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FUTURES OF DANCE STUDIES

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Locating Performance

Choe Seung-hui's East Asian Modernism and the Case for Area Knowledge in Dance Studies

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In Seoul, the capital of South Korea, rare film footage of Korean dance history can be found on display at the National Theater of Korea Museum of Performing Arts, a relatively new museum that opened its first permanent exhibit in December 2009.¹ Following the museum's chronology, the first moving images the viewer encounters are those of Choe Seung-hui 최 승희 / 崔承喜 (aka Ch'oe Sŭng-hŭi / Choi Seunghye / Sai Shōki, 1911–69), a Korean dancer, choreographer, pedagogue, and dance theorist whose international career spanned the 1920s through the 1960s. The display features short clips from several of Choe's most well known solo choreographies from the late 1930s and early 1940s. In one, *Seokeguram Wall Carvings*, Choe stands still, feet together and body squarely forward, as she moves her arms in deliberately slow, symmetrical patterns framing her chest and head (Takashima and Chong 1994, 118). She begins with her arms out to the side, palms facing forward at head height and elbows at ninety-degree angles in line with her shoulders. Breathing out from her nose, she pulls her arms down from the elbows, keeping her palms high and forward. When her hands reach waist height, she circles them forward until her middle fingertips meet at abdomen level. Then, with a breath in, she raises her wrists upward and brings her hands slowly up to her chest. In another, *Hourglass Drum Dance*, Choe walks in small, slightly bouncing steps backward and forward as she plays a large hourglass-shaped drum that is suspended on the front of her body from a shoulder strap (Takashima and Chong 1994, 96). As she walks, Choe leans her upper body back at a near forty-five-degree angle to counterbalance the drum's weight while she curves her head forward, keeping her face level. Using a stick in her right hand and the fingers of her left hand, she beats out complex rhythms, alternating on the drum's two faces. Between beats, she floats her arms out to the side and up above her shoulders and at times adds spins,

all creating a feeling of lightness in the upper body typical of dance vocabularies known today as “Korean dance” (Van Zile 2001). At the end of the clip, Choe faces the audience and walks forward with both arms extended straight out to the sides at shoulder level. By placing each foot slightly across the other, she causes the drum to sway very slightly from side to side, which produces a subtle counterbalancing action in her torso and shoulders. On each step, her opposite wrist bobs forward, creating a stylized walk that matches the pulsing rhythm of the drum beat.

The two dances described above belong to the historical category of *shinmuyong*, literally, “new dance,” an innovative genre developed by Korean dancers and choreographers during the Japanese colonial era in Korea (1910–45). After being exposed to early Western modern dance via Japanese teachers, *shinmuyong* practitioners used these new choreographic approaches to reinterpret indigenous material, with Choe being among the most successful (Lee et al. 1997, 95–102). The museum summarizes this complex history in the video caption as follows: “Choe Seung-hui was a pioneer of Korean modern dance who incorporated Western modern dance techniques into native traditions. She began her career while learning modern dance, which at that point had recently been introduced to Japan, but she gradually focused on creatively reinventing Korean traditional dances. As an accomplished choreographer and educator, she performed in numerous venues around the world. She even formulated her own doctrine of Oriental dance, and her work is remembered not just in Korea but also in Japan and China.”²² The types of indigenous materials that Choe invoked in her choreography were quite diverse. In *Seokguram Wall Carvings*, Choe borrowed the imagery of guardian figures carved into the walls in an eighth-century Korean Buddhist cave temple, Seokguram (Gu Yewen 1951, 101). The costuming in this piece visually resembles the clothing of the carved figures, giving the impression of a largely exposed upper body with loose fabric draped over the arms and wrapped around the legs. Photographic documentation suggests that this dance also included a series of poses modeled after those displayed in the carvings. In *Hourglass Drum Dance*, by contrast, she took inspiration from the performances of *kisaeng*, traditional Korean courtesan-entertainers (Gu Yewen 1951, 93). The drum used in this dance, known as the *changgo*, is a standard percussion instrument in all forms of Korean indigenous music (Lee et al. 1997, 221). When played in this way, fastened to the dancer’s body as she walks, it is linked to traditional farmers’ dance and music, giving it a folkloric quality (Van Zile 2001, 194). Although both dances reference indigenous material, what makes them exemplary of *shinmuyong* is their creative reinterpretation of these sources. In other words, these are not traditional dances aimed at reproducing actually existing dance forms. Rather, they are modern



