

# Dance and Ideology in North Korea: Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi and Her Response to Criticism

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## Abstract

Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi (J. Sai Shōki) was the most celebrated Korean dancer of the twentieth century. In the 1930s, she developed a set of dances for the new stages of urban Korea, Japan, and beyond that showcased elements taken from Korean tradition, particularly from “folk” dances (*minsok muyong*). In 1946, after Korea's division at the end of the Pacific War, she moved to Pyongyang, where her dances became the foundations of North Korea's “national” dances (*minjok muyong*). She rose to prominence, until in 1957, together with her husband An Mak, she was attacked for being bourgeois. She was stripped of her seat on the Supreme People's Assembly. Ch'oe's experience shines light on how national dances were established as ideological control was rolled out in North Korea. But there is a second side to her story: in 1957 and 1958, in her response to criticism, she adopted a blinkered approach. She resisted control and the mechanism—later known as “literary art theory” (*munye iron*)—of its delivery, and this sealed her fate. Although temporarily reprieved, her name disappeared completely from North Korean programs and from newspaper and journal accounts about dance in the early 1960s, and within a few years she was dead.

**Keywords:** North Korea, folk dances, national dances, ideology, Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi

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## Introduction

Ch'oe Sünghŭi (J. Sai Shōki) is broadly considered the most significant twentieth-century Korean dancer.<sup>2</sup> In the 1930s she—alongside others—developed a set of dances for the stages of new urban theaters in Korea, Japan, and beyond that combined elements taken from Korean tradition, particularly from “folk” dances (*minsok muyong*),<sup>3</sup> with more modern, Western-inspired styles. Her dances (or, more precisely, her versions of dances) form a central part of what in South Korea is still typically referred to as *sin muyong* (new dance). Her dances also became the foundations for North Korea’s “national” dance (*minjok muyong*) after she moved to Pyongyang in 1946, following Korea’s division at the end of the Pacific War, and settled there.

In Pyongyang in 1957, Ch'oe was attacked for being bourgeois.<sup>4</sup> This article explores the attack on Ch'oe, together with her fightback, and how, reprieved in the early 1960s, she continued to promote her approach to dance choreography until she disappeared from view: did she die of illness, as the North now claims, or was she purged again and shot for failing to conform, as journalists and scholars have suggested? Exploring this episode allows a reassessment of Ch'oe's legacy, illustrating in particular how North Korea's national dance (*minjok muyong*), as it continues today as part of national culture (*minjok munhwa*) and together with its theoretical and practical apparatus, was assembled. My discussion aims to shed light on how and why artists trained during the Japanese colonial period prior to 1945 were purged and removed when they did not—or were claimed not to—fully comply with the new ideology for literature and arts, and how and why they were replaced by a new generation of supposedly proletarian artists.

## Ch'oe Sünghŭi

Ch'oe was born on 24 November 1911 into an upper-class family reduced in status by her father's alcoholism and misfortune, and she graduated from Sookmyung Girls' School in Seoul. After showing promise as a singer, in early 1926 she encountered the Japanese modern dancer Ishii Baku (1886–1962) and, most likely introduced by her brother, Ch'oe Sŭngil, who had studied aesthetics at Nihon University, she followed him back to Japan. In Korea, dance had long been associated with courtesans (*kisaeng*), and not surprisingly her family, except for her brother, are thought to have opposed her move to Japan. The 27 March 1926 *Maeil sinmun* (Daily Newspaper) reported on Ch'oe's decision, stating that Sookmyung School also considered its honor would be damaged if its graduates pursued dance as a career. Ch'oe studied with Ishii for three years, returning

to Seoul in 1929 and setting up a dance institute. She continued to work with Ishii, on and off, for a further five years. Ishii had initially studied ballet at the Imperial Theater (Teikoku Gekijō) in Tokyo but over time came to doubt its value to a modern Japan geographically distant from ballet's European heartland.<sup>5</sup> It is thought that he was intrigued by the modernity of the American dancer Isadora Duncan and the Swiss-originating *eurythmie* of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, since, between 1922 and 1925, he travelled to Europe. In Germany he encountered Mary Wigman's expressionist *Ausdruckstanz* works,<sup>6</sup> and it is generally agreed that this led him to develop his own style of narrative dance, a style which when combined with elements of local dance he considered suitable for Japan.

