
In February 1959, China’s Wudao (Dance) magazine published a two-page spread introducing a new dance from the United States. Its headline reads, “Putrid Crazy Person Dance: Western Civilization as Seen Through Hula Hoop Dancing.” The spread chronicles a brief history of the hula hoop, offering a picture of US culture that corresponds with Cold War-era Maoist stereotypes of the capitalist world: a commercial venture by two US businessmen launches a hula hoop craze; media coverage spreads the craze to other capitalist countries (France, England, Japan) and even to former socialist allies like Yugoslavia; women hula hoop publicly in bathing suits; drunken street parties last until early morning; hospitals report illnesses from excessive dancing. Finally, a poem points out the underlying cause, that culture is now “a mere commodity.” A racialized cartoon captures the picture in a single, memorable image: a long-nosed man with bushy hair and a mustache dances the hula hoop; his body is contorted with hips out to one side and arms waving in the air. The caption reads, “The American Way of Life.”

While there is nothing strictly ahistorical about this account, few US dance historians would be happy to see the hula hoop held up as a representation of mid-twentieth-century US dance culture. After all, this was a time when the ballets and modern dances of George Balanchine, Jerome Robbins, Alvin Ailey, José Limón, Martha Graham, and others were being sent around the world for cultural diplomacy funded by the US State Department, billed as exemplars of “American” artistic achievement.
choice to feature hula hoop, rather than US ballet or modern dance, is especially significant given the context of the publication: Wudao was China’s top academic journal of dance research, whose articles at the time dealt with topics such as choreographic theory, dance criticism, and conservatory dance training. Reports on foreign dancers and companies were quite common in the publication, with groups from more than twenty-three foreign countries covered from its inception in 1958 to the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966.³ Yet, for the nearly thirty-year period known as the “Mao era” (1949-1976), this spread is the only major account of US dance found in a national publication in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The decadent hula hooper thus becomes the lone image standing in for a period of US dance that many scholars count as pivotal in global dance history.⁴ Such a selective reading therefore seems astonishing and highly problematic. It can be explained only through what must have been the “straitjacket” of Mao-era ideology, a Cold War vision that blinded Chinese scholars from historical realities.⁵

What is often forgotten in such a reflection is that Cold War stereotypes are more than a one-sided affair. Similarly narrow views also plague Western representations of Chinese culture, with equally problematic and ideologically motivated results. Consider what remains the most common image of Mao-era dance in English-language scholarship: the Chinese revolutionary ballerina dressed in military uniform, rifle in hand, poised in an arabesque atop pointe shoes. Like the hula hooper, this image is not ahistorical; revolutionary ballets were extremely popular throughout China during the final decade of the Mao era, and they remain a powerful reminder of that period in Chinese popular culture today.⁶ Yet, similar to the hula hooper, to treat revolutionary
ballet as the only important dance creation of Mao-era China seriously misrepresents the history of Chinese dance during this period. It is therefore troubling that whereas the hula hooper has long been replaced by fuller accounts of US dance history in China, English-language scholarship on Mao-era dance continues to fixate on the revolutionary ballets, with little change since they first captured the attention of the world in the 1970s.

Therefore, I argue that much like the hula hooper, the revolutionary ballerina tells us less about Chinese dance than it does about Cold War ideology. The persistence of the revolutionary ballerina as the dominant image of Mao-era Chinese dance culture demonstrates the ongoing power of Cold War thought shaping PRC studies.

From a historical perspective, revolutionary ballet represents only one small part of Mao-era dance creation, which practitioners and critics viewed as a break with existing practice when it first appeared. The first Chinese revolutionary ballet, The Red Detachment of Women (红色娘子军 Hongse niangzi jun), premiered in 1964, fifteen years after the start of the Mao era. Prior to this, Chinese choreographers employed by state-supported schools and performance ensembles in the PRC had developed a large repertoire of new dance works using innovative movement vocabularies derived largely from indigenous movement practices, in which the direct and large-scale application of ballet technique was rare. When elements of ballet movement such as pointe technique appeared in a few of these works, they were treated with skepticism and remained marginal to broader practice. The consensus at the time, endorsed by Maoist cultural policy, was that existing foreign ballets could be staged by Chinese dancers, but that new works should employ what were then known as “native forms” (民族形式 minzu xingshi, also translated “national forms”): newly created dance styles composed through
research into indigenous theater, regional folk and religious dances, martial arts, and etc.\textsuperscript{12} Ballet technique, which remained associated with classical European aesthetics despite its promotion by Soviet teachers, was considered the antithesis of native form.\textsuperscript{13}

Contrary to claims by some PRC-based dance scholars, it is not true that ballet dominated Chinese dance practice after 1949, whether in terms of technique, training, or repertoire.\textsuperscript{14} Before the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, ballets were performed only by a very small minority of Chinese dancers, and such performances were limited to a few major cities, including Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai.\textsuperscript{15} By contrast, the new native dance repertoire was performed by every major professional dance company and school across China, which numbered in the dozens and were found in every region.\textsuperscript{16} Evidence of this repertoire abounds in extant dance films from the era, which show no documented works composed in ballet vocabulary prior to \textit{Red Detachment}.\textsuperscript{17} Even the Beijing Dance School, the most important center for ballet training in China, taught ballet alongside native dance from the time of its founding in 1954 until the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, when \textit{Red Detachment} first appeared in 1964, it represented something unfamiliar to both audiences and critics, as reflected by the fact that reviewers at first struggled to categorize it in existing terms. Because of the extensive use of ballet movement vocabulary, and the fact that it was performed by what at the time was China’s only dedicated ballet ensemble, critics immediately categorized \textit{Red Detachment} as ballet. However, because it was a new composition based on Chinese themes, it could not be considered a “European ballet dance drama” (欧洲芭蕾舞剧 \textit{Ouzhou balei wuju}), the general term used at the time to describe foreign ballets. At the same time, because its movement vocabulary was based primarily on ballet and not on native dance, it could not
be considered a “native dance drama” (民族舞剧 minzu wuju), the name used at the time for the new narrative dances that used native forms. As a result, a new category emerged—“revolutionary ballet dance drama” (革命芭蕾舞剧 geming balei wuju)—or, as it is more commonly translated, “revolutionary ballet.”¹⁹

Although the revolutionary ballet has normally been interpreted as evidence of Soviet influence in China’s Mao-era dance culture, the historical reality is much more complex. The period when Soviet ballet artists were directly involved in the training and direction of Chinese dancers is 1954-1960. While a ballet curriculum was introduced during this time, and several foreign ballets were staged with Chinese dance students, this was also the most active period of research and creation in native dance, as well as the time when an entire Chinese-style dance curriculum was developed and implemented to take the place of ballet for Chinese dance artists. It was under the direct supervision of the Soviet ballet dancer Viktor Ivanovich Tsaplin (known in Chinese as “查普林” 1903-1968), working in collaboration with the celebrated Peking opera actor Li Shaochun (李少春 1911-1975), that students in the choreography course at the Beijing Dance School created Magic Lotus Lantern (宝莲灯 Bao liandeng, also translated “Precious Lotus Lantern,” 1957), widely considered the first full-length classical-style native dance drama. Thanks to an extant film production released by Shanghai Tianma Film Studio in 1959, we can see that Lantern used a completely different movement vocabulary and aesthetic style from the later revolutionary ballets, as discussed further below. This work became the model for new native dance dramas, of which twenty-three well-documented examples appeared between 1958 and 1960 as part of the Great Leap Forward.²⁰ A course called “Oriental dance” (东方舞 Dongfang wu), taught by four instructors from
Indonesia, was taught at the Beijing Dance School between 1957 and 1960, making Soviet ballet and character dance just two of several foreign dance styles being taught to and performed by China’s dance students during this time.\textsuperscript{21} When \textit{Red Detachment} appeared in 1964, Soviet instructors had already long-since departed from China, and the Soviet Union was considered an enemy.\textsuperscript{22} It is therefore in this later context of Sino-Soviet antagonism, not of Sino-Soviet friendship, that the emergence of the revolutionary ballets should be understood.

The idea that revolutionary ballet represents Mao-era dance and serves as evidence of Soviet influence on Chinese socialist culture is a common perception in English-language PRC studies. The maintenance of this idea, however, relies on strategic occlusions of significant and well-documented phenomena in Chinese dance history. First, it requires the occlusion of the repertoire and training programs of Mao-era native dance, which were larger, more widespread, and arguably had a more lasting influence than revolutionary ballet.\textsuperscript{23} Second, it requires occlusion of the persistently ambivalent relationship that existed between Mao-era Chinese dancers and ballet technique, an ambivalence that was encouraged by the Soviet experts themselves.\textsuperscript{24} Given the language in which the creators of the first revolutionary ballets defended their work, it is surprising that revolutionary ballet has ever been interpreted as an example of Maoist China’s unquestioned adoption of Soviet culture.\textsuperscript{25} Rather than following Soviet forms, these artists described revolutionary ballet as a radical assertion of local agency, in which they challenged their own status as perpetual students of foreign culture. In a 1965 essay, Li Chengxiang, the lead choreographer of \textit{Red Detachment}, wrote that the emergence of revolutionary ballet meant that Chinese choreographers would no longer be “running
along behind the butts of others” (gen zai renjia de pigu houbian pao). It is this attitude of not following, of radical resistance to what Li calls “blind worshipping” (mangmu chongbai) of foreign ballet, that the revolutionary ballets inherited from the earlier Mao-era dance creation. The major difference was that this resistant orientation was now being asserted by strategically employing, rather than rejecting and replacing, the ballet movement vocabulary. From this perspective, rather than viewing Mao-era dance history as a narrative about China’s adoption of Soviet ballet, it makes much more historical sense to view it as an ongoing struggle to define a specifically Chinese dance style, which both learned from and sought to reject the basic superiority of foreign models.