FIGURE 46. Choe Seung-hui’s *Hourglass Drum Dance*. (Reproduced with permission from the private collection of Siqintariha and the Pioneers of Chinese Dance Digital Archive, Asia Library, University of Michigan)

dances, in the sense that they emphasize the creative voice of the individual artist and adapt to the changing social conditions of modern life. As Judy Van Zile has argued regarding Choe's *shinmuyong* works, "She tried to create a kind of dance that was both distinctively Korean *and* modern" (2013, 136). Through *shinmuyong* choreographies such as *Seokguram Wall Carvings* and *Hourglass Drum Dance*, Choe thus laid the foundation for a new kind of modern dance, one that diverged from both Western modern dance and Korean traditional dance yet took inspiration from both.

As the museum caption cited above acknowledges, Choe's dance innovations had a lasting impact not just in South Korea but also across much of East Asia, a region today comprising the political entities of China (including Taiwan), Japan, North Korea, and South Korea. Despite a recent explosion of new research on Choe's work, however, this transnational component of her legacy is still not well understood. One reason for this is that scholarship on Choe has long been limited by political factors. Research on Choe was censored in South Korea until the early 1990s because of her status as a "communist defector" after 1946, when she immigrated to Pyongyang, now the capital of North Korea.³ Since the ban on Choe-related research was lifted, however, the South Korean dance community has recognized her as a pioneering figure in their field, as demonstrated by the national museum exhibit described above. South Korean recognition of Choe led to a corresponding rise in Anglophone scholarship. However, limited access to North Korean sources has caused this work to remain limited primarily to Choe's development of *shinmuyong* during the Japanese colonial era, prior to 1945 (Lee et al. 1997; Van Zile 2001,



FIGURE 47. Choe Seung-hui's *Seokguram Wall Carvings*. (Reproduced with permission from the private collection of Cui Yuzhu and the Pioneers of Chinese Dance Digital Archive, Asia Library, University of Michigan)

2013; Park 2004; Kim Young-Hoon 2006; Atkins 2010; Kleeman 2014; Romero Castilla 2017).⁴ Nevertheless, it was during the under-researched post-1945 period of her career, I argue, that Choe's transnational impact on East Asian dance modernism was most evident. After her move to North Korea, Choe's new role as an icon of socialist internationalism allowed her to develop the choreographic approaches she had originally devised for the creation of *shinmuyong* into a generalizable method for the proliferation of new forms of modern dance across East Asia.

To tell the story of Choe's post-1945 career and her role as an architect of East Asian dance modernism during this period, I employ Chinese-language sources that have previously been overlooked by Anglophone scholars. The original documentation of Choe's visits to China between 1941 and 1952 offers abundant insights into not only Choe's activities in China but also her own theoretical conceptualization of the new dance forms she was creating at the time. From as early as 1943, Chinese dance critics and scholars have been generating their own interpretations of Choe and her work, and they offer different perspectives from those available in either the South Korean or Anglophone literatures.⁵ By turning to these previously unexamined Chinese-language sources, it is possible to gain new insights into Choe's work and to better understand her impact on the development of dance in East Asia. Methodologically, such an approach demonstrates the need for deeper engagements between Asian studies and dance studies, as well as a shift from "East-West" models of globalization to consider circuits of artistic exchange across political and linguistic boundaries within Asia.

