes lies in the fact that two bodies connected to Japan were not read in the same way onstage. Ito made his visibility as a Japanese or "Oriental" dancer a resource for his work. By contrast, the performance records currently available position Ailes as a dancer with Graham and the New Dance League, a practitioner of leftist dance, and a performer in the WPA-supported Broadway production *Adelante*, without placing Japaneseness at the center of her repertory. At least on the basis of the surviving evidence, she cannot be said to have used "Japan" as a public artistic brand in the manner of Ito. Although she was of Japanese descent, she appears to have worked without being required to embody the same Oriental identity demanded of Ito.

3.3 California in 1929: How Michio Ito and Sessue Hayakawa Negotiated Japaneseness Differently

In the same year—1929—that Isamu met Graham and Ailes joined the company, Ito left New York and moved the center of his activities to Los Angeles. Work in film choreography and direction was one impetus for the move, but what he developed in California extended well beyond Hollywood cinema. At the Hollywood Bowl and the Pasadena Rose Bowl, he created large-scale "symphonic choreographies" combining numerous dancers, choristers, and orchestral musicians, working on a scale different from the theaters and solo performances that had characterized much of his New York career. Ito arrived five years after the Immigration Act of 1924 had effectively barred immigration from Japan and at a time when anti-Japanese sentiment was embedded in both California law and society. Nevertheless, when the *Rafu Shimpo* reported on his 1930 Hollywood Bowl production, it anticipated that "hundreds of Japanese people" would attend. Ito's success could therefore be understood not only as an individual's entry into

the American entertainment mainstream, but also as an event that made the presence of the Japanese American community visible within a major public venue (Rodman 2024, 124-60; Cowell 2001).

The Japanese actor Sessue Hayakawa provides a useful point of comparison. Hayakawa became one of early Hollywood's highest-paid stars, but his star persona was constructed through contradictory racial fantasies of Japanese masculinity: dangerous yet desirable, foreign yet sophisticated. He established his own production company, Haworth Pictures, in an effort to gain greater control over such representations. Nevertheless, amid intensifying anti-Japanese sentiment and business difficulties, he left Hollywood in 1922. When he briefly returned for *Daughter of the Dragon* in 1931, he was once again placed within Hollywood's racial system, playing a Chinese character despite being Japanese.

Where the meaning of Hayakawa's body as a film actor remained especially subject to scripts, casting, and editing, Ito's position as a choreographer, teacher, and theatrical producer gave him comparatively greater control over the presentation of his own body, other dancers, and theatrical space. In 1933, the *Japanese-American Courier* titled an interview with Ito "Profit from Your Race" and reported his advice that young people of Japanese descent should not conceal being Japanese as a disadvantage, but should make use of their racial characteristics as a source of value. The statement demonstrates Ito's active effort to transform Japaneseness into an artistic resource. At the same time, its essentialist language shows that he was not entirely outside the period's tendency to treat race as a set of fixed characteristics (Miyao 2007; "Profit from Your Race," *The Japanese-American Courier*, January 1, 1933, 5).

The difference between Hayakawa and Ito is therefore not that one possessed agency while the other did not. Hayakawa also attempted to change cinematic representation by establishing his own company, while Ito employed the "Orient" desired by mainstream audiences and reorganized its meaning within his own theatrical practice. What differed was the degree of authority that their respective media and professional positions gave them over their self-representation. Their trajectories show that Japaneseness was neither simply an advantage nor simply an obstacle. It could become both a source of value and a source of danger at the intersection of an artist's choices and classification by audiences, industries, and the state. It was this position that Isamu reentered when he encountered Ito again in California in 1935.