The fascination with revolutionary ballet and its mythologized history as a product of “Soviet influence” is, I argue, part of a persistent Cold War narrative about Mao-era Chinese culture that simplifies relationships between Chinese and Soviet practices (and understandings of these practices themselves) while systematically denying connections between Maoist culture and global anti-imperialist and anti-colonial movements, leading to an occlusion of what I call the postcolonial dimension of Chinese socialism. The postcolonial blind spot refers to this practice of Cold War anti-vision, in which China’s Mao-era postcoloniality is strategically denied or disregarded, along with any serious consideration of Mao-era cultural agents’ critical engagements with foreign cultural knowledge or their radical assertions of indigenous modernity through the creation of new, locally inspired artistic and cultural forms. The introduction of postcolonial historiography and cultural critique in PRC studies can help to overcome this blind spot. On the one hand, it helps draw new connections between activities in Maoist China and those in other parts of the world not typically associated with the Soviet Union.
or socialist culture. At the same time, it can help to identify and challenge Eurocentric and US-centric tendencies that undergird many Cold War narratives in PRC studies.

Over the course of the Mao era, Chinese artists found themselves engaging in cultural politics variously categorized as socialist, revolutionary, anti-colonial, and anti-imperialist, while being situated between and within constantly shifting geopolitical arrangements across what for lack of better titles are known as the socialist bloc and the Third World. The inconsistencies, changes, and ambivalences within these positions are as important as their alignments and commonalities. By examining the early Mao-era dance repertoire through a postcolonial lens, my goal is not to equate Maoist cultural politics with those of other postcolonial communities, nor is it to deny the connections between Maoist and Soviet cultural practices. Rather, it is to view socialism and postcolonialism, in their historical specificities and multiplicities, as mutually constitutive components in the negotiation of national culture in Maoist China. Using dance history as a case study, this paper offers a new approach to Maoist culture that challenges Cold War models and the postcolonial blind spot they have produced. It suggests new ways of examining the Mao era that acknowledge the Third World and postcoloniality as important factors in the cultural articulations of Chinese socialism.

China and the Postcolonial: Outline for a Method

In one of few recent studies to make the argument explicitly, theater scholar Claire Conceison defends the use of the term “postcolonial” to describe the People’s Republic of China, despite widespread dismissal of this label by Chinese intellectuals and PRC scholars in the post-Mao era. “I maintain that China is postcolonial,” Conceison
writes, “but in a rather complex and unorthodox sense of the term” (emphasis in original).

27 In Conceison’s account, China can be described as postcolonial for two reasons: its historical relationship to European, US, and Japanese colonialisms, and the importance of this experience in shaping its modern identity. “These colonial traumas loom large in the Chinese collective memory,” she writes, “and as with other nations demanding and recovering from withdrawal of foreign colonial powers in the latter half of the twentieth century, China’s new nationalism is drawn largely from this experience and from the continued threat of foreign (particularly American) economic and cultural imperialism.”

28 Here, the category of postcolonial is relevant for China not only because of its historical status as a “semi-colony” of the West or Japan, but also because of its contemporary relationships to the foreign, including particular ways of imagining Self and Other in the post-Mao era. China’s self-perception during the late twentieth century, Conceison argues, was intimately tied to an East-West binarism (often in which the US represents “the West”) that cannot be understood outside the context of modern colonial history. In other words, to understand China’s view of itself as presented in contemporary media and art, a postcolonial framework is both useful and necessary.

Here, I build upon Conceison’s argument by suggesting yet another way of considering the People’s Republic of China as a postcolonial space. Focusing on the pre-Cultural Revolution Maoist period (1949-1965), I ask how historical and theoretical relationships that developed between Chinese Maoism and anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements in other parts of the world shaped the formation of Chinese socialist culture in the early Mao era. Recent scholarship by historian Alex Cook and others has demonstrated the tremendous impact that Maoist cultural and political
practices had on revolutionary movements across the globe during the 1960s and 1970s.29 I contend that making sense of this impact requires examining the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial commitments present in earlier Maoist cultural practice from the 1940s through the early 1960s, when a cultural complex emerged that I call “socialist postcoloniality.” Thus, my argument is not only that revolutionary postcolonial leaders around the world were inspired by China and took Mao as a model for their own diverse local purposes, but, separately, that Chinese Maoism itself was formulated as a postcolonial endeavor, identifiable long before what Cook calls “the age of the spiritual atom bomb” begun in 1964.30 It is this earlier moment of China’s socialist postcoloniality that has often been ignored in PRC studies, a result in part of Eurocentric Cold War ideology but also of a tendency to disproportionately favor the late 1960s and early 1970s when contemplating Maoist culture and China’s connections with the Third World.

Following postcolonial studies scholar Robert Young, I define the postcolonial as a historical field of connectivity that emerged during the mid-twentieth century, when transnational processes of decolonization intersected with global leftism, creating a new arena of political movements, international exchange, and circulation of ideas and cultural forms that was based on a shared commitment to challenging the hegemony of Western European and US universalism. “Since anti-colonial revolutions were themselves increasingly in touch with each other in different ways during the course of the twentieth century,” writes Young, “a political and theoretical convergence took place that laid the basis for the field of ‘the postcolonial.’”31 Early Maoist China can be considered postcolonial insofar as it participated in this historical field and contributed to its political and theoretical processes. Postcolonialism, as a conceptual orientation,
assumes that colonialism was not coherent or consistent as a historical phenomenon but
that the choice to see similarities and areas of overlap between what are otherwise quite
different historical conditions has strategic potential for anti-colonial and postcolonial
politics. Thus, the analytical perspective of postcolonialism can inform studies of Mao-
era culture without suggesting that conditions in China before 1949 were identical to
those in other places more typically thought of as postcolonial. It is precisely such
connections, made initially by the leaders of anti-colonial movements, that provided the
inspiration and early frameworks for postcolonial critique.

For both historical and ideological reasons, the postcolonial and the Cold War are
intimately intertwined. Both reached their height during the period from the late 1940s to
the late 1960s, and both involved new reflections on the relationships between race,
global economic inequalities, and political and social justice. As the US and the USSR
emerged as new expansionist powers, their respective leaders formulated different
relationships to the postcolonial as both a geopolitical region and a set of theoretical
positions: Soviet leaders encouraged postcolonial critique and used it to fold the United
States and global capitalism into a larger idea of Western imperialism, thereby laying the
basis for transnational alliances based on positions of anti-colonial leftism; meanwhile,
US leaders discouraged postcolonial critique, characterizing twentieth-century US
expansionism in terms of freedom and democracy and denying its possible connections to
earlier histories of colonial exploitation by Western powers and their allies. The
relationship between early US civil rights activism, global anticolonial politics, and the
Cold War is especially relevant here. By the 1950s, US state leaders’ efforts to suppress
communism at home and abroad were directly undermining movements for social justice
that were based on claims about the history of race-based discrimination and the related economic, political, and cultural structures of colonialism. The suppression of postcolonial discourse was thus central to US Cold War politics during this period, just as the promotion of postcolonial discourse was central to Cold War politics of the USSR and its allies.

What I view as the postcolonial blind spot in English-language PRC studies and the related popular understandings of early Maoist China as socialist or communist but never postcolonial was fostered as part of a Cold War politics of representation developed in the United States during this period. As Christina Klein demonstrates in her book *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961*, US representations of Asia during the early Cold War favored views that sidelined colonial history and postcolonial thought. In the post-WWII era, Klein argues, “the expansion of US power… coincided—and existed in tension with—the revolutionary process of decolonization.” In this context, a practice of Cold War Orientalism emerged, in which “[US] middlebrow intellectuals repudiated imperialism as an acceptable model for East-West relations.” Instead, US leaders and middlebrow intellectuals promoted a vision of Asia firmly divided along lines of “communist” and “free,” in which the racially neutral idea of “global integration” was employed to combat socialist and postcolonial discourses about US neo-imperialism in Asia.

Maoist China’s particular blending of the socialist and the postcolonial posed one of the strongest challenges to this set of US concerns. As Young writes, “The success of the communists in China in 1949 had a similar kind of effect in colonial countries that the Bolshevik revolution had had in Europe… national liberation and socialist revolution had
been brought together.”38 Within a broader perspective of postcolonial history, Chinese Maoism offered the key bridge that allowed Soviet socialist politics to be transformed into a new form of postcolonial revolutionary struggle. In this sense, Young argues, the Maoist revolution was more important to the history of decolonization than India’s national liberation of 1947, because in departing from the Soviet model it offered a new model more suitable to colonial areas in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It is this position of Maoist China between the Soviet Union and the colonized world, I argue, that posed a particular threat to Cold War ideology promoted by US leaders and their allies and thus was never fully integrated into English-language conceptions of early Maoist history and culture. The idea of Mao Zedong as an anti-colonial leader whose relevance was not limited to the co-called “socialist bloc” was too dangerous to US interests during the early Cold War and continues to be so today. Such a view not only challenges the clear division of Asia along communist and non-communist lines, it also opens up the possibility of resistance to US-led “global integration” articulated through the politics of postcolonialism.

