

Katherine Mezur and Emily Wilcox eds.
Corporeal Politics: Dancing East Asia
(Studies in Dance History). Ann Arbor:
University of Michigan Press, 2020.
ISBN: 978-0-472-05455-8. 372 pp.¹

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Katherine Mezur and Emily Wilcox should be congratulated for not only contributing to but also expanding the field of East Asian dance and performance studies. Their co-edited volume, *Corporeal Politics: Dancing East Asia*, should be recognized as a milestone in this growing field. Emily Wilcox's introduction articulates the importance of "a regional approach" in studying "multiple forms of dance across East Asia," and highlights "corporeal politics" as "a unifying methodology" for the sixteen case studies collected in this truly interdisciplinary, transnational volume, with contributors based across East Asia and the United States (2). In her substantial introduction, Wilcox continues to delve into how critical area studies methodologies and anti-Orientalist approaches could offer insights for East Asian dance studies, from the late 1960s to today.

The introduction further articulates the central methodological tenets of *Corporeal Politics* through invoking "East Asia" as a framing concept, that is, the volume's emphasis on deep historical and cultural contextualization, its use of original sources in East Asian languages, and its following the logic of East Asian history, rather than treating US or European models as universal (7). Based on its respect for and insistence on the linguistic, cultural, and historical specificities of the forms of East Asian dances it examines, *Corporeal Politics* foregrounds the inventiveness of East Asian dancers and choreographers and the creativity and transnational qualities of East Asian dance forms. More importantly, it locates dance within the broader structures of power and knowledge by offering sustained politicized readings of dancing bodies in East Asia in the traditions of critical area studies and critical dance studies.

1 A shorter version of the review is published in *The International Quarterly for Asian Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (2022), <https://hasp.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/iqas/article/view/19014>.

Radical contextualization is at the heart of the methodology of *Corporeal Politics*. The sixteen chapters of the book are organized into five thematic parts. Part 1, “Contested Genealogies,” consists of three chapters on China. In Chapter 1, “Sexuality, Status, and the Female Dancer,” Beverly Bossler argues that the association between dance and sexual allure in China and East Asia made female dancers and males who performed feminine roles inherently transgressive figures. This chapter sets the stage for the future chapters, as according to Bossler, “the legacies of imperial Chinese practices and attitudes still influence the social conditions and meanings of dance and dancers in East Asia today” (25).

Chapter 2, “Mei Lanfang and Modern Dance,” analyzes Mei Lanfang’s cross-gender stage performances and the writings of his close artistic collaborator Qi Rushan. Catherine Yeh argues that dance operated as a modernizing force in Chinese theater. She demonstrates how dance represented a new language of the “civilized” vitality of modernity that could be incorporated into Peking opera (48). In this sense, Peking opera modernity shares the trajectory of modern dance in the US and Europe, borrowing from both foreign cultures and one’s own cultural traditions, and distinguishing itself from other forms of cultural hybrids.

In Chapter 3, “The Conflicted Monk,” Nan Ma compares two choreographies based on the *Si Fan* (Longing for the Mundane) story, one staged in 1921 by female Japanese dancer Fujikage Shizue and the other in 1942 by male Chinese dancer Wu Xiaobang. Ma argues that Fujikage appropriated the modernity that came to be associated with *Si Fan*’s rebellious theme to make a gesture of “breaking away” from the formal and thematic constraints of traditional Japanese dance, while maintaining its difference from Western dances (68). She continues to examine how Wu Xiaobang’s concern about the unity of the mind and the body was ultimately a utopia in the age of mass popular culture, in which the dancing body was irreversibly objectified and commodified (73). Beautifully written, Nan Ma’s chapter demonstrates how the same *Si Fan* theme was seen with dynamic differences in the Japanese and Chinese new dance movements, as both new and old, refreshing and decadent, progressive and backward, and liberating and oppressive.