In 1935 Isamu designed the set for Graham's *Frontier*, beginning their long-term collaboration. That same year, while visiting the West Coast, he received an "enthusiastic welcome" from Ito, who was then based in Los Angeles. According to a text Isamu wrote in

1942, Ito told him of a plan to collect donations of two sen apiece from schoolchildren in Japan and erect an enormous statue titled *Justice* in San Francisco Harbor as a “silent rebuke” to the Statue of Liberty in New York. Isamu believed that such a monument would provoke resentment rather than goodwill and would merely call attention to injustice. This record suggests that the deep friendship that began between them in New York in the 1920s continued even after their centers of activity diverged, allowing them to speak candidly even about political projects. At the same time, Ito’s proposal to construct a national symbol criticizing the United States with money collected from schoolchildren in Japan offers a clue for considering claims that his thought contained a nationalistic strain. A single statement should not be used to define Ito’s entire political outlook; it is better positioned as an episode that reveals its complexity. (The Isamu Noguchi Archive, MS_BIO_028_005)

4. 1941-1945: War Did Not Classify the Four in the Same Way

4.1 Ito: From Artistic Cosmopolitanism to “Enemy” Status

The day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Ito was arrested by the FBI and transferred among several facilities under the Department of Justice’s enemy-alien system. In the hearing records, his international contacts, mobility, linguistic ability, and capacity as a performer to command an audience were reinterpreted as dangerous skills potentially useful for propaganda or espionage (Riordan 2017). Qualities previously praised as talents connecting East and West were inverted during the war into possible evidence of disloyalty to the state. The Japanese identity Ito had employed generated value in the art market, but it could not protect him from state classification.

In 1943 Ito was sent to Japan with his wife, Tsuyako, aboard an exchange ship. The state severed the daily contact he had built over more than twenty years with his school, students, theaters, family, and collaborators. Even after he resumed his work in Japan after the war, American dance institutions were reconfigured around his absence. His subsequent “forgetting” must therefore be reconsidered not as the result of insufficient artistic value, but as a consequence of forced displacement and the formation of archives afterward.

4.2 Isamu: From Exemption to Voluntary Entry—and Then Confinement

As an American citizen and resident of New York, Isamu was not directly subject to the mass exclusion imposed on the West Coast. Nevertheless, in May 1942 he voluntarily entered the Poston incarceration camp to demonstrate solidarity with the Japanese American community and to improve living conditions through parks, gardens, recreation, and artistic activities (Noguchi

2024). Most of his plans went unrealized because of administrative conflict and a lack of resources, and once inside, he was not free to leave. Whereas Ito was detained and sent to Japan after the state classified him as dangerous, Isamu became confined while attempting voluntarily to assume a sense of belonging with Japanese Americans. Their “incarceration experiences” were not the same, but they intersected in showing that transnational artists could not freely choose either their belonging or their movement.

In a letter to Isamu around 1942, Ailes wrote that a production in which she might have performed had fallen through and that she had “no work at present.” The letter does not state that she had been refused employment because she was Japanese or Japanese American. Since the producer failed to advance the project and the performance itself never materialized, it is more reasonable to read her situation as an effect of the contraction of theatrical production and the instability of employment during wartime. What matters here is the contrast with Ito. Although Ailes lost work, she could remain in New York and search for another possibility. Ito, by contrast, was detained as an enemy alien and lost at once his freedom, his base of operations, and the career he had built as a dancer in the United States before ultimately being sent to Japan. Although both were connected to Japan, the war did not exclude them in the same way. (The Isamu Noguchi Archive, MS_COR_418_014)

4.3 Yuriko: Arts Education and Western Dance under Forced Incarceration

Within the incarceration camps, art helped some prisoners sustain their daily lives after their freedom had been taken away. At the same time, it became a means of reconsidering their own position after the state had classified them as “Japanese” and excluded them from American society. Chiura Obata established an art school with other artists at the Tanforan temporary detention center and reorganized it after their transfer to Topaz. Its wide-ranging curriculum included not only Japanese brushwork but also drawing, oil painting, sculpture, and commercial art. At the Santa Anita temporary detention center, Ruth Asawa studied drawing with animators formerly employed by Disney who had likewise been incarcerated, and she continued making art at Rohwer. After leaving the camp, she studied at Black Mountain College and went on to develop the technique she encountered during a 1947 visit to Mexico into her later wire sculptures. At the Minidoka camp, George Nakashima met Gentaro Kenneth Hikogawa, a master of traditional Japanese woodworking, and deepened his knowledge of Japanese tools and joinery. This experience also informed the woodwork he developed after his release in New Hope, Pennsylvania.