Ch'oe, in turn, absorbed Ishii's influence. In the early 1930s, she began to fuse Korean aesthetics to his dance grammar, creating a blend suitable for Korea, where new dances were needed as new theaters opened and where a demand was growing for dances with a distinct Korean flavor. However, a further influence on Ch'oe is regularly noted, since she introduced demonstrably Korean elements after encountering Han Sōngjun (1874–1942), who was experimenting with Koreanesque choreographies. She may well have worked with Han for one or more brief periods (Han Kyōngja 2008, 247; other scholars indicate she worked with him for “one week,” “several weeks,” “forty days,” and so on), although some, including her student and sister-in-law Kim Paekpong (b.1927), dispute this. And her autobiography—which stands witness to the considerable success she quickly achieved since it was written when she was just twenty-six years old—states she never learned Korean dance from any single dancer. This does not surprise, though, since modernity is a multifaceted beast; within it, experimentation, and the questioning of inherited traditions, was common across the globe throughout the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> The Japanese colonial period in Korea was a time when questions swirled as to whether traditions had any place in the contemporary world, although Ch'oe's early success was partly due to her utilization of Korean elements, in what Atkins describes as the “exotic familiar.”<sup>8</sup> Van Zile sums up Ch'oe's approach: “She tried to create a kind of dance that was both distinctively Korean *and* modern.”<sup>9</sup> Her fame quickly spread, often under the Japanese pronunciation of her name, Sai Shōki. Toward the end of the 1930s she embarked on a two-year tour to America and Europe;<sup>10</sup> in the United States, she was richly rewarded for a five-month performance contract with the Russian-born impresario Sol Hurok (1888–1974). She also worked as a model, famously as a muse for Picasso, but in 1939, she evacuated from Europe on the liner *Kashima Maru* due to the impending war. After returning to Asia, she continued to dance, travelling between Japan, Korea, and China.

Ch'oe had married the Tokyo-trained Russian literature scholar and political activist An Mak (born An P'ilsŭng) in 1931. Following the division of Korea at the end of the Pacific War, he crossed to the northern zone. Ch'oe followed him, possibly—as O Sejun argues on the basis of a 1946 article Ch'oe wrote for the *Minju ilbo* (*Popular Daily*) newspaper—because she shared his left-wing views.<sup>11</sup> Quite apart from their marriage, an equally plausible reason for the move was because, when she returned to Seoul from Shanghai in spring 1946 and requested help from the United States' military government in control of the southern zone to set up a dance school, she was rebuffed. This was reported at the time by the United States' officer for cultural matters in Seoul, the pianist and later music professor Ely Haimowitz.<sup>12</sup> Ch'oe, with Kim Paekpong, took a fishing boat northwards, camouflaging herself in peasant clothes and landing near Nampo, the port to the west of Pyongyang.<sup>13</sup> Soviet cultural advisers helped her set up a school in Pyongyang, the Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi Muyong Yŏn'guso (Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi Dance Study Institute). Here, her approach to dance was core to pedagogy, hence allowing it to continue after her death, notably through her daughter An Sŭngja (b.1932) but also through institute graduates. Also, while many of her earlier dances had been solos, in Pyongyang she mostly choreographed group dances, often working with her own troupe. In 1956, her institute was merged with the Pyongyang Music School to form the Pyongyang Music and Dance College, with her husband An Mak serving as its first dean.

Ch'oe became “an icon of socialist internationalism.”<sup>14</sup> She encouraged new forms of modern dance to emerge beyond Korea, including in China. In fact, her connections to China predate her move to Pyongyang. In Beijing (Beiping) in 1943 she sought training from Peking opera star Mei Lanfang and proposed creating a new Chinese dance style based on opera forms, and a year later she set up, in Beijing, an Oriental Dance Research Institute. Then, in 1950, she took refuge in Beijing to escape the Korean War from November 1950 until October 1952, working with Mei and also with the Kunqu actors Han Shichang and Bai Yunsheng. The communist government invited her to relocate her dance institute from Pyongyang to Beijing, and she established a dance research course (the 崔承喜舞蹈研究班 Cui Chengxi wudao yanjiu ban) at the Central Academy of Drama (中央戏剧学院 Zhongyang xiju xueyuan).<sup>15</sup>

She also travelled to Moscow and elsewhere in the Soviet bloc. In 1951, her Korean troupe won first prize at the East Berlin Youth Festival for her “*Chosŏn ŭi ōmŏni*/Mother of Korea.” But what should have been a triumphant return to Pyongyang soured when she was targeted for criticism. A campaign had begun against writers and artists who had migrated to the North from Seoul, and Ch'oe's choreography was attacked as being insufficiently political, while she was

personally attacked because of what was claimed to be her promiscuity.<sup>16</sup> She sought and received protection from the northern leader, Kim Il Sung.<sup>17</sup>

This, however, proved to be only a temporary reprieve. An had become critical of Pyongyang's increasing isolationism from the global socialist community by 1957, as the leadership worked to establish a narrowly defined nationalism. He criticized Kim's Juche Speech and, as Kim moved to take tighter control, such criticism could not be tolerated. Although Ch'oe's dances were able to meet the nationalist agenda, and although she had experienced contemporary dance and developments in mass dance elsewhere, she criticized new dance works that involved mass performance, in particular "Ch'öllima/Flying Horse," on the grounds that artistic skill and artistic expertise were being diluted. Both Ch'oe and An were attacked, and as performances of "Ch'öllima" went ahead, Ch'oe's work "Pak Hyönc'h'ön," based on a historical figure, was criticized for lacking "revolutionary optimism."

