

# Performance Arts Practice: An Intercultural Journey

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# Performance Arts Practices: An Intercultural Journey

Tamah NAKAMURA

#### Abstract

A developing awareness of the author's personal space in the body and movement communication is described through her intercultural living experience and academic study. Theoretical rationale extends individual self-awareness to the creation of practical, volunteer performance arts practices through workshops and performances with the community.

#### Body and Society – Individual Experience

Aesthetic expression through dance movement and performance has always been a highly valued part of my life. As an American who is a forty-year resident in Asia, thirty of those in Japan, I live in a culture which places high value on constraint of emotional expression in the adult maturation process. I turned to dance and performance as a form to release emotional expression. I have been practising classical ballet for 20 years and Butoh dance for 15 years. Although I started practicing classical ballet in my late 30s, my Japanese teacher discovered my ability to "express" and included me in many Russian folk dances and also choreographed special pieces for solo class recitals. It was through these experiences that I discovered the stage provided a safety net and boundary between me and social judgment of my actions. I could express any emotion I wanted and no sanctions were brought against me. Quite the opposite from my experience in my daily life in Japan, my ability to express was praised.

One of my personal ways of knowing is through a kinesthetic, experiential approach to learning. As an educator at the university for many years teaching intercultural communication, gender studies and second language communication skills, I prefer action-oriented, creative techniques (role play, movement conversations, etc.). I have also been facilitating discussion groups on gender and women's issues for Japanese and non-Japanese women in the community. Gradually, I noticed that the learning of new patterns first required a shift in old patterns in order for new ways of acting to emerge. I realized that it is important for people to shift their current habits so they can create their own new patterns from information stemming from the consciousness that arises from that movement. There is nothing I can teach them. I can only facilitate their learning. They have the capability to learn it themselves. I began to sense a need to synthesize my experiences teaching and living in Asia into a theoretical framework toward helping others. In 1999 I entered a doctoral program at Fielding Graduate University, Santa Barbara, California as a means of explicating that experience.

Fielding's curriculum is interdisciplinary. It is based on a scholar-practitioner model, set in an adult transformational learning framework. In addition to the theoretical component for each course, an application to the student's practical/social context is required. At the orientation session, I was torn between a strongly internalized bias that research should be something 'academic', and my interest in aesthetic movement. However, when a faculty asked me, "What is your passion?" I responded from my heart, "I want to be a dancer!" I stayed with my 'passion' of movement as expression exploring it through theory in coursework and applications of expressive movement in experiential settings both individually and collectively in groups. This has brought about a transition in my own life-work.

In the Spring of 2001, I joined the Butoh Seiryukai dance group in Fukuoka, Japan and it developed into my ethnographical research context within which I explored social identity and community creation through somatic movement. It is important to understand that Butoh dance is not based on technique. A highly oversimplified description of Butoh is that it is characterized by the dissolution of the self in the body by moving to internal images, thus changing body form and deconstructing the social body. Butoh has been an avant-garde form of dance-theater performance, but a few recent studies have been exploring Butoh as a method of movement therapy (Kasai & Takeuchi, 2001). Experimentation with integrating my theoretical learning at Fielding and Butoh Seiryukai activities, has helped me to extend my workshops for the community to include body movement to extend verbal discussion groups. I now facilitate somatic movement workshops to offer an alternative medium for reflection and expression of personal and social issues.

# Body and Society – Community Experiences (see flyers in appendix)

Collaborative performance practices bring together practitioners of diverse movement modalities to share varied experiential approaches across cultural boundaries. Participants are international and Japanese students, and the general public.

Biodata: performance arts practitioner collaborators

<u>Tamah Nakamura</u>: I am a professor at Chikushi Jogakuen University, Dazaifu, in communication skills and an adjunct instructor at Kyushu University, International Center, in contemporary Japan studies. A practitioner in dance and somatic movement education, my Ph.D. dissertation is on Butoh as a form of social identity creation. I spent fifteen years participating as a member of the group in Butoh workshops, post workshop discussions, overnight retreats and other activities reflecting an awareness of my personal aesthetic values in body movement, and experiential learning. I hold an ISMETA RSME certificate (somatic movement education); and am studying toward pilates certification.

