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Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces. SanSan Kwan. 2013. New York: Oxford University Press. 224 pages.

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This evocatively written monograph by SanSan Kwan aims to deconstruct and map the relationships between individual and collective bodies, socio-cultural identity, politics, place and kinesthesia. This is a complex task, and one in which Kwan succeeds admirably. Juxtaposing choreographed dance and quotidian urban movement in five contrasting Chinese socio-political environments, *Kinesthetic City* examines contested constructs of Chinese identity and the ways in which “urban motion reveal(s) the character of a city” (xix). The body of the book consists of three chapters that analyze both urban kinesthesia and politically instigated dance choreographies that reflect pivotal moments in

the co-creation of national and individual identity in Taiwan, Hong Kong and the United States. These central chapters are framed by a meaty 24-page introduction that explores dance, cultural constructions of female beauty and urban kinesthesia in Shanghai, China, and a 14-page epilogue that considers diasporic movement and identity construction in Los Angeles' San Gabriel Valley. Given that the central thrust of Kwan's theoretical argument is meaningfully unraveled in these sections, both could well have been expanded into full chapters. Each of these five units would serve as excellent readings for undergraduate and graduate courses on the multivalent influences of kinesthesia, place, politics and identity, and stand as strong individual case studies of these interwoven relationships.

In the first chapter, “Vibrating with Taipei: Cloud Gate Dance Theatre and National Kinesthesia,” Kwan analyzes a choreography by Hwai-min Lin, the son of the former Minister of Culture. Entitled *Legacy*, it reflects the historical moment in 1978 when the United States dropped its recognition of Taiwan's sovereignty in favour of mainland China, embodying the angst of the Taiwanese at this emotional moment of global disregard. The work was performed 154 times from its premiere until 1999, and has been toured internationally in what Kwan aptly terms acts of “choreodiplomacy” (42). While Kwan presents an intriguing and valuable subjectivist analysis of multiple choreographies by Cloud Gate Dance troupe, the inclusion of ethnographic interviews of additional local audience members would have further enriched her interpretation.

Kwan investigates in the second chapter, “Jagged Presence in the Liquid City: Choreographing Hong Kong’s Handover,” the still, seated meditation postures of the Falun Gong political-spiritual group that has been banned by the Communist government of China, at the moment of Hong Kong’s political handover from Britain to mainland China in 1997. Here she asserts that the unusual stillness of the resolute protesters’ held postures acts as an embodied form of resistance against the silencing of their voices and spiritual practice that they anticipated in the wake of the handover of Hong Kong’s territories and the colonized bodies within. She notes perceptively that these bodies, maintaining their nearly motionless protest day after day in weather both foul and fair, are highlighted by their contrast with the frenetic movement and dizzying pace that is characteristic of Hong Kong.

The final chapter, “America’s Chinatown: Choreographing Illegible Collectivity,” explores a publicly staged community performance in the World Financial Center by H.T. Chen and Dancers, a dance troupe founded in New York City’s neglected and sequestered post-9/11 Chinatown. Their ritualized dance, entitled *Apple Dreams*, works “to reshape a city space that has been historically ghettoized, as well as traumatized by 9/11” (21), and yet has been ignored by mainstream American efforts to rebuild and support those who suffered on and after 9/11. Kwan’s careful choice of these three highly politicized sites is provocative, yet moves well beyond the common usury of politics for titillation, offering a convincing and nuanced deconstruction of the

deliberate stagings of Chinese identity at each of these specific historical moments of cultural flux.

Throughout the text, Kwan argues for a subjectivist “kinesthetic methodology” that she bases on her own bodily experiences as a pedestrian, inhabitant and sometimes dancer in each of the central sites explored, founding her argument on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of culturally learned *habitus* (1977). She presents three main intersecting forms of analysis in each chapter: “the personal-somatic, the sociopolitical and the aesthetic” (xiii). Positing a feminist approach throughout her monograph, Kwan claims the acts of perception and reading through the body to be female (Hammergren 53-69), and offers this approach to counter “in flexible ways, a masculinist reading centered on the visual and the textual” (xxx). Her acceptance of a binary division in which males are not body-centered and females are not verbal/textual is troubling—the opposite position is often claimed, but these counterarguments are not explored here. This is particularly difficult to buy into in the context of Chinese cultural analysis, in which gender is traditionally understood as a fluid and relativistic construct, as represented by the symbol of the *taiji*. It is understood therein that an aspect of *yin* (female) always exists in *yang* (male) and vice versa, while *yin* and *yang* are engaged in a continual process of becoming one another. The simplicity of gender binaries is rejected in such contexts.