This time, Ch'oe could expect no protection from Kim Il Sung. She was stripped of her seat on the Supreme People's Assembly while her husband, An Mak, was removed both as a deputy minister and as dean of the College. However, Ch'oe still had supporters. Sö Manil celebrated her life and detailed her dances in six sequential issues of the journal *Chosön yesul* (조선예술 Korean Arts), beginning in October 1957.<sup>18</sup> In 1958, Ch'oe was allowed to publish two book-length accounts, one of her own dances and the second containing her choreographies for stage dances; the first of these will be discussed at length below.<sup>19</sup> She served on the editorial board of *Chosön yesul* until November 1958, and then her name disappeared from its pages. Her disappearance is striking given the journal's focus: although at first its coverage included music, there was already a separate music journal, *Chosön ïmak* (조선음악 Korean music), published under the aegis of the Union of Korean Composers (*Chosön chakkokka tongmaeng* 조선 작곡가 동맹), hence *Chosön yesul* quickly shifted its focus to dance and theater (music was only reintroduced to its pages as *Chosön ïmak* ceased publication at the beginning of 1968).

Indicative of her rehabilitation, her name reappeared in *Chosön yesul* in June 1961, when the journal published a three-page article authored by her.<sup>20</sup> The attack on her immorality, however, returned in March 1962. Initially, this seemed not to affect her position, and she was able to publish a volume of dance choreographies for children in 1963.<sup>21</sup> Seven further articles by her appeared in *Chosön yesul* between June 1962 and November 1966, and while these indicate she was back at the centre of the northern dance scene, examining them reveals she continued to resist accepting all state directives on art.<sup>22</sup> In each article, she was described as an *inmin paeu* (인민 배우 people's artist), a significant honorary

award she had been given in 1955.<sup>23</sup> She was, though, permitted to celebrate her approach to dance and dance choreography. Hence, in the June 1961 article she returned to her earlier “*Taedong kangbanesŏ*/Taedong Riverside” to argue that it reflected both the socialist victory and the paradise that North Korea’s capital had become (the Taedong river runs through Pyongyang). Again, her April 1965 article positioned “traditional” dance alongside creative dance, while two articles in July 1965 and September 1966 defended solo and small-scale works rather than massive displays and the by-then favored spectacles.<sup>24</sup>

That support for her was strong is evident from her October 1965 article, where she was introduced not only as a people’s artist but as the Korean Dance Federation National Committee chair. Her article was suitably laudatory, praising the flowering of dance during the era of the Korean Worker’s Party.<sup>25</sup> In the same vein, the final article published by her, in the journal’s November 1966 issue, proclaimed that Korean dance art reflects the struggles of the nation.<sup>26</sup> But, by then, the latitude she had been permitted in the articles had fatally damaged her. Her final two articles no longer named her as chair of the federation. Her name was no longer given in (known) dance performance programs. The *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper in Tokyo reported that both Ch’oe and An had been arrested in November 1967, and rumors circulated that both had been executed. This remained the belief beyond North Korea’s borders into the new millennium.<sup>27</sup> Then, in May 2005, a North Korean newspaper announced that 40 of her dances had been revived.<sup>28</sup> Five years later, a VCD showcasing a series of her dances was distributed at the international-facing 2010 April Spring Arts Festival in Pyongyang. Photographs of her gravestone in Pyongyang began to be circulated, its inscription stating that she had died on August 8, 1969, from ill-health; it is not known when this was erected. At some point, her grave was moved to its current, elevated position in the Mount Taesŏng Revolutionary Martyrs’ Cemetery (대성산 혁명 련사릉 Taesŏngsan hyŏngmyŏng ryŏlsarŭng).

Meanwhile, in South Korea, because Ch’oe had moved to the North in 1946, mention of her name was banned until the late 1980s. In the early 1990s, North Korean dancers performed in Seoul as part of a rare artistic exchange, and at a conference held at the Academy of Korean Studies I listened as southern dance scholars identified Ch’oe’s legacy in the “*K’al ch’um*/Knife dance” that had been performed. Scholars began to research her.<sup>29</sup> Still, a South Korean commission in 2008 ruled that Ch’oe should be considered a collaborator with the Japanese colonial authorities. Indeed, her staged versions of folk dances can be interpreted as a mirror of Japan’s curation of Korean folklore and archaeology, through which the colonialists sought to identify something of Japan’s pre-modern past.<sup>30</sup> But much as with other Korean writers and artists, maintaining a career that

brought reasonable financial rewards during the decades of occupation necessitated negotiating with the Japanese authorities and often required the creation or performance of works that celebrated Japan.<sup>31</sup>