These histories should not, however, be converted into a success story in which forced incarceration somehow cultivated artists. What matters is that the prisoners sustained creative activity with limited materials, knowledge, and relationships, and carried those practices into the postwar period in different forms. Art in the camps did not serve only to preserve Japanese culture. It also provided a place to relearn techniques and modes of expression derived from both Japan and the United States.

One person who underwent a similar process through dance was Yuriko Amemiya, later Yuriko Kikuchi. As a Japanese American, Yuriko was sent to the Tulare temporary detention center in 1942 and subsequently transferred to the Gila River incarceration camp. She taught dance to children in both facilities and organized a dance school at Gila River, where she presented works in American modern dance and ballet. Hayakawa understands this practice of Western dance not simply as entertainment, but as an activity through which Japanese American women, deprived of their rights, presented themselves as refined American citizens and negotiated mobility beyond the camp and the possibility of future professional lives (Hayakawa 2018). It partly conformed to the “Americanization” expected by the camp administration, while also allowing dancers to retain ownership of their bodies and futures against the enemy-alien status imposed by the state.

Yuriko did not continue Western dance because she had escaped racialization as a Japanese American. The policy that incarcerated her was itself the result of state discrimination based on ancestry. Yet even while being treated as “Japanese,” she continued to teach not dance as a representation of Japanese culture, but the modern dance and ballet she had studied before incarceration. The divergence between a racial classification imposed by the state and an artistic affiliation chosen by the individual was already visible here. The practice of Western dance that Yuriko sustained in the camp continued after her release in 1943, leading toward her career as a specialist in American modern dance in New York.

4.4 Turning Artistic Visibility into Political Action

After returning to New York from Poston, Isamu joined the painter Yasuo Kuniyoshi and others in 1944 to organize the Arts Council of Japanese Americans for Democracy, the arts division of the Japanese American Committee for Democracy (JACD). Kuniyoshi served as chair, and the architect Minoru Yamasaki—who would later design New York’s original World Trade Center—participated as vice chair. Through exhibitions and political statements, the Arts Council defended democracy while criticizing Japanese militarism and fascism. Yamasaki also served as chair of the Resettlement Council of Japanese American Organizations in New York, where he

worked to secure housing and employment for Japanese Americans relocating to New York from the West Coast camps. Amid local opposition, he supported the opening of a temporary residence in Brooklyn. The Arts Council's political advocacy and the Resettlement Council's material assistance were separate activities, but both demonstrate New York artists using their social standing on behalf of the Japanese American community.

The war affected not only their political positions but also the character of their work. After returning from Poston, Isamu produced works such as *The World Is a Foxhole* (1942-43) and *This Tortured Earth* (1942-43), translating sensations of war, devastation, and confinement into abstract form. Kuniyoshi was not forcibly incarcerated, but he was classified as an “enemy alien” and subjected to a frozen bank account, the confiscation of his camera, and restrictions on his movement. During the war, he participated in the production of propaganda condemning atrocities committed by the Japanese military. In his postwar paintings, broken objects, masks, disordered compositions, and intense colors came to express anxiety and disillusionment after the war. For both artists, their struggles as artists of Japanese descent affected their work. The visibility and expertise they had acquired in the art world became means for political speech and community assistance during wartime. Ito had used his Japanese identity as a strength onstage, whereas Isamu, who had tried to avoid being evaluated only as Japanese, positioned himself alongside the Nisei during the war and connected that identity to collective action. Japaneseness was not a fixed attribute: at one moment it could become an artistic weapon, at another the basis for exclusion, and at still another a responsibility to speak politically.

