

Book review: Katherine Mezur, Emily Wilcox: Corporeal Politics - Dancing East Asia

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Coo argues that as dress in the Philippines evolved over the course of the nineteenth century, fashions for mestizos and indios converged, and “local and regional variations in clothing slowly disappeared” (p. 428). This convergence of dress, she continues, supports the claim that a sense of national identity had emerged by the late nineteenth century. This connection between fashion and national identity is one of the most interesting parts of Coo’s work, and one that could be developed further. The importance of clothing, and material culture more broadly, in helping lowland, Christianised peoples in different parts of the islands to see themselves as one people is worthy of further study.

There is also at times some slippage between Coo’s sources and her own scholarly voice. The use of phrases like “fossilized state of savagery” (p. 47) when referring to non-Christians, or the of the idiom “a monkey, however richly dressed, is but a monkey” (pp. 45–46) when discussing a play about an Aeta man wooing a Tagalog woman, without attribution to a specific source, could be misread as part of Coo’s analysis, rather than as an echo of her sources or the beliefs of nineteenth-century elites.

Ultimately, however, Coo’s work is an impressive piece of scholarship. It is thoroughly grounded in the recent scholarship on the Philippines, and she deftly weaves an understanding of the changing colonial context into her discussion of the evolution of dress. The book is also beautifully printed, with almost one hundred illustrations to track the evolution of fashion throughout the century. Her descriptions of fabric and clothing are so evocative that one can almost imagine holding samples of the textiles while reading about them. *Clothing the Colony* is an invaluable guide to the history of Philippine fashion and clothing production. This book will be essential reading for a wide audience, from scholars of the Spanish empire and colonialism in the Philippines to students of dress, fashion and textiles.

Sarah Steinbock-Pratt

KATHERINE MEZUR / EMILY WILCOX, *Corporeal Politics: Dancing East Asia*. (Studies in Dance History). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020. 372 pages, 32 illustrations, \$39.95. ISBN 978-0-472-05455-8 (pb)

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*, deserves recognition as a milestone in this growing field. Emily Wilcox’s introduction expresses the importance of a regional approach to the varied styles of dance throughout East Asia and highlights “corporeal politics” as a unifying method-

ology for the sixteen case studies collected in this truly interdisciplinary, transnational volume, with contributors based across East Asia and the United States (p. 2). Wilcox proceeds to delve into the ways in which Critical Area Studies methodologies and anti-Orientalist approaches have been able to offer insights for East Asian Dance Studies, from the late 1960s to the present.

The introduction further articulates the central methodological tenets of *Corporeal Politics* by invoking “East Asia” as a framing concept – that is, the volume’s emphasis on deep historical and cultural contextualisation, its use of original sources in East Asian languages, and its method of following the logic of East Asian history, rather than treating US or European models as universal (p. 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 politicised readings of dancing bodies in East Asia in the tradition of Critical Area Studies and Critical Dance Studies.

Radical contextualisation is at the heart of the methodology of *Corporeal Politics*. The sixteen chapters of the book are organised into five thematic parts. Part 1, “Contested Genealogies”, consists of three chapters on China. In the first chapter, “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” (p. 25).

“Mei Lanfang and Modern Dance” analyses 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 modernising force in Chinese theatre. She demonstrates how dance represented a new language of the “civilised” vitality of modernity that could be incorporated into Peking opera (p. 48). In this sense, the modernity of Peking opera 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 “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 dance (p. 68). She goes on to ex-

amine how Wu Xiaobang's concern about the unity of the mind and the body was ultimately utopian in the age of mass popular culture, in which the dancing body was irreversibly objectified and commodified (p. 73).

Part 2 is entitled "Decolonizing Migration" and consists of four chapters. The contribution written by Kazuko Kuniyoshi and translated from Japanese by Yuda Kenji emphasises Murayama Tomoyoshi's attempts to approach Western dance as an equal and from a contemporary perspective. Based on his studies in Germany, Murayama proposed "conscious constructivism" as a new concept of fine art. According to Kuniyoshi, this was Murayama's inventive way of presenting fresh and powerful visual materials, rather than a direct influence of Russian Constructivists (p. 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 part of the history of the importation of Western culture to Japan.

"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 his movement language and characterisations. 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 stylised, reformed or even "pseudo" Korean dance (p. 102). Okju Son shows that Park utilised 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 modernise 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.

Emily Wilcox, one of the co-editors of the book, asks in "Diasporic Moves" 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 localised and evolving approach to representing Chinese identity, performing a Sinophone epistemology enabled by her diasporic experiences (p. 117). She borrows from Shu-mei Shih's notion of "multiply-angulaed critique" – which acknowledges multiple cultural affiliations while maintaining a critical distance from them – to fruitfully analyse Dai's choreographies as responses to her intercultural experiences (p. 126).