### Changing times and a new ideology: *Juche* and *Ch'öllima*

To understand the attacks on Ch'oe, I must first outline how ideology emerged that impacted and controlled artistic production. During the first decade of North Korea's existence, and as the embers of the Pacific War died down, artists and intellectuals were allowed some independence; they enjoyed considerable latitude as Soviet advisers cultivated cultural and educational development. Excluding those who had been anti-Japanese guerrillas (who Lee Chong-Sik has remarked were “preponderantly of the illiterate and indigent”<sup>32</sup>), the writing and artistic community was split between four groupings that broadly mapped onto factions jockeying for power:<sup>33</sup> a large contingent of southern artists and writers—many of whom had trained in Japan (and some of whom had worked in Japan) during the colonial period—who had settled in Pyongyang from 1945 onwards; those born or living in northern territories before 1945; leftist intellectuals who had returned from China (some of whom had been with the Chinese Communists at Yan'an); and a group of Soviet Koreans, some of whom had been sent back to Pyongyang by the Soviets. The latter looked to Moscow for direction, but what they received was not, according to Szalontai, substantial.<sup>34</sup> Art criticism tended to follow factional lines, drawing on Confucian hierarchical norms to ensure a “patrimonial functioning of the cultural apparatus.”<sup>35</sup> Controls on artistic production began to be enacted. The Central Committee, for example, in March 1947 established censorship mechanisms on the grounds that art should henceforth educate the people in socialism. To an extent, the North Korean situation mirrored but compressed what had been the case in the Soviet Union, where latitude and avant-garde approaches were initially permitted but where, in the late 1920s, the culture commissar and playwright Anatoly Lunacharsky began to restrict artistic freedom, and where prescription became normal with the 1930s' roll out of socialist realism.

The attack on Ch'oe in 1957 and its aftermath reflected a marked shift in approach: henceforth, production was to sublimate aesthetic artistry beneath an emerging ideology which, over time, came to be justified through what is typically referred to in North Korea as “literary art theory” (*munye iron*) or, through its association with *juche* (*chuch'e*) philosophy, as “self-reliance literary art theory” (*chuch'e munye iron*). The shift was signalled by Kim Il Sung's speech, “On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing *Juche* in Ideological Work” (hereafter, the “*Juche* Speech”), delivered on December 28, 1955,<sup>36</sup> and

the implications began to be worked out through the *Ch'öllima* “flying horse” campaign (the *Ch'öllima undong*), a campaign ostensibly about mass mobilization which began, according to official North Korean accounts, in 1956.

The Juche Speech reveals that North Korean ideology had drifted from the Soviet model. The speech is often considered to have had a slow burn,<sup>37</sup> and Brian Myers questions whether it marked a watershed at all,<sup>38</sup> but it quickly began to impact the performing arts. An article by Kim Hiyōl about “national” (*minjok*) art in the September 1956 inaugural (*ch'angganho*) edition of the journal *Chosŏn yesul* reported how juche addressed issues in national culture, demanding that creators of art should not merely be cosmopolitan (that is, learning from foreign practice) but must always reflect the Korean people (that is, practice nationalism).<sup>39</sup> Juche was, however, omitted from Ch'oe Sünghū's comparison of global directions in dance with national dance, carried in the October 1957 edition of the same journal.<sup>40</sup> It was also missing from her 1958 account of national dance, *Chosŏn minjok muyong kibon* (조선 민족 무용 기본 The Basis of Korean National Dance), her most significant volume. This, surely, was deliberate, but can conceivably be considered part of how artists and writers were expected to work out the implications of speeches and directives, and how they did so through the pages of their journals. This is the conclusion I draw from the parallel journal for music, *Chosŏn ūmak* (Korean Music), where juche was not mentioned so far as I have found until the July 1958 issue, when the composer Kim Wŏn'gyun (1917–2002) explored what a juche direction in music should be.<sup>41</sup> Then, indicating how juche was already considered to have led to advances in national music culture, seven articles in the journal's June 1959 edition, including one that introduced “model” songs by the composer Sin Tosŏn (1924–1975), explored it.<sup>42</sup> The patchy coverage indicates an ongoing discussion: what should the new ideology mean for creative practice?

The divergence of the new ideology from Soviet practice became more obvious with the roll out of *Ch'öllima*. The campaign was ostensibly about mass mobilization, and in some ways it continued what began as the North Korean version of the Soviet Stakhanovite movement when a Korean train engineer, Kim Hoeil, was championed in the late 1940s as the equivalent to the Soviet miner Stakhanov who had reputedly shifted 102 tons of coal in a single shift. But the campaign was more than a mere continuation. The normal interpretation is that it began as a reaction to Soviet reforms after the death of Stalin. These had been confirmed by Khrushchev's February 1956 “secret” speech, and summer 1956 saw members of the Chinese and Soviet factions in Pyongyang attempt to set up a collective leadership that would limit Kim Il Sung's authority. This was much as some Chinese communists had sought to do to limit Mao's authority; Pyongyang always closely watched its neighbor.<sup>43</sup>



Commentators, however, disagree about exactly when *Ch'öllima* began. Myers writes that it was backdated to 1956 in a deliberate ploy by later northern historians to distance it from the parallel Chinese movement—which, in turn, also marked China's divergence from Soviet machinations.<sup>44</sup> Cheehyung Kim states that the earliest written reference to *Ch'öllima* dates from 1958, and that its work team element does not predate the next year, 1959.<sup>45</sup> However, in 1958 Kim Wŏn'gyun and Cho Kilsök (1926–1996) co-wrote a song, “*Urinün ch'öllima t'ago tallinda/Ride and Run Our Ch'öllima*,” suggesting it was already well established. Still, the first mention of the campaign I have found in the journal *Chosŏn ūmak* is a short text in the January 1959 edition which tells how “workers had risen up” five years previously, that is, in 1955.<sup>46</sup>