<u>Yoichi Usami</u>: I have lived in Germany for 10 years where I studied and performed Eurythmy over 300 times. I compose contemporary music, and direct children's performances. For over 15 years I have been holding Eurythmy-based workshops for children's education. I am a member of the following associations: German Music Copyright Assoc.; Japan Children's Assoc.; honey-beesart's.

<u>Chiharu Yamaguchi</u>: I am a butoh dancer based in Fukuoka. I have also performed butoh in Tokyo, Taiwan and New York. I collaborate in live-action performances with musicians, painters, photographers, visual media, and other types of artists.

<u>Niibe Kentarou</u>: Born in Hokkaido, 1977, dancer and teacher of Chinese martial arts "Baguazhang" in Fukuoka. Has performed in many dance stages with live music.

<u>Kouso Kouzo</u>; Born in 1970 in Fukuoka. I am a percussionist widely experienced in percussion instruments involving drums, bells, cymbals, rattles, and tambourines. I have done improvisation with percussion and butch dance. I am currently a member of the Pokamus Rock Band.

## 1. "Movement for Refreshment of the Heart" Workshops

These workshops were included as one element in existing courses at women's centers in Japan. Topics of center-created courses were 'women considering divorce', 'women experiencing domestic violence', 'relaxation and stress relief'. The somatic movement workshops guided women to sense their soma, the body experienced from within. Aims of the workshops were to:

- hear the voice of your body
- do 'nothing'
- move to suggested images
- become aware of your own movement patterns
- notice how you move with others

My rationale and goals are to provide not only a cathartic movement experience but also include activities to foster critical consciousness and social action on an individual and group level (Nakamura, 2002a). "The actual meaning of body language is found through seeing the whole pattern in the context of the individual mover having a combination of personal, cultural and environmental experiences" (Hanna, 1988). Pallaro notes that the body has significance as "agent, container, mirror, vehicle of exchange" (1997) with the recognition of the experience of the body as the primary sense of core self. When we bring attention to the social structure held in our bodies, we can encourage people to 'listen' and develop awareness by deconstructing or releasing habitual movements to recreate movement in self-directed ways. Movement patterns in different cultures are internalized in the socialization process and are either permitted or denied expression (Dosmantes, 1992). Typical social issues raised by the women are hierarchical gender role expectations and narrow societal perceptions of women as less intelligent and less employable thus limiting their interaction to less than full members of the society. Reflecting on and activating collective social issues through non-verbal movement improvisation which deconstruct images held in the body is a form of non-dialogic activism toward whole person transformation. The individual is then a social agent with power to shift body self-perception thus promoting self and group transformation.

The purpose of the workshops is for participants to become aware of internalized social structures through guided movement activities and to dialogue to further recreate new patterns of movement toward intervening in their own life drama.

Participants' comments:

I realized how tense I usually am. I felt like crying. I was very moved. I became completely relaxed. My mind was full of problems before the workshop but now I feel refreshed. I almost never have time to allow myself to breathe and 'be with myself' for two hours.

# 2. Communication Movement Center Let's Co-Move!

Extending the workshops to a general population, a practitioner who is a butch dancer and I offered monthly workshops for a period of six months. We invited one practitioner each month to share their expertise. Initially, my collaborator and I offered a somatic movement experience followed by the invited practitioner, culminating in a final discussion. Among our workshop leaders were an acupuncturist, a taichi instructor, a children's storybook reader, a yoga instructor, and a psychologist.

Tamah's somatic movement: Our soma is our own experience of our body - a kind of self-attention (Csordas, 1993; Hanna, 1988). In our workshops we create an atmosphere of self-discovery. We begin with simple explorations of our soma by creating peaceful, still moments; breathing into gentle stretches; moving with imagery; and finding pleasure in our own expressive movements from our inner dance.

# 3. Kyushu University International Center, Japan in Today's World Program Performing Japan course component, Tamah Nakamura, instructor

Workshop and Performance Themes and Concepts.

Themes of our workshops and performances were focused on the power of communication: shintai, kotoba no chikara. Workshop and performance objectives were to experience the interconnection of sound, words and rhythm (movement), that is, words as sounds, movement as unifying, intuition as sensing ambiguity and 'atmosphere'. An additional element incorporated a further theme of experiencing our movements in daily life through various cultural movement modalities.