Patriot and Visionary: Chinese Views on Choe Seung-hui

On June 1, 1951, Shanghai-based dance editor Gu Yewen published the first Chinese-language book on Choe Seung-hui, less than two years after the founding of the People's Republic of China and while Choe was temporarily living in Beijing as a Korean War refugee.⁶ In contrast to predominant South Korean perceptions of Choe at the time as a pro-Japanese collaborator, Gu presented her as a heroic figure who safeguarded Korean culture in the face of Japanese colonial suppression:

[At Ishii Baku's school] she spent many years studying and researching Western dance. . . . Once she had fully mastered the techniques of modern dance, this patriotic daughter, ever faithful to her compatriots, threw herself committedly into her future path to become a performer of national dance art.⁷ As an artist in a colonized country, however, this was impossible. The Japanese fascists not only

suppressed the Korean people politically and economically, their cultural policies also obliterated and exterminated national culture and art. As a girl of fourteen or fifteen, she may not have realized her mission, namely, that in a country under the bondage of Japan, she dedicated herself to researching national dance. But whether she realized it or not, she did the work of rescuing her country's national culture and art. Moreover, she finally completed it. (Gu Yewen 1951, 4–5)

Like the South Korean condemnation of Choe, Gu's praise was motivated at least in part by Cold War politics. As socialist neighbors fighting on the same side of the Korean War, China and North Korea were allies, and this alliance called for a positive view of North Korea and its cultural representatives. Much like the Soviet ballet experts who would arrive in China a few years later, Choe was an honored guest whose artistry was to be both admired and studied by her Chinese counterparts. Gu thus interpreted her commitment to Korean-themed choreography during the colonial era as a patriotic stance against the suppression of Korean culture rather than a capitulation to imperialist desires.

Cold War alliances were not the only factor shaping Chinese views of Choe's art. Since her first tours to China during the colonial era in the early 1940s, Chinese critics had praised Choe as a cultural visionary whose performances would pave the way for dance developments in China. In a detailed review of Choe's 1943 performances in Shanghai, for example, Chinese critic Liu Junsheng wrote that Choe's creativity, especially her skillful manipulation of rhythm, had effectively launched her own school or "sect" of interpretive dance, which Liu compared to those of Duncan, Wigman, the Russian ballet, and Negro dance (1943, 26). Liu asserted that while interpretive dancers had performed in Shanghai before, their audiences had mainly been foreigners, whereas Choe attracted more local viewers. With her public performances, Liu argued, she thus became "the first to open up an atmosphere [for art dance] in China," meaning that she set an example for dance as a serious stage art, in contrast to the entertainment-oriented productions then dominating Shanghai stages (29). Finally, Liu praised Choe's theoretical sophistication. Referring to a symposium held in Shanghai in which Choe had articulated her ideas on dance creation, Liu equated her views with "the highest principles of modern art" and wrote enthusiastically of her intentions to help promote "pure art dance" in China (30).

Given that Shanghai was under Japanese occupation in 1943 and Choe was then touring as a representative of Japan, Liu's enthusiasm for Choe may have reflected local political conditions, namely, the impact of Japanese occupation on Shanghai's media. Choe's interactions with Chinese performing artists, however, suggest the existence of a genuine artistic connection that transcended