*Ch'öllima* harnessed the image of a mythical horse (*ma*) able to gallop a daily thousand (*ch'ŏn/ch'ŏl*-) “miles” (*ri/li*); each “mile,” though, much shorter than the imperial measure. The Korean peninsula north to south is around 1,200km and is measured in both the North's “*Aegukka/Patriotic Song*” (with music by Kim Wŏn'gyun) and the South Korean equivalent (“*Tonghae mulga*,” with music by Eaktay Ahn [1911–1965]) as 3,000 *ri*, so the horse could theoretically cover around 400km daily. The image may have been taken from a fourteenth-century Chinese novel but surely links back to Turkic legends about richly caparisoned flying horses that possessed amazing stamina.<sup>47</sup> The campaign made subservience to state leadership ordinary and everyday. Analogous to Mao's “Mass Line,” it evolved what Andrew Walder refers to as “organized dependence,” through which workers became reliant “economically on their enterprises, politically on the part of management, and personally on supervisors.”<sup>48</sup> Through the monolithic *yuil sasang* ideology, it gave Kim Il Sung paramount authority. “The reason for this was simple,” writes Frank Dikötter in his recent exploration of dictators, because,

few people in predominantly rural countries like Russia, China or [North] Korea ... understood Marxism-Leninism. Appeals to the leader as some sort of holy figure were more successful than the abstract political philosophy of dialectical materialism that a largely illiterate population in the countryside found hard to comprehend.<sup>49</sup>

*Ch'öllima* can be interpreted through the parallel Chinese movement, but it can also be considered to retain the tripartite Soviet division of *narodnost*, *klassovost*, and *partiinost*, as *inminsŏng* (people-mindedness), *kyegŭpsŏng* (class-mindedness), and *tangp'asŏng* (party-mindedness). If we take the latter as a starting point, then *juche*, which literally means “subject,” folds the three aspects together into what Jorgenson summarizes as “culturally specific ethnic nationalism,”<sup>50</sup> and then opens them out to shine a spotlight on Kim Il Sung's unsurpassable brilliance

while, at the same time, maintaining that people are, as workers, the masters of the revolution.

Taken together, the campaign and the working out of the speech unleashed purges against the Soviet faction and any others who might threaten Kim Il Sung's leadership, including artists and writers. In the previous paragraphs I have mentioned three composers, Sin Tosön, Kim Wön'gyun, and Cho Kilsök. All three had reason to quickly fall into line, because all three had in preceding years been sent to study in the Soviet Union (Cho to Leningrad in 1948, and Sin and Kim, under a cultural exchange agreement Pyongyang signed with Moscow in 1949, to Moscow in 1949 and 1952 respectively). Much the same applied to Ch'oe Sünghüi, due to her activities in and links to both China and the Soviet bloc, although, as I explore here, she proved much less compliant. Juxtaposing *juche* with *Ch'öllima* required literature and art to be ordinary and everyday but also exceptional. This required ideological conformity, which rendered literary art monothematic, retaining inherited genre conventions but redefining aesthetics away from the vagaries of artistic excellence. Simply put, this is not what Ch'oe's dances, and her pedagogy, were about.

Conformity would be, once *juche* became part of the state's constitution in 1972, measured through "seed theory" (*chongjaron*). The latter links to Kim Jong Il and his intervention in film creation and is given its fundamental exposition in the first chapter of Kim's *On the Art of Cinema*.<sup>51</sup> It requires the incorporation of ideology and its premises, relating to the people, party, and leadership; didactic content rather than aesthetic and technical elements are considered to give artistic success.<sup>52</sup> Seed theory left no space for artistic factions; creativity was constrained. Ch'oe Sünghüi's dances, and her writings, however, enshrine creativity.

Literary art was also required to reflect socialist realism. Soviet socialist realism emerged in a 1933 essay by Maxim Gorky and was taken up by Stalin at the 1934 First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers. Commentators typically identify five aspects: reflection (in which ideology frames reality), typicality (the historical dialectic), revolutionary romanticism (hyperbolic marking of revolutionary action), popular spirit (of the people and for the people), and subjectness (joining the people to the party).<sup>53</sup> In North Korea, the comprehensive text on literary art theory appeared in 1975, two years after Kim Jong Il discussed seed theory.<sup>54</sup> But policy is never static hence, and rather than each aspect of socialist realism being monolithic in its own right, interpretation reflects the given moment in which a work of literary art is created or promoted. Max Hayward argues this was the case in Soviet literature,<sup>55</sup> and Katerina Clark states that socialist realism, as a result, should be regarded less as a unified theory than as a "canonical doctrine defined by its patristic texts."<sup>56</sup> Socialist realism requires model works,

so in North Korea, although the pre-eminent model works have since the 1970s been five “revolutionary operas” (*hyǒngmyǒng kagŭk*) created between 1971 and 1973, Sin Tosŏn’s article in the June 1959 edition of *Chosŏn ūmak* indicates how model songs had begun to be elevated as soon as *juche* and *Ch’ŏllima* took hold.<sup>57</sup> Ch’oe Sŭnghŭi’s 1958 book—to which I turn in the next section—does much the same for dance. But, and dissonant to what became literary art theory, Ch’oe’s book proposes model dances based on her own creative choreography.<sup>58</sup>