Key words and phrases from the student and community reflections are: calming, silence,

expression of feelings, intercommunication, interdependence, soundless information exchange, 'perform' communication with body, touch others' hearts through sound and movement.

a. Chikushi Jogakuen University Life Long Learning Center

This workshop was offered in Chikushi Jogakuen University's Life Long Learning Center course curriculum for the general public. The JTW international students and instructors shared children's games across cultures: Hanaichimonme Japanese children's game; JTW students share a children's game from their home country, in small groups, to participants from the community. Embedded aims were:

- To experience the interconnection of sound, words and rhythm (movement).
- Words as sounds, movement as unifying, intuition as sensing ambiguity and 'atmosphere' (reading the atmosphere 空気を読む).
- To experience our movements in daily life through the mediums of Eurythmy (German movement modality), Chinese martial arts butch and somatic movement.



Participant Comments:

## Chinese - female

Similarities in games are the same tune in different countries with different words.

Perhaps in eastern cultures obeying rules and trying to cater to others are more important than being outstanding in a group.

## <u>Filipino – male</u>

Games use music, chants and rhythmic songs in order to foster a climate of excitement and

cooperation among players. It gives the game a sense of being more than just a win-lose activity – it becomes an enjoyable activity.

Physical activity is almost always present. The act of holding hands makes you think you are 'one' and a collective in winning the game – even if you hardly know each other.

Being sensitive to how others are acting or about to act enables you to do things out of instinct or intuition.

Although the songs we learned as children are taught to us in our native language, it is quite surprising to know that their melody is the same for different countries. But sometimes putting the words to the temp or rhythm is different.

Non-verbal communication is enough to facilitate teamwork. You don't have to agree verbally that you are a team – you just feel it.

Having intercultural competence requires being aware and sensitive to other cultures' way of behaving and communicating because these things are culturally encoded.

#### American (instructor)

Words get in the way of communication. Words make us hesitate and unsure. They make us misunderstand. We all can act/behave well together; we can 'move' together.

The games we play as children socialize us to communicate with others in our society. But do they socialize us to communicate with other cultures? Today I noticed the following:

Many of the games had similar purposes:

- verbal repetition (sometimes with no meaning just sounds)
- action repetition
- making teams (opposition)
- creating rules to make winning and losing teams
- learning to lose; learning to try harder
- choosing/interchanging members on teams (learning to leave a group and join a new group)
- holding hands/touching

Many children today do not play these action games (based on different cultural expectations). They play individualized computer games which are universal throughout the world. Yet, today's children are less socialized to communicate easily even within their first culture. Therefore, the purpose of children's action and rhythm games is clearly important to help us develop "Communication Movement" behavior.

b. The Power of Communication (Shintai, Kotoba no Chikara) "Words, Sounds, Movement and Intuition"

This workshop explored the experience of the interconnection of sound, words and rhythm (movement). Using a haiku poem (Frog in a Pond by Basho) in both Japanese and English. Themes highlighted were Words as sounds, Movement as unifying, Intuition as sensing ambiguity and 'atmosphere'. It culminated in a joint instructor-student performance held at a public space.

Participant's reflections:

<u>Japanese</u> (female) Gaze, share, distance, space, texture, breath

#### France (male)

Kotoba no chikara is the kotoba the body produces as an *expression of feelings*. I felt free and confident to communicate in movement much more than words.

## France (male)

Language is a set of symbols. How do we interpret dance or body movement? We have to dance ourselves – to take part in the construction of communication. When we dance together, we 'speak' the same language – <u>intercommunication and interdependence</u>. Sometimes creating the same pattern, sometimes creating new patterns.

#### Taiwan (female)

Body, social manner, external appearance and communication. Boiling heat – every pore was opened. <u>Soundless information exchange with others.</u> Instead of study by words, <u>we 'perform'</u> <u>communication with our mind and body.</u>

## China (female)

Before the workshop, I expected that the performance would be something like a normal pattern dancing with the music. However, it was totally different from my expectation. The freedom in dancing is what I have learned from the workshop. We, JTW students, designed our own show within the theme "The frog leaps in the ponds". We created the sound of fresh morning and the sound of water when the frog leaps in with instruments we have. <u>We wanted to touch our audience's heart by using sound and movement.</u> During the real performance, I felt relax and calm as if I was walking in the forest beside the pond in the early morning. <u>After the performance, I saw a drawing picture of one of the children there. It was the pictures of us while the frog was leaping in the pond and the humans, including me there, sat beside the ponds. As soon as I saw that picture, I realized that our performance can touch her heart successfully.</u>

#### American (male)

To be honest, in the beginning I was a little hesitant about what we were doing. After all, I had never done anything like this, let alone act. I found though as I was doing the workshop and *reciting the Haiku that it ended up being surprisingly calming*, and as that happened I got more into the experience of performing and doing a good job at it as well. Of course, when I heard that I actually had to perform it in front of people I was like, what?! Especially since I had been voted, perhaps not so voluntarily, the frog. But I decided to take that feeling with a grain of salt and to have fun with it and make a good experience in the end. And it really was fun at the performance.