A historical moment that has been especially neglected in studies of early Maoist culture is that surrounding the Bandung Conference of 1955 and the short-lived non-alignment movement launched in 1961. This movement aimed to unite Asia and Africa, through a postcolonial critique that challenged the geopolitics of the Cold War.39 With China, India, and Indonesia as “key players,”40 Bandung and the non-aligned movement marked a high point of intra-Asian connectivity, as well as “the first public statement of the creation of an independent transcontinental political consciousness in Africa and Asia.”41 While it is sometimes dismissed because of its ultimate failure to fulfill its
political and economic vision, the non-aligned movement nevertheless had very real and important consequences in its time. It foregrounded anti-racism and anti-imperialism as central issues upon which to launch a critique of US capitalist hegemony, and it also marked the beginning of an effort, led in part by China, to create a new global alliance that challenged both Cold War powers. The emergence of “Third World-ism” as a positive political stance became the key expression of these commitments, and this was also an important touchstone of Maoist cultural politics during this era. In this sense, as Young argues, Bandung brought about a decisive shift in the nature of the postcolonial, from a historical field of interconnectivity to a political and ideological position.42

Signs of the so-called “Bandung moment” and its presence in early Maoist culture abound in China’s historical record. A review of major periodicals in China during the period from 1955 to 1965 shows that anti-imperialism and Asia-Africa unity are major themes in China’s public discourse during this period. Wenyi bao (Literary and Arts Gazette), which has been called “the most prestigious and influential magazine of its kind in Communist China” and “the heart of every literary movement since its inception,”43 published regular reports on Asia-Africa writers meetings between 1955 and 1965,44 in addition to introductions to literary works by Asian and African authors45 and articles promoting anti-imperialism.46 Between 1960 and 1962 alone, its regular advertisements for foreign literature in translation include writings from India, Jordan, Lebanon, Senegal, Ceylon, Iran, United Arab Emirates, and Tunisia. China Pictorial (人民画报 Renmin huabao), one of China’s most widely circulated mainstream periodicals, regularly included photographs of anti-imperialist rallies and meetings between Chinese and Third World leaders throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In the Duxiu PRC periodical database,
which includes both mainstream and academic journals, a title search for the words “imperialism” (帝国主义 diguozhuyi) and “Asia-Africa” (亚非 Ya-Fei) for the years 1955-1964 shows over eight hundred and four hundred hits each, respectively. Meanwhile, the same search for the phrase “class struggle” (阶级斗争 jieji douzheng), a concept usually more associated with Maoist culture, shows just over six hundred hits. Meanwhile, a study of Chinese textbooks from the period 1949-1966 finds anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism to be two of the most consistent themes in PRC official worldview as disseminated through educational materials during this period. This data suggests that far from being absent or irrelevant, issues related to the postcolonial were at the forefront of PRC public discourse and cultural activity long before the mid-1960s.

Despite ample historical evidence that suggests connections between Mao-era China and the postcolonial world, Chinese studies scholarship implicitly proscribes application of the category “postcolonial” to Maoist China. Since the 1990s, the “colonial modernity” thesis has been successful in breaking down the Cold War resistance to postcolonial analysis for the late Qing and Republican eras (the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). However, when postcolonial approaches have been applied to periods after 1949, they have tended to be carefully circumscribed, used primarily for the post-Mao era, minorities within China, or cases with different trajectories from the PRC proper, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan. When Chinese nationalist politics have been considered in relation to the global history of decolonization by China scholars, it has usually been in connection with early twentieth-century figures such as Sun Yatsen, rather than Mao Zedong and the early Mao era. Thus, a clear position within the field of Chinese studies that places Mao-era China within a global network of postcolonial
cultural politics remains largely elusive. As a result, China scholars find themselves inclined for ideological reasons never to ask the following quite logical question: If pre-1949 China is now regularly conceived of as “colonial modernity,” then why is post-1949 China not postcolonial?

A number of factors contribute to the maintenance of this situation, one of which is divisions within postcolonial studies. Scholars who might otherwise be sympathetic to postcolonial analysis have been dissuaded from it because of disagreements about the extent to which postcolonial thought can deal effectively with certain issues, such as political economy and the “Fourth World,” or marginalized minority populations within the nation-state. Changes in China’s intellectual climate since the 1980s have also made postcolonialism and anti-imperialism unfashionable among many PRC intellectuals, for whom distancing from these ideas becomes a strategy to mark separation from the contemporary Chinese state, aspects of the Maoist past, or the persistent underdevelopment of the Third World. With China increasingly integrated into the global capitalist system, past positions of anti-imperialism that were based on an opposition to US-led capitalist hegemony are now increasingly untenable in the new era of neoliberal postsocialism. Meanwhile, despite the ostensible end of the Cold War, US ideology continues to harshly delimit discourse on Maoist China in English-language scholarship. As Rebecca Karl observes, “In the absurd ‘good vs. evil’ passing for political analysis in some quarters these days, taking Mao and socialism seriously puts one, by taint of conflated ideological association, on the side of ‘evil’ and ‘tyranny.’” In other words, while the situation that Tani Barlow called “colonialism” has been somewhat resolved, “postcolonialism” is alive and well in China studies today.
Within this larger context, the revolutionary ballet image has become a tool for reinforcing the continued practice of Cold War Orientalist narratives about Maoist China in a nominally post-Cold War era. An example of this can be found in the 1995 essay “From ‘Beasts’ to ‘Flowers’: Modern Dance in China,” an English-language essay by the highly influential PRC-based dance scholar Ou Jian-ping. Following a common pattern for scholarship of this type, the essay takes a basic contrast between the Mao and post-Mao eras as its central theme. Applying a highly reductionist, Eurocentric analytical framework, Ou describes the entire Mao era as one of “Sino-Soviet friendship,” which witnessed the “enthusiastic, absolute, and essentially blind acceptance [of Soviet ballet].” By contrast, he argues that the post-Mao era saw China develop a closer relationship with the United States, which led to “a new openness” and the adoption of Western modern dance. Following a dualistic Cold War perspective, Ou presents the possibility of transnational dance exchange as being limited to two possibilities: Soviet ballet and American modern dance. Furthermore, he views China’s entire dance history through a teleology oriented toward a US-centered model of dance development. In a section titled “Why did it take so long?” Ou provides a series of explanations for why, in his words, “it has taken China over half a century to assimilate Western modern dance.” In Ou’s account, the image of Maoist ballet serves a very clear purpose: it offers proof of China’s backwardness—expressed as both a supposedly complete capitulation to Soviet models and a culturally determined resistance to individual expression and innovation—as justification for US intervention. As Ou explains, it was through the direct assistance of the American Dance Festival and the US-based Asian Cultural Council that modern dance began to develop in China at the end of the 1980s. Through its efforts, Ou argues,
Chinese dance may soon “join the ranks of the world-wide dance community.” In this view, “the world” means US-centered circuits of modern dance exchange.

Ou’s approach belies a number of problems that could be productively deconstructed through postcolonial historiography and cultural critique. First, one could make a comparison between the introduction of Soviet ballet during the Mao era and that of US modern dance in the 1980s. Although Ou presents one as restrictive (Soviet ballet) and the other as liberating (US modern dance), both of these phenomena led to the imposition of external structures of power, both brought about new formations of transnationalism, and both engendered complex localized reinterpretations and alternatives. Second, one could challenge the use of Western dance categories—ballet and modern dance—as the organizing themes for making sense of Chinese dance history, and instead propose the use of indigenous categories, such as native dance. Ou mentions native dance only twice in his essay, and both times he places it in parentheses. This suggests that while Ou cannot tell the story of Chinese dance without reference to these forms, he nevertheless wishes to relegate them to a space outside his dominant narrative, which is one focused on Chinese dance as a reproduction of Western (whether European, Soviet, or American) dance history. By re-arranging this relationship of priority, a postcolonial approach would place the indigenous categories at the center of the narrative. Finally, whereas Ou imagines “the world” as limited to the Soviet Union and the United States, one could instead account for other paths of transnational connectivity, looking at China’s dance development in a global context that includes parts of the world beyond the two “spheres of influence” determined by the Cold War. Rather than defining modernity and the global from this perspective, one could treat the Third World as a
global sphere of its own, looking at China’s dance development as it relates to transnational patterns of postcolonial dance culture.

In the remainder of this paper, I offer one possibility for carrying out this postcolonial counter-narrative in Chinese dance historiography. I provide a very different view from the one Ou presents, one that challenges the model of Sino-Soviet friendship, de-centers the dominance of Eurocentric dance categories, and shifts Maoist China from a global sphere defined by the Soviet Union and the United States to one defined by the field of the postcolonial. To begin, let’s examine some alternatives to the revolutionary ballerina.

**Rethinking Maoist Dance: Three Alternatives to Wu Qinghua**

Wu Qinghua is the heroine of *The Red Detachment of Women* who defined the revolutionary ballet image. As Xiaomei Chen and others have described, images of Wu standing in the ballet arabesque position on pointe were extremely common during the Cultural Revolution and became iconic of the particular version of revolutionary femininity that developed during that period. Wu is characterized by three main features: her class status as the daughter of a poor peasant, her gender status as a woman whose subjectivity is defined by revolutionary consciousness (rather than by romance or children), and her physical embodiment of the revolutionary ballet body, with straight legs, pointed feet, erect posture, and clenched fists. The story depicts Wu’s transformation from an ordinary individual to a soldier for the communist cause and her overcoming of oppression from a class enemy, the corrupt landlord.
Before the premier of *Red Detachment* in 1964, three very different heroines dominated China’s Mao-era dance stage, which offered different embodiments of Maoist femininity and Chinese revolutionary culture. These were Third Sacred Goddess (*San Shengmu*), the heroine in the 1957 dance drama *Magic Lotus Lantern* (*Bao liandeng*); Zhou Xiuying (周秀英), the heroine of the 1959 dance drama *Dagger Society* (*Xiaodao hui*); and Ke Ying (柯英), the heroine in the 1959 dance drama *Five Red Clouds* (*Wu duo hongyun*). As with the revolutionary ballets, these works were widely performed by dance companies across China, and their images were distributed using popular media, including film. Also like the later ballets, these works were performed widely for national holidays, visits by foreign delegations, and tours promoting Chinese culture abroad. Some were even studied and performed by foreign dance companies outside China. Despite their widespread popularity at the time they were created, their significant impact on later dance creation in China, and their excellent preservation in film format, these works have never been analyzed in the English-language scholarship. Furthermore, the analysis of these works in the Chinese-language scholarship, while relatively large in quantity, remains focused on issues such as historical provenance and contemporary reception. PRC dance scholars have not considered these works as expressions of postcolonial cultural politics in a transnational sphere defined beyond the Soviet Union.