Part 2, “Decolonizing Migration,” consists of four chapters. Chapter 4, “Murayama Tomoyoshi and Dance of Modern Times,” written by Kazuko Kuniyoshi and translated from Japanese by Yuda Kenji, emphasizes Murayama Tomoyoshi’s attempts to approach Western dance as an equal and from a contemporary perspective. Based on his study in Germany, Murayama proposed “conscious constructivism” as a new concept of fine arts. According to Kuniyoshi, this is Murayama’s inventive way of presenting fresh and powerful visual materials,

rather than a direct influence of Russian Constructivists (90). By focusing on Murayama Tomoyoshi and his creative synthesis of Western dance, this chapter challenges the accepted view of modern Japanese dance history as a part of the history of the importation of Western culture to Japan.

Chapter 5, “Korean Dance Beyond Koreanness,” written by Okju Son, explores how Park Yeong-in, through his Korean-themed *Sinmuyong* dance pieces performed in Europe, negotiated complex political and cultural positions and expressed hybridity in their movement language and characterizations. A central problematic raised by this chapter, relevant to other parts of East Asia and other chapters in this volume, is why Korean *Sinmuyong*, which literally means “New Dance,” is paradoxically associated with stylized, reformed, or even “pseudo” Korean dance (102). Okju Son shows that Park utilized Korean and Japanese culture to choreograph a new kind of dance that connected him to his European audiences. In this sense, Park Yeong-in’s experiments on Korean dance became a means to modernize dance. His understanding of ethnicity was framed by the discourse of modernity, which enabled him to invent a multidimensional tradition to choreograph dance pieces that spoke to wider audiences.

In Chapter 6, “Diasporic Moves,” Emily Wilcox, one of the co-editors of *Corporeal Politics*, asks how the notion of Overseas Chinese identity might change our understanding of the life and work of Dai Ailian. By focusing on Dai Ailian’s September 1940 performance in Hong Kong and March 1946 performance in Chongqing, Wilcox shows that Dai’s choreography embodied a localized and evolving approach to representing Chinese identity, performing a Sinophone epistemology enabled by her diasporic experiences (117). She borrows from Shumei Shih’s notion of “multiply-angulaed critique,” which acknowledges multiple cultural affiliations while maintaining a critical distance from them, to fruitfully analyze Dai’s choreographies as responses to her intercultural experiences.

Chapter 7, “Choreographing Neoliberal Marginalization” by Ji Hyon (Kayla) Yuh, argues that the dramatic and physical representation of non-Korean characters on the musical stage reveals how Koreans understand race and racialized others within the current neoliberal, multicultural political economy in South Korea (136). The chapter compares different representations of two non-Korean characters, Solongos from Mongolia, and Michael from the Philippines in the musical *Bballae* (*Laundry*) and argues that these articulated differences in their choreography ultimately foreshadow their different fates in the story.

Part 3, “Militarization and Empire,” consists of another three chapters. In Chapter 8, “Masking Japanese Militarism as a Dream of Sino-Japanese Friendship,”

Mariko Okada delves into the popular Kyoto tradition of *Miyako Odori* and shows how it was turned into a tool for disseminating Japan's imperialist propaganda in the late 1930s. Demonstrating how *Miyako Odori* performances presented idyllic images of Sino-Japanese friendship at a time of Japanese full-scale invasion of China, Okada argues that such dance performances sought to provide audiences with alternative images that coincided with their dreams, which were inevitably shaped both by their own desires and by state propaganda (161).

Echoing Chapter 8, Chapter 9, "Imagined Choreographies" by Tara Rodman, analyzes an unrealized 1944 plan made by modern dancer Itō Michio for a national festival pageant to be held in the Japanese-occupied Philippines. Rodman shows how this plan synthesized Itō Michio's experiences studying in Germany and staging mass performances in the US. The chapter argues that it is precisely by attending to an unrealized project such as the Philippines pageant that a crucial facet of Itō Michio's career becomes visible, that is, choreographing ways of being in community that could transcend geography, race, and regime (170). The imagined status of Itō Michio's pageant crystalizes the collaboration between an individual's own private dreams and those of the empire, connecting the personal with a broader social and regional community.