#### c. Workshop: "Flower Arch"

Continuing the themes of 1) experiencing the interconnection of sound, words and rhythm (movement), and 2) words as sounds, movement as unifying, intuition as sensing ambiguity and 'atmosphere' (reading the atmosphere), the instructors used an ancient Japanese story in both Japanese and English translation to voice with movement.

#### HO-I

Those who know solitude, Horns grow on their heads They grow tusks! Their hair stands on end, their eyes glow! Solitude! Solitude! Is an un-nameable, wonderful....wonderful Wonderful wind! Endless! The child senses the distance infinitely far And simply trembles. And the child perceives the nature of all creatures that tremble. Ho-i, Ho-i The glowing eyes reflect the flames of the world The hair, standing on end, swims in time flowing backwards Ho-i, ho-i,

A summary of the feedback during the follow-up discussion:

#### Movement as Unifying

Everyone else seemed nervous and moving together made them feel less nervous and more comfortable. One student said, the initial *"silence and awkwardness soon turned into a comfortable space as we all became surrounded by the sound workshop"*.

## Words as Sounds (sound-words)

They had been trying to understand the 'meaning' of the words in the entire poem in a linear way. One students said she realized the purpose of the workshop was "to fully express through sound and movement". Although we had read the poem many times in class, and practiced with loudness, taking parts, warming up our bodies, the workshop was the first time that they actually moved to and with sounds, and the sounds of the words. From this workshop I realized that 1) Changing tone of voice (loudness/quality) = changes (influences/controls) body movements and, 2) Words may have the quality of the images they portray. If they don't it is hard to match voice and word. Putting movement "instructions" beside each line helps non-movers (participants not used to expression through movement) to create a movement image (imagine as they move and voice the words).

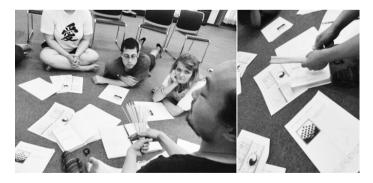
People in contemporary society are focused on the 'visual' as much of our life is filled with media images. One student commented that she "had forgotten the importance of sound and space" but she was reminded of it when she experienced how the sound-word HOI when voiced differently "could really make a difference to the mood and atmosphere of the location and the people in the space itself"

#### Connecting in Space; sensing atmosphere; accepting ambiguity and chaos

In the final comments of the workshop, Japanese students commented on the atmosphere in the space/room; their feelings; how their interactions and relationships with the other participants changed from beginning to the end.

One student commented that the way the performance was created was uniquely Japanese and that she experienced "*a kind of peace and harmony, even in the chaos*". She felt that in her home country of Singapore the same improvisation exercise would have resulted in more chaos.

One of the great realizations I, as facilitator, got from this workshop was that "voice is the image's shape or body; and movement is the background or stage". Instead of discussing the meaning of the poem and the poem's structure from the beginning of the class, I will use voice and movement together. The 'meaning' of the poem will emerge through this approach, because students will learn to experience and develop a tolerance for ambiguity, and a sense of creating the atmosphere. By participating in a workshop with Japanese participants, the international students benefit more than from what I can 'teach' them in class because they can experience non-linear improvisation and producing a performance together.



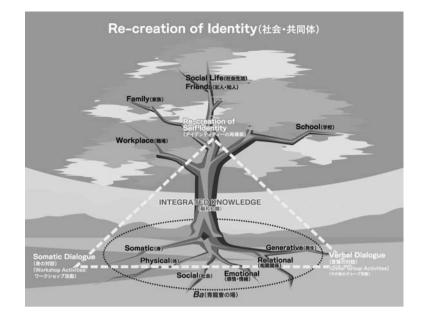
Revisiting my dissertation findings in "Beyond Performance in Japanese Butoh Dance: Embodying Re-Creation of Self and Social Identities", we can understand the influence on my subsequent movement work in the community.