The first major difference between these heroines and Wu Qinghua is in the corporeal and aesthetic ideals they embodied through the dance techniques they performed. Like nearly all other dance dramas created in China prior to 1964, these works were categorized as “native dance dramas” rather than “ballet dance dramas.” This
meant that rather than being choreographed using ballet technique, they employed newly created native movement repertoires derived from indigenous performance sources, such as folk dance, indigenous theater, and martial arts. Choreographic practice of the time stipulated that the technique used in new works of Chinese dance should correspond to the characters, stories, and settings conveyed in each work; thus, if a story was set in an ethnic minority village, it should be composed using ethnic minority folk dance; if it was based on a classic romance, it should be composed in a movement style based on historical costume drama. For Third Sacred Goddess and Zhou Xiuying, the dance techniques incorporate elements of Chinese theater, visual art, martial arts, and Han folk dance. In the case of Ke Ying, the primary movement sources are Li and Miao folk dance. The use of native technique in these works self-consciously locates them within indigenous systems of expressive codes and aesthetic standards, rather than European ones. As such, they followed the pre-1964 consensus that Chinese dance should be composed using “native forms.”

From the perspective of China’s indigenous performance and visual culture, Third Sacred Goddess presents a combination of two conventional characters: the “virtuous female” (青衣 qingyi) and the “immortal” (神仙 shenxian). Whereas Wu Qinghua’s opening scene portrays her in a dark dungeon, chained to a pole with fists clenched, Third Sacred Goddess is introduced magically coming to life atop a temple alter, her fingers poised in a Buddhist mudra, clouds and a halo painted around her (Figure 1). Her dance is composed of soft, breathy movements with swaying curves, twisting actions, and coordinated eye, hand, and torso actions, similar to what would be found in indigenous theater or a temple painting. With the tips of her fingers, she delicately plucks a blossom
from the tree outside her temple, breathing in its aroma with the spring air. Instead of rifles and sabers, Third Sacred Goddess’s props include long silk scarves, a pair of double swords, and a magic lamp. A floor-length scarf is draped over her shoulders, which she circles through the air, framing herself in curves of white fabric as she spins across the stage. In contrast to Wu Qinghua’s exposed legs, pointed feet, and straight extensions, Third Sacred Goddess’s legs are hidden beneath a long gown or pantaloons, performing tiny steps, flexed foot actions, and softened bent lines.71

In contrast to Third Sacred Goddess, who resembles the celestial moon maiden Chang’e, Zhou Xiuying is more like Hua Mulan, the legendary female warrior. Her movements are derived from the “martial female” (武旦 wudan) role type in indigenous theater, mixed with techniques adapted from martial arts and Han folk dances from the region around Shanghai, where the story is set. As the hero of a historic peasant uprising, Zhou Xiuying is portrayed as a noble, brave, and capable woman who is loved by her fellow activists and the local people. Rather than her own oppression, it is the suffering of others that motivates Zhou Xiuying, along with a desire to right injustices to her community. Her signature stance is tall and proud, with weight poised slightly forward on one foot and one arm curved in front of her body with the hand at waist-level, the wrist slightly bent and palm facing forward. A slight rotation in her spine, a lifting of the elbows out and away from the torso, and a flexed, fan-like position in the fingers, all clearly mark her movement repertoire as Chinese (Figure 2). A fierce fighter, Zhou Xiuying is adept with a number of weapons used during battle scenes in Chinese theater, including swords, batons, spears, bows, and sabers. Whether rousing the troupes or out-maneuvering an opponent, she moves with crispness, vigor, and speed, performing
tornado-like spins and lightning poses reminiscent of the female knight-errants in martial arts cinema.\textsuperscript{72}

Ke Ying, a minority heroine, has an altogether different movement repertoire from that of either Third Sacred Goddess or Zhou Xiuying. Ke Ying’s signature dance sequence contains a set of small, lilting, syncopated steps set to a three-count rhythm, which is punctuated by a small kick to one side using the bottom portion of one leg, then a slow turn executed with the upper body on a diagonal and the arms crossed partially over the chest (Figure 3). Inspiration for this choreography came from field research on Li and Miao folk dances in the Five Finger Mountain area of Hainan, where the story is set. A folk arts festival was held in Hainan the year \textit{Five Red Clouds} was created, and some of the local groups who participated in this festival also contributed to its choreography.\textsuperscript{73} The mixing of two nationality dances to compose Ke Ying’s movement style—Li and Miao—reflects Ke Ying’s identity as an ethnic Li, as well as the prevalence of Miao communities in the region where the story is set. Since \textit{Red Detachment of Women} is also set in Hainan, a ballet version of Li-style folk dance also appears in that work. However, the style is used only in select group sequences. Unlike in the revolutionary ballets, in \textit{Five Red Clouds} minority folk dance serves as the primary movement language of the entire work, used in solo scenes and duets by the major characters, as well as in group dances.\textsuperscript{74} In this way, minority dance is raised to the status of a dramatic language, rather than a colorful diversion as it appears in the revolutionary ballets.

The commitment to native dance technique apparent in these three dance dramas evinces a critical attention to form as a site for the negotiation and expression of
indigeneity in cultural politics. The assertion of native form over ballet indicates a strategic choice to privilege local knowledge and local aesthetic standards in the creation of modern Chinese dance. Furthermore, it identifies style as the primary focus in this process. Lu Jing (1918-), the founding chief editor of *Wudao (Dance)*, and a key participant in China’s national-level dance activities during the Mao years, explained this logic in an article published in 1958, in *Wudao*’s inaugural issue. Lu writes,

> Through thousands of years of effort by our ancestors, the dance art of our nationality has created its own distinctive style that expresses the people’s psychology and customs and therefore is familiar to and loved by them…. Therefore, it is necessary that we develop new China’s dance art on the foundation of inheriting native tradition. Chinese dance art must appear on the world stage through a national style that is unique to China. Only then can it become a lustrous pearl in the treasure house of world dance art.\(^7\)

Here, Lu defines “national style” as a crucial link between the past and the future: on the one hand, it inherits native traditions, building on styles that have been cultivated through generations of local creative practices, customs, and sensibilities; on the other, it imagines a future world in which China has developed its own national dance art, which becomes recognized and valued on the world stage as something that contributes to a universal, yet at the same time stylistically diverse, global dance culture.

This link between the past and the future through the idea of a national dance style is part of what constitutes the use of native technique as a postcolonial cultural strategy in Maoist China. By imagining global dance culture as something that is enriched by native dance traditions, rather than polluted or inhibited by them, Chinese
dance critics and choreographers challenged the idea that only modern European cultural formations had the capacity to become global and universal. National dance style became the means by which China inserted its own local dance practices into a transnational dance culture, placing it on an equal level with the dance traditions of other nations and peoples. By arguing that Chinese dance should present itself to the world using a national style that inherits native traditions, Lu challenges the Orientalist idea at the heart of the colonial project, in which traditional culture is constructed as a barrier to modernization and to participation in global culture. By promoting native form in new dance works, Mao-era dance artists directly challenged assumptions of colonial modernity, in which modernization was thought to require the destruction and abandonment of traditional culture. Instead, drawing on postcolonial sensibilities, they asserted the equal value of Chinese dance traditions in comparison to other dance styles, implicitly challenging the monopolization of modernity and universalism that had been claimed by Western cultural forms through the history of colonialism.

During the Mao era, both Han and minority dances were considered components of native dance tradition, and both were seen as contributing to China’s national dance style. For this reason, all three works described above are classified as “native dance dramas” in the Chinese dance taxonomy. The political transition from an empire to a nation-state that took place in China during the early twentieth century brought about a new conception of Chinese identity, in which national minorities were considered part of a new, multicultural national ethnic construct, what is known as the “Zhonghua minzu” (中华民族 Chinese nationality). This conception of a national identity that was both multicultural and ethnically defined was a central component of Chinese Communist
Party policy, which was institutionalized through policies developed during the early 1950s. Because the construction of Chinese multiculturalism through nationalities policy took place simultaneously with the construction of China’s early Mao-era dance repertoire, this repertoire embodies many of the ideals of early Chinese multiculturalism, which were often too radical to be realized fully in social practice. The inclusion of minority dance in China’s national dance training curriculum and its use as a primary movement vocabulary in many early Mao-era dance works demonstrate these new attitudes toward minority culture that emerged in the early Mao era. Thus, although the grouping together of Han and minority-identified forms under a single category of “native” is problematic from a broader historical perspective, such a grouping served the goals of the early Maoist cultural regime, which sought to assert the value of a multicultural “Chinese” dance style in place of what were perceived at the time as fundamentally “foreign” forms, such as European classical ballet.