## Curating national dance

The *Juche* Speech criticized the writer and leader Pak Ch’angok (?–1958), not just for associating with bourgeois reactionaries but for failing to learn from Korean history and culture and for not using the Korean language properly. Han Sŏrya, the writer and leader of the southern artist faction, levelled much the same criticism at the composer Kim Sunnam (1917–1986), who, he wrote, neglected his Korean roots in his promotion of foreign music styles.<sup>59</sup> Two *Chosŏn ūmak* articles by Mun Chongsang and Wŏn Hŭngnyong (1956/2: 58–65, 1956/3: 65–79) refined Han’s criticism.<sup>60</sup> Kim poorly imitated Soviet songs and failed to consider the lives of today’s Korean people; he also used meters and tempi that everyday people could not follow (in this, the inference is that he was influenced by European and North American avant-gardism). Kim Sunnam was from the south but had settled in Pyongyang; still, Mun remarked that his association with the foreign “betrayed” Koreans. Kim’s fate was not as final as Pak Ch’angok, but he was purged and sent into internal exile to Shinp’o in South Hamgyŏng province, where he was permitted only to write folksong arrangements; his career in Pyongyang resumed some years later, in the mid-1960s.

Musicians and composers, much as in Mao’s “100 Flowers” campaign in China, were sent to rural areas to learn to understand the people by collecting folksongs (*minyŏ*). Even if the more direct influence was China, the importance of folksongs in creating national music had long been recognized in the Soviet Union, where Boris Krasin’s 1918 report to the Moscow Proletkult invoked folksongs, while recognizing that revisions and updates were needed because folksongs had been created in “different times and with a different consciousness.” They were to serve as “the starting point for the new creation of the proletariat.”<sup>61</sup> In North Korea, four large volumes of folksongs were printed, *Chosŏn minjok ūmak chŏnjip: minyŏ p’yŏn* (조선 민족 음악 전집: 민요편 Korean national music collection: folksong volumes) (1958–1959, reissued 1998–1999), and from these, as the musicologist Ri Ch’anggu sets out in his *Chosŏn minyŏ ūi chosik ch’egyŏ* (조선 민요의 조식 체계

Explaining the System of Korean Folksong),<sup>62</sup> a national folksong style was established that was considered both popular and populist.

Compared to music, dance was more difficult to bring into line, because of the central position of Ch'oe Sünghŭi. Her 1958 volume, showcasing her own dances, offered the equivalent for dance of both the folksong transcription volumes and the prescriptions of folksong style, as its title made clear: *Chosŏn minjok muyong kibon* (The Basis of Korean National Dance). Still, though, it did so on her terms. She felt able to challenge the control mechanisms, and this is clear from how she fought criticism. Her fightback to that criticism began with an article in the party newspaper, the *Rodong Sinmun*, on September 3, 1957. In this she balanced ideological change, accepting that dance should capture revolutionary sentiments and support socialist construction, with an appeal for the maintenance of dance aesthetics—that is, her dance pedagogy. She accepted dance should reflect the popular will and serve to improve mass education and cultural awareness, and called for new works to be created that were monumental, martial, and cast in diverse forms, but also argued that for these to be properly staged, better, and more dedicated dance training was urgently needed—that is, using her pedagogy, as she had started in Pyongyang a decade earlier when she had set up her dance school, the Ch'oe Sünghŭi Muyong Yŏn'guso, and also as she had attempted in China.

Much the same approach was adopted in Sŏ Ranil's articles about her in *Chosŏn yesul*: the first article gave her biography and described some of the national dances she created in the 1930s, and the second argued that she had for many years burnished Korea's international image.<sup>63</sup> Notwithstanding that Ch'oe worked alongside other distinguished dancers at her school and at the National Dance Theater (국립 무용 극창 Kungnip muyong kŭkch'ang; Ch'oe Kiya, Ham Kibong and Yi Soge are among those frequently mentioned, along with her dancer daughter An Sŏnghŭi), there is little indication that she was ready to follow what ideology now required.

Her 1958 book continues in the same vein. The first section gives the foundation for national dance, claiming that elements long lost have recently been recovered and weak elements strengthened. It squares this with the emerging ideology by pointing out that dance comes from the people. Then it analyses body shapes, gestures and actions, and foot and hand positions—in ways that remained almost identical in texts published in Pyongyang after Ch'oe's death such as a 1982 dance theory text by Ri Mansun and Ri Sangnin and a 1987 dance notation volume by U Ch'angsŏp. Ch'oe gives precise angles of direction and elevation for some elements, and these also remain in North Korea's later dance notations, prescribing, for example, 45-degree divisions for directions on stage, and restricting hand

and arm holds to 45, 90, and 135-degree elevations outwards from the vertical. She also details more intimate body movements, including the tiny up-and-down shoulder movements, slight rotations of the head, and delicate hand and finger rotations that remain so characteristic of South Korean dance practice;<sup>64</sup> I note, however, that some of these movements are missing from U Ch'angsöp's 1987 dance notation volume.