these political circumstances. Choe gave her first two performance tours in China in 1941 and 1942, shortly after she returned to Japan from her world tour. According to Korean Chinese dance scholar Li Aishun, these performances attracted positive attention from leading figures in the Chinese theater community, and Choe began to develop a strong interest in Chinese performance forms (2005, 17). During her third tour to China in 1943, Chinese media reports indicate that, in addition to Korean-themed works such as *Seokguram Wall Carvings* and *Hourglass Drum Dance*, Choe was also performing new choreography using Chinese themes, some of which were inspired by her experiences in China ("Cui Chengxi wudao" 1943; "Chongyi zhe meili" 1943). Between 1944 and 1945 Choe made extended visits to Beijing and Shanghai, both major centers for Chinese opera forms such as Peking opera and Kun opera. During this time, the Chinese media documented Choe's meetings with Mei Lanfang and other leading Chinese opera actors, as well as Choe's study of Chinese opera and her founding of a research institute in Beijing devoted to the creation of a new dance genre she called "Eastern Dance" or "Oriental Dance" (Ao 1944; Gu Xue 1944; "Haiwai tongxin" 1944; "Zuji san dazhou" 1944; "Cui Chengxi yi ge" 1945; Luo 1945; "Cui Chengxi nicong" 1945; "Riben wuyongjia" 1945; "Cui Chengxi nüshi" 1945; see also Wilcox 2018b). During the Japanese occupation of Shanghai, Mei famously refused to perform for the occupation government, growing a mustache as a form of protest. Meanwhile, Mei publicly praised Choe's artistic work, calling her "a great artist . . . [who] respects past Eastern art traditions and gives them new life" and lamenting that there were not more great dancer-choreographers like her in China (quoted in Luo 1945, 85–86). Mei personally taught Choe segments of his stage repertoire, and he even offered to perform for her privately in costume in his home (85; "Cui Chengxi zuo" 1946; Yu 1946).

When Choe returned to China for her second extended stay in late 1950, she renewed relationships with artists such as Mei and continued her previous work of researching Chinese opera movement to create new dance forms (Bai 1950; "Guonei wenyi" 1951; Ming 1951). In an essay published just before Choe's arrival, Chen Jinqing (1950), then a leading figure in the Chinese dance field, praised Choe as a model for the future development of "new dance art" (*xin wudao yishu*, 新舞蹈藝術) in China. During the previous years, the main challenges that had been facing Chinese dancers, Chen explained, were how to create new works that successfully adapted folk and traditional dance forms for the modern stage and how to create new pedagogical systems appropriate to train professional dancers for these new repertoires. According to Chen, Choe had already found ways to resolve both problems and thus offered a model for Chinese dance workers. Regarding the problem of choreography,

Chen cited specific works from Choe's repertoire and explained how in each one Choe had dealt especially deftly with traditional and folk material. She wrote, "These works all directly absorb folk styles and rhythms, then polish them and make them more beautiful. . . . [T]hese precedents are very worthy of our study" (1950, 21). Choe's system for professional Korean dance training, which she had demonstrated during a tour to China in late 1949, had also greatly impressed Chen: "We have seen a set of Choe's basic training methods; she established it by using dance movements from her own national traditions and following the life movements of the Korean people, then absorbing western scientific methods. This set of basic training is completely in a Korean national style. . . . [It] is [also] very worthy of our study, because we currently need to create our own basic training system" (22).⁸

With the support of admirers in China such as Mei, Chen, and others, Choe received an invitation from the Chinese Ministry of Culture in early 1951 to establish her own course at the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing, where she developed and implemented a dance curriculum based on Chinese opera movement ("Guonei yishu" 1951; "Zhengli Zhongguo" 1951; Fang 1951).⁹ As Chinese dance scholars such as Su Ya (2004) have documented, this course



FIGURE 48. Choe Seung-hui teaching at the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing in 1951. (Reproduced with permission from the private collection of Sigintariha and the Pioneers of Chinese Dance Digital Archive, Asia Library, University of Michigan)

had a tremendous influence on the development of dance in China, especially on what became known as Chinese classical dance (*Zhongguo gudianwu* 中國古典舞). An essay that Choe published in China's leading newspaper in 1951 in which she outlined her methodology for developing this course also remains a key theoretical text in the historiography of Chinese classical dance in China (Choe 1951; Li Zhengyi et al. 2004).