In Chapter 10, "Exorcism and Reclamation," Ya-ping Chen reads Taiwanese contemporary choreographer Lin Lee-chen's 1995 work *Jiao (Miroirs de Vie/ Mirrors of Life)* as an exorcism of the militarized body and a reclamation of sensuous and empathic life. Chen argues that Lin Lee-chen used elements of indigenous culture and religious rites embedded in local Taiwan history to achieve such a goal. The chapter continues to examine the choreographic embodiments in *Jiao* not only within the framework of the dance's cultural and ritualistic references, but in the context of the corporeal history of twentieth-century Taiwan (186). Ya-ping Chen demonstrates that the corporeal expressions in *Jiao* were therapeutic counteractions to the subjugated and instrumentalized bodies formed by the militarized culture in Taiwan, even when the theme and content of the performance do not address the political history of Taiwanese bodies directly.

Part 4, "Socialist Aesthetics," consists of another three chapters. In Chapter 11, "Choe Seung-hui Between Classical and Folk," Suzy Kim excavates the post-1946 career of Choe Seung-hui, one of the most renowned figures in early twentieth-century East Asian dance. Kim emphasizes the theoretical and artistic depth of Choe Seung-hui's dance writings, choreography, and pedagogy, showing her engagement with transnational socialist culture and her enduring legacy in Korean dance today. The chapter concludes by illustrating how Choe's dilemma

was ultimately resolved through a renewed commitment to folk dance as the quintessential embodiment of both national form and socialist content (205). Echoing Chapters 8 and 9, this chapter further demonstrates how ideological agenda often went hand in hand with individual ambitions, connecting the personal with the political.

Chapter 12, “The Dilemma of Chinese Classical Dance” by Dong Jiang, contends that “the argument over traditional or contemporary is like a ruler or mirror that can provide artists with corrections at the right moment” (237). In Chapter 13, “Negotiating Chinese Identity through a Double-Minority Voice and the Female Dancing Body,” Ting-Ting Chang argues that ethnic minority dances such as Yang Liping’s make China more visible to the world and that the peacock dance specifically serves to reinforce an imagined transnational Chinese community in an era of globalization (242). Moreover, Chang carefully attends to the economic aspect of cultural exports such as the peacock dance, highlighting how such a cultural form remains tied to Yunnanese identity, bringing financial benefit back to the Yunnan region and its ethnic minority communities.

Part 5, “Collective Technologies,” consists of the final three chapters. In Chapter 14, “Cracking History’s Codes in Crocodile Time,” Katherine Mezur, one of the co-editors of the volume, addresses the work of Ashikawa Yoko and Furukawa Anzu, two Japanese women artists who were central to the domestic and transnational evolution of *butoh* from the 1970s to the 2000s. The chapter considers these artists’ contributions to the worlds of *butoh* within the confluences of Japan’s gender discrimination in the arts, the US occupation and postwar conditions, and issues of single authorship in collective art making processes (262). Mezur argues that the two women artists’ diverse collective performances offer examples of a decolonized corporeal politics embedded in the located temporalities of East Asia. She recognizes the importance of bringing these two women artists forward and into the light of performance historiography, which “should provoke and inspire a reimagination of *butoh*’s genealogy beyond any singular lineage and a recognition of the complexity of their diverse collective art labor” (264). The chapter’s emphasis on Ashikawa’s and Furukawa’s radical kinesthetic imaginary with their bodies, and their performing and choreographing fantastic extensions of (often posthuman) forms drawing on a wide range of cultural resources, will be echoed in Chapter 16, the final chapter of the volume.