5. Postwar Yuriko: Racial Classification and Aesthetic Choice

After leaving the Gila River camp in 1943, Yuriko moved to New York and joined the Martha Graham Dance Company in 1944. She eventually became one of its principal dancers and, in later years, assumed responsibility for transmitting Graham's works to subsequent generations through teaching and reconstruction. Yuriko established her professional identity by mastering the Graham technique as it had been formed in the United States and embodying its dance language onstage—not by performing an ethnicized “Japan.”

The March 13, 1948, issue of the *Pacific Citizen* observed that although Yuriko was also accomplished in Japanese dance, she had never performed an “Oriental role” in the Graham company. The newspaper also discussed how difficult it was for minority performers, including Japanese Americans, to be evaluated as individual artists apart from racial identity, identifying Yuriko and Sono Osato as exceptional cases of success (Kikuchi Diary, March 16, 1948). This

assessment cannot be treated as evidence that racism had disappeared from the stage at that time. On the contrary, the very description of Yuriko's success as something achieved "despite" her Japanese ancestry shows that she remained situated within a racialized gaze.

Yuriko therefore did not become central to Graham's work because she was free from racialization. Even after experiencing the most explicit form of state discrimination in forced incarceration, she did not confine her specialty to "Japanese dance"; she established a position within American modern dance. Her career demonstrates that the racial classification assigned by others and by the state does not necessarily coincide with the aesthetic affiliation chosen by an artist.

At the same time, this discussion does not regard Graham's dance as a "pure West" entirely detached from Asia. Graham's theatrical language was shaped through her long collaboration with Isamu Noguchi, and she herself was interested in Asian thought and art. The term "Western dance" is used here not to claim cultural purity, but to indicate the historical position of the Graham technique as an institution of American modern dance and Yuriko's role as one of its central practitioners.

In the 1948 *Tale of Seizure*, Yuriko's trajectory intersected directly with Isamu's. Yuriko choreographed and performed this solo work, which entered the Graham company's repertory, and Isamu created its stage set (The Isamu Noguchi Archive, Catalogue Raisonné no. 278). According to Charles Kikuchi's diary, Isamu told Yuriko that the set had cost \$940 and also offered his views on how she should perform within its space (Kikuchi Diary, February 18 and 23, 1948). Their relationship therefore extended beyond the indirect connection created when Yuriko danced among Isamu's sets in works choreographed by Graham. *Tale of Seizure* was a direct collaboration in which Yuriko's choreography and body and Isamu's sculptural form constituted a single work.

The contemporary critic Frances Herridge described the work's theme as a struggle to free oneself from conventions and beliefs inherited from one's ancestors (Kikuchi Diary, February 14, 1948). The term "ancestors" cannot immediately be equated with Japanese culture, nor can the work be conclusively interpreted as a direct representation of Yuriko's own experience of incarceration. Nevertheless, it is significant that a work by Yuriko, who had been racialized as Japanese American, was received as a conflict between inheritance and individual freedom.

Where Ito foregrounded being Japanese as an expressive resource onstage, Yuriko—at least during this period—established her position as a dancer and choreographer in American modern

dance rather than through ethnic roles. This difference does not mean that she abandoned Japaneseness. The state and critics continued to read her as Japanese American, while she chose a professional dance language apart from that classification. *Tale of Seizure* should be understood not as a collaboration intended to represent Japaneseness, but as an instance in which Yuriko and Isamu, both long perceived through Japanese ancestry, jointly created dance and sculptural form that were not limited by that classification.

6. Rupture and Reconnection Seen through Isamu

After the war, Ito resumed theatrical production and teaching in Japan. The Noguchi Archive preserves photographs showing that Isamu and Ito met again in postwar Japan. Record 09413.3 shows Ito at the far right of a group gathered around a horse and identifies Isamu Noguchi as the photographer. Records 09415.4 and 09415.5 are also photographs taken by Isamu of Ito holding a Bugaku mask (The Isamu Noguchi Archive, Photography Collection).