Apart from dance form, content was also an important site for the negotiation and expression of postcolonial cultural politics in these Mao-era dance dramas. One way that a postcolonial sensibility was expressed through the content of these works was through their use of native literature. This was a common practice in dance creation of the time, and Magic Lotus Lantern is only the most well known and well documented of many examples. The story on which Magic Lotus Lantern is based, Splitting the Mountain to Save Mother (劈山救母 Pi shan jiu mu), is a popular Chinese folk legend usually dated to the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), which has a considerable tradition of adaptation in regional theater. The story incorporates religious symbols and moral concepts related to Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian sources, as well as frequently reoccurring themes in
Chinese classic and popular literature, such as filial piety, star-crossed lovers, master-disciple relationship, self-cultivation through martial arts, supernatural powers, and travel between the human and immortal worlds. By adapting this story into a modern dance drama, the creators of *Magic Lotus Lantern* asserted the importance of native literature, culture, and art as the foundation for new forms of cultural creation in Mao-era China, a concern that was echoed across the fields of literature, film, music, and visual art.\(^{80}\)

Another way that a postcolonial sensibility is expressed in these works is through their focus on anti-imperialism as thematic content. The textual introduction to the film version of *Dagger Society* sets the scene for the story as follows:

After the 1840 Opium Wars, imperialism increased its invasive and extractive impacts upon China. In order to overturn the double oppression of imperialism and the feudal court, the Chinese people carried out a long-term struggle of armed revolt. In 1851, the Taiping rebellion took place in Guangxi and responses came from many places. In August of 1853, the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal Dagger Society revolt took place in Shanghai. This film describes the story of the heroes of this revolt.\(^{81}\)

The antagonistic force in the story is collusion between an American imperialist, Yan Matai, and a Qing official, Wu Jianzhang. Yan, who is performed by a Chinese actor in whiteface, is clearly the primary villain of the story. This is demonstrated by the fact that only Yan is shown brutalizing and killing local people, including eventually the leader of the Dagger Society, and it is only when heroine Zhou Xiuying kills Yan that the battle ends and the story comes to resolution (Figure 4). Yan, an exemplar of Western imperialism in its many forms, plays multiple roles in the story. First, he is introduced as
a wealthy capitalist, overseeing a business using local labor that imports opium from the British East India Company. Later, Yan dresses as a priest and mediates several negotiations between the Qing official Wu, powerful Westerners living in Shanghai, and members of the Dagger Society. Finally, during the fight scenes, Yan appears in military uniform and gives the orders to fire canons that destroy the Dagger Society headquarters. Throughout the work, the local official Wu and his Chinese guards serve as secondary villains who act on behalf of and are protected by what is pictured as the more powerful group, Western imperialists.  

In *Five Red Clouds*, postcolonial politics are expressed in a slightly more subtle way through the work’s thematic treatment of ethnic violence, which it portrays as a form of economic exploitation, discrimination, and political suppression comparable to the enslavement of African and native peoples in colonial contexts. As with *Dagger Society*, the antagonism presented in the work has a dual quality, with both class and ethnicity playing a role. The villains in the work are a group of Guomindang (Nationalist) officers who oppress local Li people, through political intimidation, forced labor, and murders and burnings of people and their dwellings. The scene in which colonial slavery is most directly suggested occurs during the first half of the work, when a group of Li men and women are taken forcibly from their homes, chained together by the ankles, and made to carry out hard labor through the night without rest, under the supervision of armed guards. When a Li man and then Ke Ying try to resist and plead with the officers, they are locked inside a metal cage on which a sign hangs that reads “Exhibition object: Li,” on which the word “Li” is written in a large script and includes three added strokes that give it the prefix-like radical “dog” (Figure 5). As anthropologist Magnus Fiskesjö has
demonstrated, such “animal classifiers” were common in Chinese-language ethnonyms throughout much of history but were abandoned by the mid-twentieth century. Thus, in this production, the use of the “dog” classifier in the character for Li would have signified an out of date, dehumanizing view of minorities that was no longer considered acceptable in a modern, egalitarian society. Although relationships between the Guomindang and ethnic minorities were not typically described as colonial in official Maoist historiography, the assemblage of images in this particular scene—forced labor at gunpoint, ankle shackles and chains, human exhibition using a cage, and the animal classifier—together constitute a metaphorical depiction of colonial slavery, along with its connotations of racist modes of economic and political oppression. Later scenes that depict Guomindang officers using torches to burn down the residences of the Li people offer symbolic reference to race violence in the United States, at the time a common image associated with “US imperialism” in PRC discourse. At the end of the production, when the Li unite and overthrow the Guomindang soldiers, they embody a revolutionary subjectivity on the part of an oppressed group, which can be read in this context as a metaphor for anti-colonial revolution.

_Dagger Society_ and _Five Red Clouds_ were not alone in their foregrounding of imperialism and racial oppression as key themes in Chinese revolutionary culture; many new dance dramas of the early Mao era presented similar issues, often in connection with criticism directed explicitly at the United States. _Peace Dove_, a dance drama premiered in 1950 and widely documented in contemporary media (where it was criticized for employing ballet technique), depicted the US as an “imperialist warmonger” whose fight for world domination through capitalism and the atomic bomb was being challenged by
“the struggles of the people of Asia.” Several other dance dramas and large-scale music and dance works with themes of anti-US struggle and inter-Asian solidarity appeared during the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the best documented of which are *Mother Calls* (母亲在召唤 *Muqin zai zhaohuan*, 1951), *Luo Shengjiao* (罗盛教, 1952), *Fire of Fury in the Coconut Grove* (椰林怒火 *Yelin nuhuo*, 1965), and *Remain in Combat Readiness* (阵以待 *Yan zhen yi dai*, 1965). Racial violence within the United States was the central theme of the dance drama *Fires of Fury are Burning* (怒火在燃烧 *Nuhuo zai ranshao*, 1964), a pro-Civil Rights work by China’s top PLA performance company. It begins with brutality of a young black boy by a white police officer, which is followed by an anti-police rally and then a victorious battle against the Ku Klux Klan, to a setting of the UC capitol building and a flaming cross (Figure 6). In all of these works, themes of anti-colonial revolution, national liberation, and race-based social justice are mobilized and performed by Chinese choreographers and dance artists, as part of officially sponsored activities carried out under the rubric of Maoist culture.

**China in the World: Dancing Maoist Cosmopolitanism**

China’s participation in Third World anti-imperialist politics during the mid-to-late 1960s and early 1970s is relatively well known. In his introduction to *Mao’s Little Red Book: A Global History*, Alex Cook argues that the period from 1964 to 1971 marked the height of this engagement, a time when China, now in possession of the atom bomb, saw itself as the leader of a new group of countries that would ally together to oppose the Cold War system characterized by US and Soviet hegemony. In dance, this new orientation is reflected in the emergence of large-scale productions dealing with anti-
colonial revolutions and African-Asian-Latin American tricontinentalism. The 1965
dance drama *The Congo River is Roaring* (刚果河在怒吼 *Gangguohe zai nuhou*), for
example, commemorates the Congolese independence movement, and the 1965 large-
scale song and dance productions *Ode to Wind and Thunder* (风雷颂 *Feng lei song*) and
*We Walk on the Great Road* (我们走在大路上 *Women zou zai dalu shang*) both
celebrate anti-imperialist struggle in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Additional large-
scale open-air performances are reported during 1965 with captions such as “US
imperialism get out of Dominica!” and “The entire world’s common enemy US
imperialism must lose!” Global concerns clearly had a place on the Maoist dance stage
by the mid-1960s, reflecting transnational political and cultural engagement that aligned
China with the postcolonial world.

As demonstrated in the previous section, developments in early Mao-era dance
suggest that this engagement did not begin in the mid-1960s. Even before the founding of
the PRC, direct exchange between artists, as well as shared stylistic and cultural
strategies, connected Chinese dancers to the postcolonial world. This process was
especially clear during the Second Sino-Japanese war of 1937-1945, when “native form”
emerged as a central theme in Chinese Communist Party cultural policy, and
experiments with new dance styles based on indigenous forms was also taking place in
areas occupied by the Guomindang, such as Kunming and Chongqing. Characterized by
a critical stance toward elite European culture and a focus on Chinese traditional and folk
arts, the CCP’s early native form policies supported China’s first native dance movement,
a modernized, politicized folk dance style known as “new *yangge*” (新秧歌 *xin
yangge*). The native form movement, which continued and diversified through the
1940s and became institutionalized in the 1950s, established several principles that would become foundational to dance in the PRC, and to Mao-era culture more broadly. These included the central role of field research in informing new artistic creation, the commitment to making revolutionary art grounded in native (as opposed to European) aesthetic practice, and the idea that modernization was compatible with preserving China’s cultural heritage. Recognizing these concerns as a shared theme during the immediate pre- and post-1949 decades, literary scholars Bonnie McDougall and Kam Louie argue that the period from 1937 to 1965 should be understood as one continuous cultural era for modern Chinese literary and culture studies, what they call the “Return to Tradition.”

I view this era, in contrast to the more frequently examined “May Fourth” and “Cultural Revolution” periods that came immediately before and after, as China’s postcolonial period: a time of ambivalence toward Western forms, engagement with the decolonizing world, and commitment to developing traditional art into a national culture.

China’s “Return to Tradition” begun in 1937 coincided with an unprecedented explosion of new national classical and folk dance styles across the colonial and postcolonial world. Although they were products of different local conditions and histories, these movements nevertheless came to constitute a global phenomenon, in which China was a major participant during the early Mao era. This cosmopolitan dance field was postcolonial in the sense that it challenged the universalist claims of ballet and Western modern dance, instead asserting a shared focus on dance as an expression of local, culturally specific sensibilities. In other words, this was an anti-hegemonic, alternative field of global dance exchange relative to the one defined by US and Western European elite concert dance, while also being modern, innovative, and cosmopolitan.
One example of these new forms was Soviet-style state folk dance, pioneered by Igor Moiseyev’s State Academic Ensemble of Folk Dances of the Peoples of the USSR, founded in 1937. Another example was South Asian classical dances such as bharata natyam and Kathak, for which important new training institutions and performance repertoires also appeared in the late 1930s, through the work of Rukmini Devi, Tanjore Balasaraswati, and Madame Menaka. In Mexico, the year 1937 marked the first staging of Danzas Auténticas Mexicanas, which presented a new theatricalized form of nationalized folk dance known as folklorico, and in the United States it marked Katherine Dunham’s appearance on Negro Dance Evening, an important turning point in the development of a new African American modern dance inspired by research on Afrodisiassic sources. Korean dance artist Choi Seunghee, at the time a colonial subject of the Japanese empire, also launched her world tour in 1937, marking the emergence of a new tradition-inspired form of modern Korean dance.