In Chapter 15, “Fans, Sashes, and Jesus,” Soo Ryon Yoon analyzes the use of dance in anti-LGBTQ activism by right-wing Christian Protestant groups in South Korea, while also considering how queer activists and their allies reappropriate

national dance styles and imbue them with new meanings. The chapter argues that church groups choose a combination of dance and songs not simply to proselytize, but to present their nationalist political ideology with the goal of building their power in and outside of South Korea (285). According to Yoon, the queer parallel to the Christian fan dance demonstrates how a traditional performance emblematic of “Koreanness” comes to produce new affective engagements through a “queer” choreography, while the evangelical activists’ singing and dancing become a process of territorializing Christian hegemony and “proper” Koreanness at the expense of queer Koreans.

Chapter 16, “Choreographing Digital Performance in Twenty-First-Century Taiwan” written by Yatin Lin, examines *Huang Yi & KUKA* as a case study to interrogate the production of experimental dances involving collaborations between humans and digital technologies in the context of twenty-first-century Taiwan. Lin considers Huang Yi a digital performance artist representing the dot-com generation. For Lin, Huang’s choreographies were based on his broad interests, drawing on his talents in fine arts, dance, photography, videography, and computer and stage technology to map out his own dance-scape. The chapter emphasizes the power of Huang Yi’s work from the perspective of “sensorially immersed audiences,” as Huang attracts people across disciplines who are willing to engage in his performances with a new corporeal awareness (314).

Centrally concerned with decolonization, the coda of the book, “To Dance East Asia” by Katherine Mezur, one of the co-editors of the volume, suggests that what stands out across the different approaches covered in this volume is “*movement* and its powerful potential for deployment by artists” (318). Mezur drives home the argument that dancers are cultural citizens and agents of power, who, through their dance movements can lead and create social movements. The power of dance could be seen both from its promoters and those who want to put it under control: on the one hand, dancers deploy their bodies to drive action and move the world; on the other hand, the myriad forces that carefully manipulate dancing bodies to their ends, also understand their significance in propelling political and social action.

Corporeal Politics is a richly diverse and thoroughly rewarding read, one that makes the reader stop and reflect. I very much appreciate co-editor Emily Wilcox’s emphasis in the introduction on extending the critique of whiteness in US dance studies (8). At the same time, using “decentering whiteness” to frame this volume might not best serve the purpose of centering East Asian dancers and following the logic of East Asian dance histories. As to individual chapters, I find Chapter

7's focus on the South Korean musical *Bballae* less directly related to dance and choreography as it stands now. It might help to discuss the dialectics between choreography (movement) and stillness (lack of movement) early in the chapter. If these central dynamics could be raised early and with more intentionality, it might help to situate this chapter better in the volume. Similarly, to better situate Chapter 12 and its examination of the dilemma of Chinese classical dance in this volume, close reading of specific case studies could have strengthened its thematic cohesion.

The organization of the sixteen-chapter volume into five themes of contested genealogies, decolonizing migration, militarization and empire, socialist aesthetics, and collective technologies is very effective. The substantial introduction and coda powerfully emphasized anti-Orientalist and decolonizing approaches, and convincingly presented “corporeal politics” as a central thematic thread. Such an effective organizational structure could be complemented not only by better articulating the connections among the five thematic sections, but also by signaling alternatively ways of organizing the chapters in the introduction or coda, such as following the themes of dance as ritual (chapters 1, 10, 16), dance as the coming together of individual desires and collective ideologies (chapters 8, 9, 11), and dance as a dialogue between human and non-human bodies (chapters 14 and 16), among other possibilities and configurations.

With its chapter-length, theoretically informed introduction and coda, and sixteen richly referenced chapters based on original research in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and English, *Corporeal Politics* breaks new ground in East Asian Dance Studies through its dual contribution to Dance Studies and East Asian Studies. It should be read by anyone interested in dance history, the East Asian region, its rich transregional and transnational cultural histories, and the politics of dance in East Asia and throughout the world.

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