Kwan is far more successful and nuanced in her eloquent deconstruction of the binaries presented by the city

of Shanghai itself. Of Shanghai's East-West and traditional-modern dichotomies, Kwan argues persuasively that, "Shanghai moves with, against, through, around, and over the binaries such that it overcomes them even as it incites them" (xxxiii). It is in such moments that we see Kwan at her theoretical best.

In her preface, Kwan examines the provocative work of transgendered Shanghaiese dancer and choreographer Jin Xing, and in particular Jin's "Shanghai Beauty" (2005), in which the dancer dons traditional Beijing opera costume and makeup. The simple binaries accepted above become complicated in the analysis of a transgendered individual's representation of cultural perspectives on female beauty. Given her reference to Jin's transgender transformation in "an ideologically rigid regime" (xxix), it would be helpful to explain for the non-Chinese music specialist that male actors portraying female characters, and more recently female actresses portraying male characters, is standard practice in Beijing opera. Although Kwan does an admirable job explaining the "layers of concealment that go into displaying a beautiful woman" in this context, I would also quibble slightly with her repeated suggestion that the "layer of white makeup (applied for Beijing opera) is a good base from which to better reveal one's features" (xxxi). In truth, artificial stage features are traditionally created in Beijing opera: a tiny red makeup mouth, long tightly taped back black makeup eyebrows, and an artificially drawn and shaded nose are characteristic, in addition to accentuation of one's natural eye shape with heavy eyeliner.

Kwan notes astutely that "(r)eferences to old Shanghai create significant cultural capital" (xxvi), and indeed the old colonial buildings along the Bund—aesthetic anomalies against which the rest of the city and country must be read—are heralded as "must see" tourist attractions for both Chinese and foreign visitors. It might have been useful here to connect the commodification of ancient and historical China by the modern Chinese government to Mao Zedong's 1942 *Talks at the Yenan Forum*, where he famously outlined his aim to put all art to the use of the Communist revolution and the China of the future, making the past serve the present, and things foreign serve China (Mao 21-22). This is relevant, too, in the reading of Jin's contemporary re-imaginings of Beijing opera forms.

Indeed, while there are a few moments of unresolved theoretical contradiction, Kwan's review of related theoretical literature is in itself one of the pleasures of the book. With its focus on the relationship between choreographed and everyday urban movement, the cross-pollination of individual and collective bodies, both motion and stillness as political acts, and an impressive theoretical breadth, SanSan Kwan's nuanced work offers something for everyone. The richness of ethnographic detail herein, Kwan's astute choice of pivotal moments in the socio-political lives of three geographically dispersed sovereignties and a sense of prose that is at times exquisite, render *Kinesthetic Cities* a monograph of import that will be dog-eared from multiple reads, each one resonating at length and in different ways for the careful reader. 🌸

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Island Songs: A Global Repertoire.

Edited by Godfrey Baldacchino. 2011. Landham, MD, Toronto, and Plymouth, UK: The Scarecrow Press 297 pp.

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Since the times of Malinowski and Mead, island cultures have been a favourite focus of ethnographic studies. They have been sought out by biological scientists for similar reasons: it was assumed that their isolation and independent evolution made them ideal natural laboratories. But the world is much more closely connected today than a century ago: people and their ideas flow between islands and continents with little resistance. In this day and age, is there anything distinctive about the music cultures of islands? The authors contributing to this new book believe we can indeed learn from them. They maintain that island cultures, and

their songs in particular, can expose patterns and commonalities relating to communities, music, change, and the flow of ideas around the globe, making them ideal locations to observe and critique the dynamics of globalization.

In recent decades, sociologist Godfrey Baldacchino has been a key figure in the emerging discipline of island studies, which may be defined as “the global, comparative and interdisciplinary study of islands on their own terms” (<http://www.islandstudies.ca>). Baldacchino founded the *Island Studies Journal*, organized conferences and published books in this emerging field including *A World of Islands* (2007), *Bridging Islands* (2007), and *Island Enclaves* (2010), all of which explore relations between island cultures and societies and their geographic conditions. In *Island Songs: A Global Repertoire*, edited by Baldacchino, the writers aim to “provide a global review of how island songs, their lyrics and their singers engage with the challenges of modernity, migration, and social change—uncovering common patterns despite the diversity and local character of their subjects.”

Although island music-making takes many forms and functions, the studies in this book demonstrate that song plays a central role in island identity and cultural well-being. The fifteen chapter contributors represent a wide swath of global island song traditions from the Caribbean, Atlantic Canada, Europe, Oceania, and beyond, and the authors come from a variety of disciplines including ethnomusicology, sociology, anthropology and geography. These studies not only serve as “bridges