Before 1949, some connections were established between Chinese dance activities and international dance networks, largely through the international experiences of individual dance artists. After 1949 these exchanges took place on a national scale. Between 1949 and 1962, delegations of dancers from the PRC represented China at seven international folk and classical dance competitions held at World Festivals of Youth and Students in Eastern Europe, where they performed alongside artists from around the world. The 1957 Festival had special groups for Bandung countries, Africa, the Arab world, and Latin America, and the 1962 Festival attracted representatives from 101 Asian, African, and Latin American nations, in addition to those from Europe and North America. Foreign dance companies also performed extensively in China. Between
1949 and 1959, China received sixty-five dance performance delegations from twenty-three foreign countries, an average of one every two months. Of these, thirteen came from the USSR, seven from North Korea, four each from Hungary, India, and Indonesia, three each from Bulgaria, East Germany, Japan, Mongolia, and Yugoslavia, two each from Czechoslovakia, Mexico, Poland, Romania, and Vietnam, and one each from Albania, Australia, Bolivia, Burma, Colombia, Cambodia, Great Britain, and Thailand. Algerian, Cuban, Guinean, and Congolese groups also visited between 1960 and 1964. During these visits, troupes often stayed for several weeks, touring in multiple cities and performing scores of shows for Chinese audiences. Furthermore, Chinese dance companies also carried out tours in foreign countries. Between 1949 and 1959, Chinese dance companies performed in thirty-nine foreign countries.

The majority of dance works performed during these exchanges, both by Chinese and foreign companies alike, was not ballet or Western modern dance but various new national folk and classical dance styles. All forty works for which China won awards at the World Festivals of Youth and Students dance competitions between 1949 and 1962 were works of Chinese folk and classical dance, using movement styles derived from native performance practices, not ballet. Of 113 photographs of Chinese tours by foreign dance companies published in *China Pictorial (Renmin huabao)*, China’s most widely circulating early Mao-era periodical, between 1950 and 1962, only about one quarter (28 total) are of ballet performances. About one third (36 total) are of various styles of European or Latin American folk dance, while the largest number (49 total) depicts national folk or classical-style dances from East, South, and Southeast Asia. Of these, there are nineteen images of Southeast Asian dances, including six Burmese, four
each of Indonesian and Thai, three Vietnamese, and two Cambodian. India is also strongly represented, with fourteen images total, including performances in bharata natyam, Kathak, Kathakali dance drama, and Manipuri styles, as well as hybrid and folk-style works. Thus, an examination of China’s early Mao-era dance exchange shows that a wide range of foreigners were dancing in China during the 1950s and early 1960s, among whom Soviet ballet dancers formed a small minority.

An examination of foreign dance training in China during this period shows a similarly prominent role of styles and artists from Asia. The first foreigner to significantly impact Chinese dance development in the PRC, apart from the Trinidad-born and British-trained Dai Ailian, was not a Soviet ballet teacher but rather the Japan-trained Korean dance artist Choi Seunghee (known in Chinese as Cui Chengxi 崔承喜 1911-1969). Choi’s company performed several high profile shows in Beijing in December, 1949, which were attended by representatives from China’s top theater, music, and dance companies, as well as major political leaders. In 1951-52, Choi led a “Dance Research Course” at China’s Central Academy of Drama in Beijing, where she trained many in the PRC’s first generation of professional dance artists and established the method for developing Chinese classical dance that would be used in later works like Magic Lotus Lantern and Dagger Society (Figure 7). In addition to studying Chinese indigenous theater and “new dance” (新兴舞 xinxingwu, adapted from a style of modern dance developed in Germany and Japan), the fifty-five Chinese students who took part in Choi’s course also learned works from Choi’s Korean dance repertoire and “Southern dance” (南方舞 Nanfang wu), a style Choi had developed based on South and Southeast Asian dance forms. Choi’s students went on to become performers and choreographers
in China’s top dance companies, as well as teachers in China’s first professional dance conservatory, the Beijing Dance School.

It is well known that the Beijing Dance School, founded in 1954, was the primary center for Soviet ballet training in China during the early Mao era and was also the site of China’s first ballet company, founded in 1959. What is less well known is that in addition to ballet, the School was also the national training center for Chinese classical and folk dance, as well as for a range of foreign folk and classical dance styles. The inaugural graduation performance by students at the School, held in 1955, included five ballet pieces, five works of European character dance (Russian, Spanish, Hungarian, Polish, and Yugoslav), two works of Chinese classical dance, and six works of Chinese folk dance. In 1957, the first graduating class in choreography presented several original dance dramas, the most famous of which is Magic Lotus Lantern. By the end of the 1950s, Asian dance was the primary focus of the School’s curriculum. Apart from the six Soviet instructors who taught at the school for staggered two-to-three-month periods between 1953 and 1960, four Indonesian teachers also taught at the school on long-term contracts, staying from July 1957 to August of 1959. This shift in focus to Asian dance is evident in the School’s 1958 graduation performance, which, apart from the oft-mentioned staging of Swan Lake, consisted almost completely of Asian dance styles. Apart from Swan Lake, which was the only ballet production, the program included two original Chinese dance dramas, eight short works of Chinese classical dance, eight short works of Chinese folk dance, and eight short works of foreign folk dance, which included three in Indian styles and one each from Burma, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and Romania.
The courses in Asian dance taught at the Beijing Dance School during the late 1950s laid the foundation for the creation of China’s first independent, professional dance company specializing in foreign dance, the Oriental Song and Dance Ensemble (东方歌舞团 Dongfang gewutuan).\textsuperscript{125} Officially established on January 13, 1962, the Ensemble specialized in “the study and performance of music and dance of the people of Asia, Africa, Latin America.”\textsuperscript{126} A product of the Bandung era, the company is said to have resulted from a conversation between the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and President Sukarno of Indonesia during the latter’s visit to Beijing in 1956. After seeing Chinese dancers perform an Indian dance, Sukarno reportedly suggested that a dance exchange be established between China and Indonesia, which led to the presence of the Indonesian teachers at the Beijing Dance School the following year.\textsuperscript{127} The Ensemble soon became an emblem of China’s international connections throughout the postcolonial world. In December of 1960, a number of dancers who would eventually be founding members in the troupe accompanied Zhou Enlai on a foreign relations trip to Burma, where they performed dance works representing fourteen Asian countries.\textsuperscript{128} When the company was officially established in 1962, media reports referred to its repertoire as “a product of China’s foreign exchange.”\textsuperscript{129}

The inaugural gala of the Oriental Song and Dance Company, held in Beijing during the Spring Festival holiday of 1962, presents an embodiment of China’s postcolonial cultural relations through dance during the early Mao era. Photographs from the show appeared prominently in mainstream newspapers of the time, and it was considered a major cultural event.\textsuperscript{130} The Chinese company presented dozens of musical and dance works, including folk and classical dances in the following styles: Tajik,
Japanese, Cambodian, Indian, Cuban, Guinean, Ethiopian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Burmese, Nepalese, Korean, Chinese, Mexican, Cuban, Cambodian, and Vietnamese.\textsuperscript{131} Significantly, the event opened with a Balinese dance from Indonesia, described by a contemporary critic as follows:

As the dance began, a set depicting an Indonesian-style ancestral temple appeared at the center of the stage, and sitting on the stage was a ‘gamelan’ orchestra, playing harmonious musical sounds akin to that of bells and chime stones. Under the direction of a temple officiant, six female devotees danced in a line facing the front of the stage. Fragrant incense was stuck in their hair, and their hands lifted alms bowls as they used dance to enact movements of religious ritual. By putting their palms together, performing prostrations, and subtly altering their finger positions, they expressed their hearts’ pious reverence. Later, they cast the colored flower petals from their bowls into the audience, expressing welcome and gratitude.\textsuperscript{132}

After the performance, members of the Ensemble posed for a photograph with Premier Zhou. The Oriental Song and Dance Ensemble was one of the early Mao era’s most important national performance ensembles, which both embodied and served the strengthening of China’s foreign relations with the Third World.\textsuperscript{133} Few could have anticipated that with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution just four years later, in 1966, not only would the dances performed by the Ensemble be labeled anti-revolutionary, but its dancers would be banned from the stage and laboring in political reeducation camps. In an ironic (and tragic for many established Chinese dance artists) twist of historical fate,
the rise of the revolutionary ballets meant a long period of attacks on native dance and native dance performers and choreographers.

**Conclusion**

As this postcolonial history of Chinese dance has demonstrated, although the revolutionary ballets are important, they by no means represent the extent of dance creation in Maoist China. When considering the number of works produced, their duration of popularity, and their impact on later dance practice, it is the pre-Cultural Revolution Chinese dance repertoire, consisting largely of native dance works, that constitutes the much more significant and lasting contribution of Maoist Chinese dance. In addition to full-length narrative dance dramas, hundreds of newly devised short-form dance works appeared in China during the pre-Cultural Revolution period and are well documented both in archival photographs and extant dance films. Like the native dance dramas, these works presented movement vocabularies derived from indigenous sources, rather than ballet. Between 1949 and 1962, forty of these works won awards in major international dance competitions, and as a result they achieved widespread circulation in China and abroad. Apart from being influential in its own time, this repertoire remains the stylistic foundation for Chinese dance creation and instruction in the twenty-first century, and many of its works are still performed. English-language research on this repertoire, however, remains quite limited.