Abstracting Culture: Choe's East Asian Modernism

The period spanning the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s marked an important turning point in Choe's career. During the 1930s and early 1940s, Choe had developed a Korean dance repertoire that had brought her success among both Japanese and Western audiences, at least in part because they resonated with Orientalist, primitivist, and pan-Asian discourses about Korean culture that predominated in these communities at the time due to cultural structures of colonialism and imperialism. *Seokguram Wall Carvings* and *Hourglass Drum Dance* are both representative of this repertoire, which at the time helped construct Japanese and Western notions of Korea as exotic, backward, or familiar, depending on the situation. With the end of the Pacific War in 1945 and Korea's independence from Japan, however, a new political space opened up in which Choe's dances took on new meaning as the patriotic protection of Korean culture in the face of Japanese and later also Western imperialism. It was in part because of Cold War knowledge politics that these dances were long underexplored in Anglophone scholarship. Choe's work developed these new meanings mainly in the Soviet-allied countries of North Korea and the People's Republic of China, not in US-allied countries such as South Korea and Japan. This contributed to Anglophone scholars' tendency to locate Choe exclusively in the pre-1945 Japanese colonial period rather than in the sphere of socialist nation building.

Chinese sources are especially helpful for understanding the post-1945 period in Choe's career because they demonstrate the fundamental flexibility of her earlier repertoire to take on different meanings for different audiences, a flexibility that anticipated their translatability from the political sphere of Japanese colonialism to that of socialist nation building. During her tours in the early 1940s, what struck Chinese audiences most about Choe's performances was their demonstration of dance as a serious modern art form, something that in China was quite new and relatively unfamiliar at the time. Choe's creative adaptations of traditional dance resonated with ongoing activities of artists such as Mei, who himself had been long engaged with experiments in the modernization of Chinese theater and dance with the goal of creating new spaces for Chinese traditional performance both in China and on international

stages (Goldstein 2007; Yeh 2016). For Mei and others like him in early 1940s China, Choe's performances inspired new ideas about how to analyze and reconstruct conventional movement, as well as new ways of staging the body as an artistic medium independent from singing and speaking. Rather than interpreting Choe's works through the desires of her Japanese and Western audiences, Mei and others saw in her dances reflections of their own desires: hope for Chinese performing arts to take on new forms that would please new audiences, a desire for cultural modernity in the expression of new artistic ideas and tastes, and a desire for East Asian artists to maintain independent cultural identities at a time when such identities were under threat by both the Japanese Empire and Western cultural hegemony. Choe's repertoire fulfilled the localized desires of her Chinese audiences just as it had fulfilled those of her Japanese and Western audiences. By viewing Choe's work through the lens of Chinese sources, therefore, it is possible to recognize and appreciate how different audiences viewed her repertoire in diverse ways.

Although her activities during the 1930s and early 1940s offered the foundation for her later accomplishments, Choe's contributions to the development of East Asian dance modernism were realized most fully during the socialist period of her career, with her activities in early 1950s China offering the most useful illustration. The crux of Choe's modernism was her transformation of contextualized indigenous performance practices into movement forms that could exist independently from their traditional cultural contexts and become abstracted vocabularies used to train dancers and create new dance works. Abstraction has often been considered anathema to socialist dance creation; however, it played an important role in the construction of socialist Chinese and Korean dance form as developed by Choe (S. Kim 2017; Wilcox 2018b, 2019).

In this context, "abstraction" refers to the process by which movement vocabularies that were originally derived from existing sources were given new meanings and deployed in new arrangements for new choreographic purposes. In the context of dances derived from Peking opera, for example, Choe extracted movements that had specific theatrical meanings in the context of opera performance and redeployed them as purely formal movement sequences to train dancers. When these movements were used in new choreography, they conveyed a broad sense of cultural association, such as "Korean" or "Chinese," "popular" or "elite," or "rural" or "urban." However, their specific theatrical meanings were not necessarily maintained.¹⁰ Rather than seeking a real adherence to traditional practice, therefore, Choe mined traditional performances for their visual images, aesthetic qualities, and movement vocabularies, which she then revised, recombined, and redeployed for new purposes. In *Seokguram Wall Carvings*, we can see Choe's modernism at work in her borrowing of postures and