If Ch'oe's book parallels the then ongoing work on folksongs, I must reiterate that it is distinct in one significant way: Ch'oe had in the 1930s begun to create a set of dances based on Korean practice, and because these were considered to derive from folk dances (*minsok muyong/ch'um*), these are promoted as models for national dance (*minjok muyong/ch'um*). Ch'oe was also given credit for creating the dances in a film produced to complement the book, *Ch'oe Sünghüi-ryu Chosön muyong* (The Ch'oe Sünghüi School of Korean Dance).<sup>65</sup> Curiously, much as Ch'oe's national dances were based on her 1930s' choreographies for stage performance, the national folksong style that emerged was also based on popular folksongs, that is, folksongs performed by professional singers on stage, on recordings and for radio broadcasts during the Japanese colonial period, rather than on the diverse local folksongs found in rural areas across the Korean peninsula. As a result, the national folksong style abandoned regional characteristics such as the nasal vibrato and flexible metrical structures of *Sōdo minyo* from the region around Pyongyang, and the "sad" (*aewan*) vocalization characteristic of *Namdo minyo* from Korea's southwestern region.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, then, Ch'oe modified some dance elements as she took from Korean tradition.

Demonstrating the above, Ch'oe devotes thirty pages in her volume to the Pongsan mask dance.<sup>67</sup> This dance, originating in Hwanghae Province in today's North Korea, has iconic status in both Koreas. Its status reflects folklore collection in the 1930s, but also because scholars suggest putative connections with ancient China, the Pongsan mask dance is referenced in descriptions of mask dances found in tomb paintings in the northern part of the peninsula dating to the Three Kingdom's period (that is, prior to the seventh-century unification of Korea). A preservation society for the mask dance is reported to continue in North Korea, and depictions appear in several folk-game volumes published in Pyongyang, while in 2009 the state media company issued a VCD of the dance, *Chosön minsok muyong: Pongsan t'al ch'um*. In South Korea, the mask dance was appointed National Intangible Cultural Property no.17 in 1967, initially designating "holders" (*poyuja*) who had migrated from North to South prior to the end of the Korean War.

In the early 1930s, Ch'oe lifted from the Pongsan mask dance what she termed a "vagabond dance" or, more fully, "*Pangnangin üi sorüm/Sadness of the Vagabond.*" Her choreography most likely evolved over time,<sup>68</sup> and for a performance in 1936

she reverted to simply naming what seems to be a version of the same solo dance as “*Pongsan t'al ch'um*.” Later, she danced this in the United States, for which a photograph of her doing so survives in the New York Public Library.<sup>69</sup> Her solo dance outlived her, and much the same dance opens Act 5 of the 1988 national opera (*minjok kagük*) “*Ch'unhyangjön/Story of 'Spring Fragrance'*,” where rather than being solo, as Ch'oe's 1930s versions were, it is performed by a group of eight dancers to an updated folksong, “*Nongbuga/Farming Song*.”

Preceding the mask dance, twenty pages in her book describe a fan dance.<sup>70</sup> After criticism in 1951, Ch'oe had revived her choreography of this for a performance at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow at the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students. And, after her death, much of her choreography was retained although props were changed, for the third scene of the celebrated suite “*Choguk üi Chindallae/Azaleas in the Homeland*,” created in or before 1971 by the Mansudae Art Troupe and described by Kim Jong Il as “revolutionary” (*hyöngmyöng*) due to its adherence to *juche* ideology.<sup>71</sup> Fans were replaced by winnowing baskets, hence some movements were adapted, and the title became “*Kich'um/Dance of Winnowing*”. The dance also sits behind dances in two revolutionary operas, in “*Tang üi ch'amdwin ttal/True Daughter of the Party*” (1971)<sup>72</sup> where the fans become lotus blossoms, and at the beginning of the finale of “*Kkot p'anün ch'önyö/The Flower Girl*” (1972), where fans are replaced by azaleas.

Her book also details her version of the once exorcistic “*Salp'uri*.”<sup>73</sup> She had first danced this in Tokyo in 1936 under the title “*Munyö ch'um/Dance of the Female Shaman*,” but campaigns against superstition in North Korea may explain why her 1950s choreography merged elements of a second dance, “*Süngmu/Monk's Dance*,” her version of which she had first performed in Tokyo in 1934, to become “*Sugön ch'um/Sleeve Dance*.” This title deftly substitutes an aspect of costume for anything allied to superstition or religion. In turn, “*Sugön ch'um*” became central to the second movement of “*Azaleas*,” choreographing a 1965 model song by the composer Ri Myönsang (1908–1989), “*Nuni naerinda/Snow Falls*.” In this choreography, female guerrillas descend from their camps on the sacred Mount Paektu as if angels, wearing diaphanous costumes with long, floating sleeves that link the revolution to a much more ancient, mythical past. The sleeves, though, revert to the sashes of Ch'oe's earlier “*Salp'uri*” in “*The Flower Girl*.” Ch'oe's dance was also recast by her daughter, most likely in the 1960s, into a new choreography that remains today, titled, in an onomatopoeic way, *Chaenggang ch'um* (*chaenggang* translates as “clank,” referencing the percussive accompaniment to a shaman's dance).<sup>74</sup>