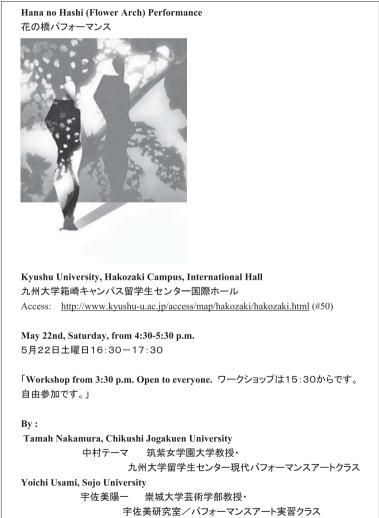
## The Tree of Butoh Seiryukai Ba (see appendix)

The significance of Seiryukai for the participants is that it acts as a matrix of interactive space to create a changed sense of self. Integrated knowledge is created stemming from interaction among all the contexts within Seiryukai Ba as they are cradled between somatic and verbal dialogue and extended to a cognitive understanding of self. This may be explained in terms of the model of Seiryukai Ba which is in the shape of a tree diagram. Each of the interactions in Seiryukai Ba is nurtured through relational interaction as well as somatic and verbal dialogue. This fertilizes the participants' understanding of themselves in relation to others and in society as full human beings through non-rational contexts, that is, somatic, emotional, and relational. New knowledge of themselves is an integrated knowledge because the main Ba of Seirvukai encompasses all micro-contexts in which people participate. The new knowledge forms a sturdy trunk of positive support for their tree of life. When they return to the branches of their life such as school, work, family, they do so with an awareness of a new sense of connection and a new way of thinking and acting. For instance, Ideta Hiroshi's experience of an increased sense of self-confidence in answering customer complaints with joy in his work illustrates a new way of both thinking and acting in his life. He used to live in a suit of armor which represented the norms of society imposed upon him. However, when doing the lighting for Seiryukai he is not expected to do it in any prescribed way so he has learned to express himself by letting his lighting dance. He no longer wears armor as he has recreated the norms of his social life and now dances with customer complaints at his post office work.

## Final Remarks

Seiryukai *Ba* offers an interactive space in which participants recreate their identity in relation to others in the group and the larger society. They do this through Butoh workshops as well as extended activities such as performance preparations and dinner discussions. In other words, Seiryukai Ba provides opportunity for participants to reflect on the meaning of their self and social identities through both somatic and verbal dialogue. This study has made a contribution to the understanding of how people function through intuitive experiential knowing. Through my organization and facilitation of collaborative workshops, I create a space for performance arts practitioners with varied modalities, international students, Japanese students and Japanese members of the community to explore somatic movement and dialog as an alternative medium for reflection on personal, social, and global identities.







#### "Expression Through Body Movement" Performance and Workshop

Yoichi Usami

Date: June 25, 2011 Time: 15:00-17:00 (3-5 p.m.) Place: Konya 505 Performers: Chiharu Yamaguchi



Workshop leaders: Tamah Nakamura + Chiharu Yamaguchi+Yoichi Usami



Maximum participants: 10

Pot luck dinner: 17:00-19:00 (5-7 p.m.). Bring something to share. No fee.

Theme: TAMASHII (魂)

Let's watch these performances, and participate in the workshop with 'fresh' eyes, without labeling the 'body movement/dance genre in advance. All three performers and workshop leaders offer varied artistic background. Words easily form our concepts, and mold our perspectives. During the dinner discussion, we can bring words to our experiences, and maybe create new terms.



#### Invitation for all JTW STUDENTS Eurythmy, Butoh & Chinese Martial Arts Workshop & Performance \[West meets East]

May 11, 2013 Saturday 1- 4:30 p.m. International Hall

13:00 Opening - Movement workshop - leaders Niibe, Takahara, Nakamura

- 動きのワークショップ 新部/中在実に共通なことを体感してもらう 0bjet installation: we will all gather materials from the outside environment and create an installation inside in which to do our workshop and have the performance.
  - オブジェ造り 中村テーマ/字佐美/新部 (leaders: Nakamura, Usami, Niibe) ホールの外で木の枝や草花や人工物などを探し、ホールに持ち込み、 今日でオブジェを造る。