imagery from the Buddhist stone reliefs, producing a movement vocabulary that maintains an aesthetic connection to these cultural artifacts while allowing for a large amount of abstraction and recomposition disconnected from the original context of a Buddhist temple. Similarly, in *Hourglass Drum Dance*, we can see Choe's modernism in her adaptation of aspects of *kisaeng* dances and farmers' music and dance, such as specific walking techniques and arm, hand, and head movements, rhythmic patterns and ways of engaging with the drum, and, of course, the materiality of the *changgo* drum itself as a stage property. In this new form, however, the dance is separated from the social identity of the *kisaeng* or the context of farmers' music and dance; instead, it becomes an expressive medium of the individual choreographer.

Choe's construction of a new Chinese dance vocabulary based on the movements of Chinese opera represented a culmination of her modernist practice because it showed the transferability and applicability of her approach as a generalizable mechanism for new dance innovation across East Asia and potentially beyond. In her 1951 essay outlining her creative method, Choe highlighted the difference between her curriculum of Chinese dance movements and their operatic sources. First, she explained that the vocabulary that appeared in her curriculum represented only a selection of the full spectrum of Chinese opera movements, those that she felt were appropriate for the aesthetic and expressive goals of dance as she understood them. Movements that did not suit the needs of dance were actively weeded out and discarded. Second, she made clear that movements were analyzed and organized into a new system of categories that allowed them to be recombined in new ways. Whereas previously, operatic movements were organized in sequences according to story lines and characters, in Choe's system they were organized into sequences according to movement qualities and their usefulness as exercises to train dancers' bodily abilities. Third, she clarified that movements were expanded in scale so that they would be able to maximize the expressiveness of bodily movement as an artistic medium independent from song and speech. Through these changes, Choe argued, Chinese opera movement could retain its aesthetic cultural properties while being extracted from its embeddedness in theater and expanded to produce a new independent dance language and system for training dancers. Choe reasoned that because the creative source was still Chinese opera movement, the system would possess national distinctiveness while at the same time being a medium for new creation (Choe 1951).

Interviews with Choe published in Chinese newspapers and magazines during the 1940s suggest that she did not view the relationship between tradition and modernity in absolute terms but instead took a progressive view of cultural heritage that saw it as inherently dynamic. In a conversation between

Choe and Mei documented in a Chinese magazine in 1945, for example, Mei asked Choe whether her works were all new creations, to which she responded:

My dances, such as past examples in the style of *Bodhisattva*, *Scattered Tunes*, and *Subtle Cleanliness*, portray Eastern atmosphere. However, I do not completely follow inherited dances that previous people have passed down. Some say new creation is destructive to tradition. I rather believe that new creation has always been the normal development of tradition. In the past, our ancestors' artistic creations were passed down and became today's art traditions. The new creations of today's artists will also become the traditions of future generations. I think Mr. Mei's creations will certainly become the classical legends of the future! (Luo 1945, 86)

This understanding of tradition as renewable rather than fixed gave the national dance forms that grew out of Choe's East Asian dance modernism a different quality from those in other places where the supposedly pure and unchanging nature of national culture was more emphasized (Wilcox 2018a). The two most obvious examples of this approach in practice appear in the new forms of Korean and Chinese dance developed under Choe's guidance in socialist contexts after 1945, specifically in North Korea and the People's Republic of China. One reason Choe's approaches were so welcomed in socialist societies is their resonance with the socialist dream of devising a new form of modernity that could compete with Western capitalist models and be grounded in folk culture. Insofar as much of Choe's choreography achieved these qualities, she became the ideal architect of a new form of dance modernity for East Asian socialism.