One reason it is important to examine this pre-Cultural Revolution repertoire, apart from providing a more thorough understanding of Chinese dance history, is that it provides the basis for developing a global understanding of Maoist culture that extends
beyond Cold War models of alignment with either the Soviet Union or the United States. Maoist China has often been described as “isolated” and “closed off” from the rest of the world, especially in relation to the periods that came immediately before and after.\textsuperscript{137} Furthermore, even work that has sought to challenge this perception has tended to limit Maoist cosmopolitanism to interactions within the conventionally understood socialist sphere.\textsuperscript{138} Early Maoist culture in general has been largely obscured by attention to that of the Cultural Revolution, and when it has been examined, it has rarely been placed in a global context. Rather than being actively interrogated, the assumption of Maoist isolationism has been largely taken for granted and has limited new research.

Another common assumption that is challenged by attention to the early Maoist dance repertoire is the idea that Maoism was hostile to Chinese cultural tradition. As the above discussion should make clear, many forms of traditional culture were highly valued during the early Mao era, and, at least in the field of dance, there was a strong commitment to promoting native art and knowledge against the encroachment of forms that were perceived to be Western or foreign. China’s complex relationship to ballet during this period is one example of this commitment, since even when ballet was promoted by Soviet artists at the height of Sino-Soviet friendship, the Maoist dance establishment still hesitated to support its adoption as the movement vocabulary of choice new choreographic works. It was not until a form of ballet emerged that was considered sufficiently infused with local elements—namely, the revolutionary ballets—that ballet was recognized as an accepted form of Maoist cultural expression. In addition, the fact that dance creation in the early Maoist period drew on popular as well as elite forms of Chinese heritage demonstrates that native dance evinced commitment not only to class
identity (as might be suggested by the promotion of folk forms) but to the importance of traditional culture. Rather than simply following the model of Soviet state folk dance, which focused on the culture of rural peasants, Chinese dance artists developed an entire genre they called classical dance, in which *Precious Lotus Lantern* was just one in a long list of works. Showing affinities to the modernized religious and court dances of postcolonial South and Southeast Asia, this new style of Chinese classical dance incorporated components of classical theater and religious art, presenting Chinese culture as ancient, elegant, and sophisticated. Thus, rather than demolishing cultural tradition, early Maoism viewed it, in both popular and elite forms, as a necessary resource in the construction of modern Chinese culture. This formed the foundation for a type of socialism that was deeply intertwined with postcolonial concerns about native empowerment and the need to overcome colonial power structures in the area of culture.

When scholars outside the field of China studies have identified connections between Maoist China and postcolonial projects in other parts of the world, these potentially fruitful conversations have often been closed off due to persistent misunderstandings or absences within China studies research. An example of this can be seen in anthropologist Kelly Askew’s study of performance in socialist Tanzania. Through careful historical research, Askew identified direct exchanges between Chinese and Tanzanian performers on the eve of China’s Cultural Revolution. Furthermore, in her presentation of cultural policies in post-independence Tanzania, one finds striking parallels to similar policies instituted in China during the 1950s and early 1960s. Unfortunately, however, Askew is led away from a fruitful comparison because of the English-language scholarship in Chinese studies. Citing a prominent China scholar,
Askew concludes that “there was one fundamental difference that unequivocally distinguished Tanzanian cultural policy from that of either China or the former Soviet Union… [Namely,] Mao…. viewed the cultural heritage of his people from a purely negative standpoint… [and] neither Lenin nor Mao found anything worth emulating or worth preserving from their respective cultural pasts.”\textsuperscript{140} I contend that in this case an overly simplified view of Maoist cultural policy as presented in the existing specialist scholarship inhibited Askew’s ability to draw global connections. This is certainly not an isolated incident, as many scholars of other world regions depend on secondary scholarship to access knowledge about China. A similar instance occurs in a recent study of Sino-Indonesian performance encounters.\textsuperscript{141} By uncovering a space of postcolonial cultural politics and Third World cosmopolitanism not usually acknowledged in studies of modern Chinese socialist culture, this paper opens up new possibilities for these and similar future dialogues.

\textbf{Notes}

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3 A complete original collection of *Wudao* from this period was consulted in the archives of the Beijing Dance Academy.

4 See, for example, Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick, *No Fixed Points: Dance In the Twentieth Century*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

5 The straightjacket is a common metaphor in English-language depictions of Cold War socialist culture. See, for example, Stephen Eric Bronner, *Socialism Unbound* (New York: Routledge, 1990).


7 See, for example, Ou Jianping 欧建平 *Xiandaiwu* 现代舞 (*Modern Dance*) (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 1992); Zhu Liren 朱立人, *Xifang baleiwu shigang* 西方芭蕾史纲 (*Outline History of Western Ballet*) (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 2001); Liu Qingyi 刘青弋, *Xiandaiwu shigang* 西方现代舞史纲 (*Outline History of Western Modern Dance*) (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 2004).

8 Popular English-language literature has also contributed to this view. See, for example, Li Cunxin, *Mao's Last Dancer* (New York: Putnam, 2003).


10 By “ballet technique” I refer to the set of movement conventions common across the various schools of classic ballet training derived from the French and Russian traditions, which includes pointe technique, turn-out, straight leg extensions, high center of gravity, erect carriage of the upper body and spine, and a specific repertoire of movement vocabulary characterized by the *arabesque*, *bourrée*, *pirouette*, and etc.

11 See, for example, contemporary reviews of the following two works: *Peace Dove* (和平鸽 *Heping ge*, 1950) and *Fish Beauty* (鱼美人 *Yu meiren*, 1959). These are the only well-documented new works created before 1964 that used pointe technique.
The term “minzu” later became associated specifically with minority nationalities in discussions of dance form. However, prior to the Cultural Revolution it was a general term used interchangeably with “Chinese.” This usage is especially clear in the idea of “minzu wuju” (民族舞剧 native dance drama), discussed further below.

This has to do in part with the fact that the Soviet ballet masters who taught at the Beijing Dance School between 1954 and 1960 only staged pieces from the classical (pre-twentieth-century) repertoire. These included La Fille Mal Gardée (无益的谨慎 Wu yi de jinshen) in 1956, Swan Lake (天鹅湖 Tian’e hu) in 1958, Le Corsaire (海侠 Hai xia) in 1959, and Giselle (吉赛尔 Gisai’er). In addition, the women who led the ballet programs at the Beijing Dance School and the Shanghai Dance School—Dai Ailian and Hu Rongrong—were both trained by non-Soviet teachers: Dai in England and Hu in pre-1949 Shanghai. Ballet was primarily viewed as a “Western” and “European” dance style, to whom the Soviets added ideological legitimacy but not cultural redefinition. Beijing Dance Academy Annals Editing Committee, Beijing wudao xueyuan zhi (Beijing: Beijing gaodeng xueyuan, 1993); Song Mingbo 宋鸿柏 et al. Wuyuanchunqiu: shanghai wudaojia de yaolan 舞苑春秋：上海舞蹈家的摇篮 (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 2010).


For more on this, see Clark (2008), 159.

According to one account, more than sixty professional dance companies existed in China as of January, 1957. “Quanguo yinyue wudao huiyan bimu” 全国音乐舞蹈汇演闭 幕 (“Closing Ceremonies of the National Music and Dance Meeting”) Guangming ribao 光明日报 (January 24, 1957).

In addition to the three full-length dance drama films discussed below, see also Bai feng chao yang 百风朝阳 (Beijing Film Studio, 1959); Caidie fenfei 彩蝶纷飞 (Beijing Film Studio, 1963); Xuri dongsheng 旭日东升 and Dongfeng wanli 东风万里 (Ba Yi Film Studio, 1964); Dongfang hong 东风万里 (Ba Yi Film Studio et al., 1965).

Between 1957 and 1964, the School was divided into two separate technique units, one dedicated to ballet and the other to native dance. After 1961, students in the native dance program were not required to study ballet, but students in the ballet program were required to study native dance. For a brief period between 1964 and 1966 the two programs operated as independent schools. Beijing Dance Academy (1993), 91-92, 123.

To trace this shift, for example, see the following three articles, all written by major Chinese choreographers of the time: Wang Shiqi 王世琦, “Pipean yangjiaohao, tansuo minzu wuju de xin guilu” 批判洋教条, 探索民族舞剧的新规律 (“Criticize Western dogma, explore new principles for native dance drama”), Wudao 舞蹈 (Dance) 1964, no. 1 (1964): 16-22; Huang Boshou 黄伯寿, “Yong baleiwo wei geming yingxiong suxiang” 用芭蕾舞为革命英雄塑像 (“Use Ballet to Portray Images of Revolutionary Heroes”). Wudao 舞蹈 (Dance) 1964, no. 6 (1964): 36-37; Li Chengxiang 李承祥, “Poui chaungxin, wei fazhan geming de balei wuju er fendou” 破旧创新, 为发展革命的芭蕾
This number includes only those works for which headlines and images appeared in contemporary issues of *Wudao (Dance)*, China’s national dance periodical. Additional works likely also existed that did not receive this national attention. For an overview of some of the major examples, including archival photos and plot descriptions, see Zhai Zixia 翟子霞, *Zhongguo wuju 中国舞剧 (Chinese Dance Drama)* (Beijing: China World Languages Publishing House, 1996).


26 Li Chengxiang (1965), 16.


30 Cook (2014).


32 Young (2001), 16-57.

33 As Young outlines, the Soviet Union had already established itself as a leader in early postcolonial thought long before the start of the Cold War, and the formation of the Comintern in 1919, on the basis of Lenin’s theory of anti-imperialism, provided a unifying conceptual framework for global anti-colonialist movements of the mid-twentieth century. See Young (2001), 28. For a detailed discussion of this history from different regional perspectives, see Prasenjit Duara, ed. *Decolonization: Perspectives From Now And Then* (London: Routledge, 2004).