The final chapter of part 2 is "Choreographing Neoliberal Marginalization" by Ji Hyon (Kayla) Yuh. The author argues that the dramatic and physical representation of non-Korean characters on the musical stage reveals how Koreans understand race and racialised others within the current neoliberal, multicultural political economy in South Korea (p. 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: "Masking Japanese Militarism as a Dream of Sino-Japanese Friendship" by Mariko Okada, "Imagined Choreographies" by Tara Rodman, focusing on the modern dancer Itō Michio, and "Exorcism and Reclamation", in which Ya-ping Chen interprets Taiwanese contemporary choreographer Lin Lee-chen's 1995 work *Jiao* (Miroirs de Vie / Mirrors of Life) as an exorcism of the militarised body and a reclamation of sensuous and empathic life.

In the first chapter of "Socialist Aesthetics" (Part 4), Suzy Kim excavates the post-1946 career of Choe Seung-hui, one of the most renowned figures in early twentieth-century East Asian dance. Echoing preceding chapters of the volume, this chapter further demonstrates how an ideological agenda often went hand in hand with individual ambitions, connecting the personal with the political.

Dong Jiang's chapter "The Dilemma of Chinese Classical Dance" contends that "the argument over traditional or contemporary is like a ruler or mirror that can provide artists with corrections at the right moment" (p. 237). In "Negotiating Chinese Identity through a Double-Minority Voice and the Female Dancing Body" Ting-Ting Chang argues that ethnic minority dances such as those of Yang Liping 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 globalisation (p. 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 finally collects three texts under the headline "Collective Technologies". Here, Katherine Mezur, the other co-editor 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 world of *butoh* within the confluences of Japan's gender discrimination in the arts, the US occupation and postwar conditions, as well as issues of single authorship in collective art making processes (p. 262). Mezur argues that the two women artists' diverse collective performances offer examples of a decolonised corporeal politics embedded in the located temporalities of East Asia. She recognises 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” (p. 264). The chapter’s emphasis on Ashikawa and Furukawa’s radical kinaesthetic imaginary with their bodies, and their performance and choreography of fantastic extensions of (often posthuman) forms drawing on a wide range of cultural resources, is echoed in Chapter 16, the final chapter of the volume. This chapter by Yatin Lin, entitled “Choreographing Digital Performance in Twenty-First-Century Taiwan”, 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.

Before this, however, in “Fans, Sashes, and Jesus” Soo Ryon Yoon analyses 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. Soo Ryon Yoon argues that church groups choose a combination of dance and songs not simply to proselytise, but to present their nationalist political ideology with the goal of building their power within and outside of South Korea (p. 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 territorialising Christian hegemony and “proper” Koreanness at the expense of queer Koreans.

Centrally concerned with decolonisation, the coda of the book, “To Dance East Asia”, again by Katherine Mezur, suggests that what stands out across the different approaches covered in this volume is “*movement* and its powerful potential for deployment by artists” (p. 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 can be seen both by its promoters and those who want to place 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 the significance of such bodies 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 Emily Wilcox’s emphasis in the introduction on extending the critique of whiteness in US dance studies (p. 8). At the same time, using “decentring whiteness” to frame this volume might not best serve the purpose of centring East Asian dancers and following the logic of East Asian dance histories. As for the individual chapters, I find Ji Hyon (Kayla) Yuh’s focus on the South Korean musical *Bballae* (Chapter 7) less directly related to dance and choreography as it now stands. 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 earlier and with more intentionality, it might help to situate this chapter better in the volume. Similarly, a close reading of specific case studies could have strengthened the thematic cohesion of the article by Dong Jiang (Chapter 12) and its examination of the dilemma of Chinese classical dance.

With its chapter-length, theoretically informed introduction and coda, as well as 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.

Liang Luo

MEGAN BRANKLEY ABBAS, *Whose Islam? The Western University and Modern Islamic Thought in Indonesia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021. 255 pages, EUR 28.85. ISBN 978-1-5036-2793-2

Whose Islam? The Western University and Modern Islamic Thought in Indonesia by US-American historian Megan Brankley Abbas examines the deep entanglement of Indonesia's state-funded Islamic higher education system with Western academies. While in recent years, much research has focused on Indonesia's religious relations with other parts of the Muslim world, mostly the Arab region, this book draws attention to the strong impact that "the West" and its academic landscape have exerted on Indonesian Islamic intellectualism, which has led to the gradual emergence of new forms of religious, academic, bureaucratic and political authority in the archipelago. Against the backdrop of Cold War geopolitics, the author presents the development of new academic Islamic study centres in Western countries and examines how they shaped the way Muslim Indonesian exchange students began to approach Islam through a Western academic lens. These Western-educated graduates came to occupy elite positions within the Indonesian university system, bureaucracy and politics, modernising the country in the model of Western narratives. These Western impulses triggered new cleavages in Indonesian Islamic thought, separating admirers of the combination of Western and Islamic scientific traditions from defenders of the classical approaches to the study of Islam.

The author expands her work beyond the Indonesian case study by linking her findings to the broader issues of Orientalism, othering and the controversial question of who should be allowed to study Islam academically. Hence, the book includes a critical reflection on the positionality of non-Muslim scholars of Islam