Conclusion: Bringing Back the Area

Choe Seung-hui offers a rich case for exploring the potential of area studies for stimulating new research and approaches in dance studies. At the linguistic level, Choe's case demonstrates the need for area studies approaches because her career left traces in multiple languages. With the exception of reviews from her 1938–40 world tour, the majority of primary source materials on Choe's life exist only in Korean, Japanese, and Chinese, making knowledge of at least one East Asian language a prerequisite for in-depth primary source research on her life and work. On another dimension, because Choe is a transnational figure who mainly traversed borders within Asia, her case necessitates a shift from East–West to East–East relationships when conceptualizing and historicizing transnational phenomena such as colonialism, imperialism, diaspora,

and intercultural exchange in the context of her work. Additionally, Choe's life and career highlight the role of the Cold War in shaping historical memory, a topic that too often goes unacknowledged in US- or Anglo-centered disciplinary research, which tends to focus on and normalize historical phenomena and experiences in the capitalist world (Wilcox 2017). Choe's artistic legacy demonstrates the importance of taking seriously cultural and artistic production in socialist countries and the alternatives that production poses to capitalist modernity, especially during the twentieth century. This is particularly important in the dance field, since many dance forms and genres that exist today were developed or institutionalized in socialist contexts. Because most current and formerly socialist countries are in places that fall into the rubrics of area studies regions (the Cold War was itself a prominent factor in determining these regions in the first place), area studies training is often necessary for in-depth research on dance in socialist or formerly socialist societies.

As a dance studies scholar based in an area studies department, I have a personal investment in the power of area studies to innovate dance research. While area studies has been rightly criticized for its sectioning off of the world into nations and regions, the reverse impulse to focus on globalization and diaspora also generates its own problems (Dirlik 2010). The fields of area studies were created to support in-depth, interdisciplinary research on regions of the world outside the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. By emphasizing linguistic knowledge and expertise in local history, politics, and culture, area studies (especially in its humanistic forms) aims at forming deeply contextualized readings of culture and art outside Anglophone and Western European spaces. Area studies offers a counterpoint to the historical Eurocentrism of the disciplines by challenging historical periodizations, theoretical concepts, and social or cultural categories developed on the basis of US or European models but too often deemed to be universal. As one authority on area studies explains, the goal of area studies since the 1950s has been “to historicize and contextualize—in effect, to de-naturalize—the formulations and universalizing tendencies of the US social science and humanities disciplines which continue to draw largely on US and European experience” (Szanton 2004, 2). Whereas ethnic studies aims at something similar by focusing on the experiences of people of color residing as minorities or diasporas within predominantly white communities, area studies accomplishes this by focusing on parts of the world where people of color are the majority. While borders are important for area studies, movements across borders have also always been important. The goal of area studies, however, is to ensure that studies of border-crossing movements do not retrench Eurocentric knowledge, whether through a linguistic

emphasis on sources in English or other Western European languages or through a geographic emphasis on activities taking place in the United States and Western Europe. Too often, this has been the unintended result when a focus on diaspora studies and interculturalism becomes a substitute for area studies research.

Like many subjects in area studies, Choe's case challenges basic historical and theoretical paradigms often taken for granted or universalized in Eurocentric disciplinary narratives. John Martin, a foundational figure in the early development of theoretical and historical paradigms in US-based dance studies, included a photograph of Choe's *Hourglass Drum Dance* in his 1947 book *The Dance*. Unsurprisingly, however, he placed it in the category of "basic dance," along with almost all other dances he associated with non-Western culture, rather than in the category of modern dance (Martin 1947, 22). Dance studies today is deeply critical of Eurocentrism, racism, and other vestiges of the field's past that are reflected in Martin's outdated categorization scheme. Nevertheless, there is still work to be done in gaining a global perspective that fully realizes this critique by replacing old paradigms with new categories, ideas, and historical narratives. In the case of Choe Seung-hui, her career moved in the reverse of the developmental narrative Martin visualized in his book. The earliest dance photographs of Choe look like what we often envision today as "modern dance." Dressed in form-fitting leotards and short tunics with legs and arms exposed and expressions of seriousness or ecstasy, Choe leaps through the air, shows off her muscular and flexible body, and articulates through extended lines, pointed feet, and angular planes. For Choe, however, these dances ultimately came to represent imitation and convention rather than innovation and creativity. Whereas these dances followed in the styles of others and worked in their voices, it was in formulating dances like *Seokguram Wall Carvings* and *Hourglass Drum Dance* that Choe invented her own forms and established something new that would be imitated by others. In this sense, what looks like modern dance from a US or European perspective for Choe and her Chinese collaborators was less modern than the Korean-style modern choreographies that she started to develop in the 1930s and spent the remainder of her career expanding, implementing, and theorizing. It was in these latter forms that Choe made her mark as a modernist choreographer, dancer, theorist, and pedagogue. In Choe's case, area studies knowledge makes it possible to see the modern and the new in what, from a conventional US or European perspective, does not fit existing understandings or expectations for dance modernism. In this way, area studies helps us to locate dance in multiple histories that move in different ways.