主員 CA ノンエを追る。 15:00~15:40 Performance – Usami, Niibe, Takahara

- 15.00 15.40 Ferrormance Osami, Ivinoe, Takanata パフォーマンスソロ/デュオ+音楽
- 16:00~16:30 Discussion on workshop and performances.
  - 日常動作:立つ、座る、歩くなどの位置付けと感覚を中国武術とオイ リュトミーから解説。学生による感想など



#### 新部健太郎 (Niibe Kentarou)

Born in Hokkaido, 1988. Dancer and teacher of Chinese martial arts "Bāguázhāng"in Fukuoka. many dance stage with live music. http://kotyuten.jimdo.com/



宇佐美陽一 (Usami Yoichi)

Eurythmie, Direction theater for children, compose music. Original stages with Eurythmie, Music and Theater. Workshop for children and adult in Japan. http://web.mac.com/studiolula/



#### BIODATA Tamah Nakamura

I am a professor at Chikashi Jogakuen University, Dazaifu, in communication skills and an instructor at JTW in contemporty Japan studies. A practitioner in dance and somatic movement education, my Ph.D. dissertation is on Butoh as form of social identity creation. Ispent three years actively participating as a member of the group in Butoh workshops, post workshop discussions, overnight retreats and other activities reflecting an awareness of my personal aesthetic values in body movement, and experimential learning.

#### Yoichi Usami (宇佐美 陽一)

I have lived in Germany for 10 years where I studied and performed Eurythmy over 300 times. I compose contemporary music, and direct children's performances. For over 15 years I have been holding Eurythmy-based workshops for children's education. I am a member of the following associations: German Music Copyright Assoc; Japan Children's Assoc; honey-bees-art's.

#### Chiharu Yamaguchi (山口 千春)

I am a butoh dancer based in Fukuoka. I have also performed butoh in Tokyo, Taiwan and New York. I collaborate in live-action performances with musicians, painters, photographers, visual media, and other types of artists.





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Invitation for all JTW STUDENTS

Performing Arts Workshop

HANA ICHI MONME

花一匁 Date: May 17, Saturday Time:1-4 p.m.

■Place: Classroom 403 九州大学総純キャンパス 留学生センター

B. Performing Japan JTW students will share a children's game from their home country, in small groups.



by the instructors.

and Tamah Nakamura.

Part 1

Part 2.

A. Hanaichimonr children's game.

#### Usami Yoichi (宇佐美 陽一) Eurythmie, Director of theater for children, compose music. Original stages with Eurythmie, Music and Theater. Workst for children and adults in Japan. nie.exblog.jp/

Chiharu Yamaguchi (山口千香) I am a butch dancer based in Fukuoka I have also performed butch in Tokyo. Taiwan and New York. I collab live-action performances with musicians, painters, photographers visual media, and other types of artists.



http://koty



#### Performing Arts Workshop DANCER IN THE MIRROR

Date: May 16. Saturday ■Place: Classroom 403 九村大学福崎キャンパス留学生センター



#### instructors

Usami Yoichi 〈宇佐美 陽一〉 Eurythmie, Director of theater children, compose music. Original stages with Eurythmie, Music and eter. Workshops for children and adults in Japan. http://eurythmie.exblog.jp/

Tamah Nakamura (中村テーマ) I am a professor at Chikushi Joj University, Dazaita, in commun skills and an instructor at JTW in contemporary Japan studies. A practitioner in dance and sor movement education, my Ph.D. dissertation is on Butch as a form cial identity o

This workshop offers a creative performance experience through language, sound, and movement for the Performing Japan half-term course. All JTW students are welcome to participate. A few Japanese participants will be invited by the instructors.

Performance arts practices which will be incorporated are calligraphy writing with sumi ink, somatic movement, Taichi (Baguazhang), Butoh, Eurythmy and percussion by instructors Yoichi Usami, Chiharu Yamaguchi, Kentarou Niibe, Kouso Kouzo, and Tamah Nakamura.



Niibe Kentarou (新部 健太郎) Born in Hokkaido, 1977, Dancer and cher of Chinese martial arts her of Chinese martial a juazhang\* Fukuoka. Co orm with live music. //kotyuten.jimdo.com/

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identity creation Niibe Kentarou (新部健太郎)



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(ナカムラ・テーマ:英語学科 教授)