Because the public metadata do not provide an exact date, the attribution of these images to the 1950s still needs to be verified against adjacent frames from the same film and Noguchi's travel chronology in Japan. Even so, the central point established by the photographs is clear. For the postwar Isamu, Ito did not remain only a model for a portrait and mask from the 1920s. State-imposed repatriation did not permanently end their relationship; it shifted its geography from the United States to Japan. When the 1935 reunion in California is considered alongside the photographs from postwar Japan, the relationship appears not as a one-way transmission from Ito to Isamu, but as one in which they continued to recognize one another at pivotal moments while working in different places.

In 1955 the Graham company toured Japan, and Yuriko also returned there. At present, however, no evidence has been found that Ito met Graham or Yuriko. The task here is not to fill the record with an imagined and appealing reunion. It is to construct a comparative history that places side by side the different positions assigned to these figures as identity and state power operated under the same historical pressures.

7. Why Dancers Must Be Placed at the Center

In the art history of Japanese Americans, preservable objects—paintings, sculptures, crafts, photographs, and architecture made in the camps—have served as crucial evidence. Such scholarship is indispensable, but dance does not remain as an object after performance and is therefore often treated merely as an item under “recreation” or “cultural events.” Within dance

history, Ito, Graham, and Yuriko have been discussed individually, while Ailes tends to appear as Isamu's sister or as the person who introduced him to Graham. Between these two fields of scholarship, dancers of the Japanese diaspora have rarely become a central basis for comparison.

Centering dancers, however, reveals differences that are difficult to see in the object-centered art history represented by Nakashima, Asawa, Kuniyoshi, and Yamasaki: Ito's body, which made ethnicity an explicit expressive resource; Ailes's body, which worked within American modern dance and leftist dance without foregrounding Japaneseness; and Yuriko's body, which made Graham's Western dance its professional language even after the state excluded her as Japanese American. These bodies do not present a binary choice between belonging to Japanese or American aesthetics. They reveal each artist's struggle over where to locate identity and whether to foreground it, distance oneself from it, or translate it into another expressive language through artistic practice. The accumulation of these different choices demonstrates that hybrid art crossing the boundary between Japan and the United States was formed not along a single route but through multiple pathways.

The asymmetry of the surviving evidence also carries historical meaning. Isamu's sculptures, sets, and photographs form a continuous career through museums and catalogues of works. Ito's repatriation severed the circuits of schools and students that had sustained his dance. Ailes's short-term engagements and low-paid dance labor were unlikely to enter an object-centered canon. Yuriko's body was indispensable to reconstructing Graham's works, yet she has often been classified as their transmitter rather than their author. Photographs, programs, oral histories, camp newspapers, letters, and records of restaging must be read across one another not because dance leaves no evidence, but because it leaves evidence in different forms.

8. Conclusion: Identity Lies at the Intersection of Choice and Classification, Not in Ancestry

The comparison among Ito, Ailes, and Yuriko shows that there is no simple correspondence between foregrounding Japaneseness and experiencing discrimination, or between declining to foreground Japaneseness and escaping discrimination. Artistic identity is determined neither by individual choice alone nor solely by the gaze of the state and the audience. It is formed where the two intersect and sometimes collide. Isamu makes that intersection visible. He moved between Sam Gilmour and Isamu Noguchi; received from Ito an artistic name and international connections; encountered early modern dance through Ailes; constructed theatrical space with

Graham; entered Poston voluntarily during the war; and reunited with Ito in postwar Japan while continuing to collaborate with Graham and Yuriko in the United States.

The significance of introducing an imperial perspective lies here as well. If Japan is treated only as a victim of Western imperialism, we lose sight of both the international authority of Japanese culture that Ito mobilized and Japan's own imperial character. Conversely, if only Japanese imperialism is emphasized, we overlook the operation of the American racial state, which forcibly incarcerated even Japanese Americans holding citizenship and sent Ito, a Japanese national, to Japan as an enemy alien. Between two empires, artists belonging to the same network were assigned different legal, social, and aesthetic positions. Describing those differences through dancing bodies and theatrical space is this article's central contribution.

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