37 Klein (2003), 19-60.
38 Young (2001), 191.
41 Young (2001), 191.
42 Young (2001), 191.


See, for example, Duara (2004).
56 Rebecca E. Karl, Mao Zedong And China In the Twentieth-century World: a Concise History (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2010).
57 See note 34.
59 Ibid., 29, 34.
60 Ou (1995), 34.
61 Ibid., 32.
62 Ibid., 34.
63 Chen (2002), 36-37. See also note 9.
64 Hongse niangzi jun 红色娘子军 (The Red Detachment of Women) (Beijing Film Studio, 1971).
65 For examples of representation in popular media, see Renmin Huabao 人民画报 (China Pictorial) 1959, no. 10 (1959): 12-13; 1962, no. 5 (1962): 24-27; 1959, no. 14 (1959): 26-28 and cover; 1960, no. 16 (1960): 24-25. On dissemination of these works via film, see Dazhong dianying 大众电影 (Popular Film) 1959, no. 16 (1959): 8-9, 18-20; 1959, no. 23 (1959): 24, 33-34; 1960, no. 3 (1960): 11-12, 17-18; 1961, no 11 (1961): 17. All three works were made into films and are available today. See Bao liandeng 宝莲灯 (Precious Lotus Lantern) (Shanghai Tianma Film Studio, 1959); Xiaodao hui 小刀会 (Dagger Society) (Shanghai Tianma Film Studio, 1961); and Wu duo hongyun 五朵红云 (Five Red Clouds) (PLA Ba Yi Film Studio, 1962).
66 Feng (2002); Yu (2004); Li Xiaoxiang 李小祥, et al., ed. Zhongguo Geju Wuju Yuan yuanshi 中国格局舞剧院院史 (History of the China Opera and Dance Drama Theatre) (Hong Kong: Tianma Chuban Youxian Gongs, 2010).
67 The performance of Magic Lotus Lantern by the New Siberia Song and Dance Theater was widely documented at the time. See, for example, Zhang Xiaohu 张肖虎, “Weida de

68 See, for example, Feng Shuangbai (2002); Yu Ping (2004).

69 See, for example, Long Yinpei “Tan wuju minzu xingshi de yixie wenti” 谈舞剧民族形式的一些问题 (“Discussion on some problems in the native form of dance dramas”), Wudao 舞蹈 (Dance) 1959, no. 12 (1959): 15-16.

70 She is similar to the new “huashan” role type developed by Mei Lanfang. See Joshua Goldstein, Drama Kings: Players And Publics In the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007),123-129.

71 Bao liandeng (1959).

72 Xiaodao hui (1961).

73 On the creation process of this work and its movement vocabulary, see China Arts Research Academy (1985), 80-86.

74 Wu duo hongyun (1962).

75 Lu Jing 陆静, “Jicheng chuantong, shenru shenghuo, wei chuangzao shehuizhuyi neirong, minzu xingshi de wudao yishu er nuli” 继承传统，深入生活，为创造社会主内容、民族形式的舞蹈艺术而努力 (“Inherit tradition, enter deeply into life, work hard toward the creation of dance art that is socialist in content and national in form”), Wudao 舞蹈 (Dance) 1958, no. 1 (1958): 6-8, 7-8.


77 Thomas S. Mullaney, Coming to Terms With the Nation: Ethnic Classification In Modern China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).


79 Other major examples documented in primary sources from this period include Dao xiancao 盗仙草 (Stealing Immortal Herbs) (Central Experimental Opera Theater 1955), Liu hai kanchai 刘海砍柴 (Liu Hai Chops Firewood) (Hunan Provincial Folk Song and Dance Ensemble 1958), Shiyi he wang'en 石义和王恩 (Shi Yi and Wang En) (Tianjin People’s Art Theater 1959), Qiang qin 抢亲 (Snatching the Bride) (All-China Federation of Trade Unions Cultural Work Ensemble Dance Team 1959), Bingdilian 并蒂莲 (Twin Lotus Flowers on One Stalk) (China Railroad Cultural Work Ensemble 1959), Zhenzhu cheng de xiao gushi 珍珠城的小故事 (Little Story of Pearl City) (South China Song and Dance Ensemble 1959), Shiyi kancai 石义砍柴 (Woodcutter Shi Yi) (Tianjin People’s Art
Theater 1959), Yumeiren 鱼美人 (The Fish Beauty) (Beijing Dance School 1959), Liang shanbo yu zhu yingtai 梁山伯与祝英台 (Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai) (Central Opera and Dance Theater 1959), Manluohua 蔓萝花 (The Bindweed Flower) (Guizhou Provincial Song and Dance Ensemble 1960), Niulang zhinü 牛郎织女 (Cowherd and the Weaving Girl) (South China Song and Dance Ensemble 1960), Leifeng ta 雷峰塔 (Thunder Peak Tower) (Central Experimental Opera Theater 1960), Houyi 后羿 (Hou Yi) (Shanghai Experimental Opera Theater 1962).


81 Xiaodao hui (1961).

82 Ibid.

83 Wu duo hongyun (1962).


85 The Five Red Clouds creation team cited this scene when explaining the work’s key theme, which it described as “the Guomindang’s discrimination against national minorities.” They write, “What could be more cruel than treating the Li as non-human, categorizing them as wild animals and putting them on exhibit?” China Arts Research Academy (1985), 84.

86 Complicity with foreign imperialism and “Han chauvanism” toward minority groups were the more common accusations against Nationalists made during this period.

87 Miin-Ling Yu (2013), 689.


89 Zhai (1996), Wudao 1965, no. 3-5.

90 Xuri dong sheng (1964). For more on the context of this production, see Liu Min 刘敏, ed. Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun wudao shi 中国人民解放军舞蹈史 (Dance History of the China People’s Liberation Army) (Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi chubanshe, 2011).


92 Wudao (1965), no. 3.

95 Holm (1991); Tong Yan (2013), 80-84.
96 Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie, The Literature of China In the Twentieth Century (London: Hurst, 1997); See also Clark (2008), 6-8.
97 Universalism was a central tenet of US modern dance during the mid-twentieth century, which contrasted fundamentally with the notion of dance as localized, culturally specific practice as expressed in folk and classical dance movements. Rebecca Kowal, How to Do Things With Dance: Performing Change In Postwar America (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2010).
98 On Moiseyev’s state folk dance style as a transnational phenomenon, see Anthony Shay, Choreographic Politics: State Folk Dance Companies, Representation, And Power (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002). On the domestic conditions that precipitated this movement within the Soviet Union, see Ezrahi (2012), 49-64.
103 See, for example, the biographies of Dai Ailian 戴爱莲 (1916-2006), Liang Lun 梁伦 (1921- ), Qambarkhan 康巴尔汗 (1922-1994), Wu Xiaobang 吴晓邦 (1906-1995).
106 Tian (1962), 44. The total number of participating countries that year, according to the organization’s website, was 137. See http://www.wfdy.org/festivals/.
107 Sheng (1959), 7.

109 The Thai group that visited in 1957, for example, performed in ten cities. Li Lanying 李兰英 “Zhong tai yi jia” 中泰一家 (China and Thailand, One Family), Renmin huabao 人民画报 (China Pictorial) 1957, no. 8 (1957): 18-20.

110 These include the USSR, Hungary, Korea, Bulgaria, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Germany, Australia, India, Indonesia, Burma, Vietnam, Switzerland, Italy, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Yugoslavia, Austria, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Afghanistan, New Zealand, Egypt, Sudan, Abyssinia, Syria, Lebanon, Pakistan, Iran, Cambodia, Luxembourgh, France, Japan, Mongolia, and Iraq. Sheng (1959) 6.

111 This evaluation is based on consultation of photographic and film documentation of all but one of the works, as well as interviews with Chinese dancers who attended World Festival of Youth and Students dance competitions during this period.


113 Images of ballet performances include Czech, Mongol, Soviet, British, Bulgarian, Mexican, Japanese, Hungarian, and Cuban companies, all of which are also shown performing other dance styles.

114 This assessment is based on an analysis of physical copies of Chinese-language editions of Renmin huabao published from January 1950 to December 1962 consulted in the Library of Congress.

115 The Vallathol Narayana Menon and Uday Shankar companies both toured in China between 1953 and 1957.


117 Shu Qiao 舒巧, one of the choreographers of Dagger Society who performed the role of Zhou Xiuying in the recorded film version, was among the students in Choi’s course. For a complete list of Choi’s Chinese students, see Tian Jing 田静 and Li Baicheng 李百成, eds. Xin Zhongguo wudao yishujia de yaolan 新中国舞蹈艺术家的摇篮 (New China’s Cradle of Dance Artists) (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 2005).

Beijing Dance School, 北京舞蹈学校, was the name of the original school, which was a vocational secondary school, the equivalent of grades six through eleven in the United States. In 1978 a university-level program was created called the Beijing Dance Academy, 北京舞蹈学院. Both schools still exist today.

On the role the School played in the development of Chinese classical dance, see Li Zhengyi, 李正一, et al., Zhongguo gudianwu jiaoxue tixi chuangan fazhan shi, 《中国古典舞教学体系创建发展史》 (History of the Development of the Teaching System of Chinese Classical Dance) (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 2004).


Beijing Dance Academy Archive Editing Committee (1993), 13.

126 “Xuexi he biaoyan yafei la ge guo renmin de gewu” 《学习和表演亚非拉各国人民的歌舞》, Guangming ribao 光明日报 January 14, 1962.


Zhang Yuling 张玉玲, “Xin zhongguo ‘shiqinian’ zhongzhi yuantuan wudao tuandui zhengzhi gongneng fenxi” 《新中国‘十七年’中直院团舞蹈团队政治功能分析》, (Analysis of the Political Functions of the Centrally Administered Dance Ensembles During New
Documentation of this early repertoire can be found in the following periodicals: 

My initial interest in this repertoire came from seeing pieces of it performed and used as teaching material while conducting ethnographic field research on China’s professional dance institutions in 2007-2014.


Askew (2002), 158-159.

Jennifer Lindsay, “Performing Indonesia Abroad” in Lindsay and Liem, eds. (2012), 191-222.