Notes

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1. Museum display observed on June 29, 2017.
2. The full caption appeared in Korean, with a shorter summary in English. This is a transcription of the English portion.
3. On Choe's career in North Korea, see Suzy Kim (2017). On South Korean censorship, see Kim Young-Hoon (2006).
4. This research begins with her childhood in Japanese-occupied Korea. It then traces her move to Tokyo in 1926 and her work with Japanese modern dancer Ishii Baku. It culminates with her mid-1930s rise to stardom in Japan; her 1938–40 world tour of North America, Europe, and Latin America; and her activities supporting Japanese military expansion during the height of the Pacific War mobilization in 1941–44.
5. I do not speak or read Korean. My understanding of the South Korean literature is based on commissioned English translations of recent Korean-language writings published in South Korea, English-language publications by South Korean scholars, and conference panels I attended in Seoul in 2017.
6. According to a Chinese newspaper report, Choe's school in Pyongyang had been destroyed by US bombs, and two of her students had been killed (Bai 1950).
7. "National" is a translation of *minzu* 民族. Here it refers to Korea.
8. On the 1949 performances, see Chen Ji (1949) and Li Yang (1950). Chen had also studied in Choe's school in Pyongyang around 1948 (Dong and Long 2008, 731).
9. For a detailed account of this program, including testimonials from dancers who participated, see Tian and Li (2005).
10. This does not mean that the resulting new choreographies were completely "abstract" in the sense of being absolutely nonreferential. This is an area that requires further exploration, however, since formalist choreography was sometimes used to develop new dance vocabularies.

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Toward a Critical Globalized Humanities

Dance Research in Mexico City at the CENIDID

JOSÉ L. REYNOSO

In this essay I advocate for expanding dance studies' international map, delineated primarily by Europe and the United States, as I reflect on possibilities toward a broader cartography. My discussion highlights the role dance studies, as an international field of critical inquiry, plays in conceptualizing what I call "critical globalized humanities." I argue that sustained interactions among distinctive dance research initiatives around the world, like the Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información de la Danza José Limón (CENIDID) in Mexico City, is a necessary condition to the formation of critical globalized humanities as praxis of decolonial relational ethics. "Critical" signals epistemological and methodological approaches employed to reframe neocolonial impulses in "globalization" as a rhetoric that unevenly fulfills its alleged promises of different forms of prosperity and development. "Humanities" points to an academic tradition as a discursive site where cultural assumptions reflective of Eurocentric intellectual genealogies are reproduced and contested by diverse ways of thinking and being.

This is not an attempt to create autonomous spaces or imagine institutional entities where scholars exist perpetually and exclusively, resisting legacies of European neocolonization (i.e., since the arrival of Europeans in the Americas in the fifteenth century) and/or US expansionist imperialism (i.e., the annexation of Mexican territory by the United States in 1848). To different extents and levels of success, some governments and individuals actively resist while adapting aspects of those historical forces. Resistive and strategic adaptation efforts have been contextualized by the fact that Mexican postcolonial history, as well as the configuration of Latin America as a geographical region and as an idea, has been impacted by European and US influences. The CENIDID represents a case where these transnational influences *frase* with the