Ch'oe's 1958 book also details “*Sogo ch'um*,” a dance descending from rural Korea's eponymous percussion bands within the genre known as *nongak* or

*p'ungmul*.<sup>75</sup> During the late 1930s, Ch'oe had performed this as “*Sangmo ch'um*,” referencing streamers that many band members attached to hats—a reasonable name because, in percussion bands, the small *sogo* hand-held drum was primarily an excuse for acrobatics rather than a musical instrument. “*Sangmo ch'um*” is how Ch'oe's dance is still normally encountered in Pyongyang. In the January 1966 edition of *Chosŏn yesul*, Ri Hŭngsu differentiated a staged version (referring to the hat, *sangmo*), from an older dance used in percussion bands. However, Ri Töksun noted that the staged form, in a theatrical performance that depicted dry field agricultural labor, retained the “scent” (*hyanggi*) of the people—that is, of the older, rural, percussion band dance. Again, in 1980 and long after Ch'oe's death, Wi Pyŏngt'aek in the journal's August edition reminded readers that the *sangmo* dance originally formed part of an entertainment held during intense periods of farming activity; Wi does not mention Ch'oe by name.<sup>76</sup>

For performances in Moscow in 1950 and again in 1957, Ch'oe essentially upzised the small *sogo* to large barrel drums, *puk*, rebranding the dance “*Puk ch'um*.” Note, though, that several separate dances exist for the latter, the two most familiar in South Korea today being centred on Miryang in the southeast and Chindo in the southwest. The northern scholar Pak Chongsŏng claims “*Puk ch'um*” as a northern dance, fulfilling the nationalistic requirement by tracing it back 1500 years to the northwestern Koguryŏ state.<sup>77</sup> He does much the same with two further dances associated with Ch'oe, “*Changgo ch'um/Drum dance*”<sup>78</sup> and “*K'al ch'um/Knife dance*.”<sup>79</sup> “*Changgo ch'um*” was, after Ch'oe's death, invoked in the fourth scene of “*Azaleas*,” “*Sagwa p'ungnyŏn/Bumper Harvest of Apples*.” Known in both Koreas, this has roots as a solo or small group dance played on large hourglass-shaped drums by brawny farmers in percussion bands, particularly in the bands of Korea's southwestern Chŏlla provinces. It was reframed by Ch'oe as a more delicate, female dance, using a single stick and one hand to strike a smaller drum. In Pyongyang, Ch'oe's dance evolved, adding a second stick to allow more complex rhythmic patterns (likewise, percussion band drummers in both Koreas today use two sticks).

There is an overlap between “*K'al ch'um*” and “*Kŏmmu/Sword Dance*,” and it was as the latter that Ch'oe introduced her choreography in 1934.<sup>80</sup> Her dance gained local resonance in North Korea because, as several articles in the journal *Chosŏn yesul* confirm, it, or a precursor of it, appears in wall paintings in the third Anak tomb, a fifth-century tomb to the west of Pyongyang.<sup>81</sup> “*K'al ch'um*” outlived Ch'oe, and featured in the “*Arirang*” mass performance spectacle which began in 2002 and continued annually through to 2013, before being revived in 2015 and 2018. The related dance preserved in South Korea, as National Intangible Cultural Property No. 12, is “*Kŏmmu/Sword Dance*.” This, though, is associated

with the town of Chinju in the southeast. South Korean scholars have compared the two, noting how the northern dance meets the requirements of socialist realism by using rapid, sharp, attacking outward-facing movements and rigid, upright postures, whereas the southern dance concentrates on non-programmatic aestheticism and more delicate movements.<sup>82</sup>

## Dance, nation, and people

Ch'oe Sünghŭi's fightback against criticism extended beyond the 1958 book. Once in Pyongyang, she had immersed herself in developing North Korea's dance culture, often collaborating with others. She is associated in particular with choreographing the 1948 staging of "*Ch'unhyangjŏn*," large-scale works such as the historical "*Sadosŏng ŭi iyagi*/The story of Sado Castle" (1954), tales of the capital, Pyongyang, in "*Taedong kangban esŏ*/Taedong Riverside" and the folksong inspired "*Nodŭl kangbyŏn esŏ*/Nodŭl Riverside," and the revolutionary opera precursor "The Flower of Ch'ŏnsan Village." She also created choreographies for dramas and for children's dances, many of which were published in two additional volumes bearing her name.<sup>83</sup>

Indeed, in the early days of North Korea, the regime accepted a bourgeois compromise to work with the writers and artists—including dancers—who were available. Many had migrated northwards from Seoul since, as is the case everywhere, artists tend to have left-wing sympathies. And those who settled in Pyongyang, including Ch'oe, initially inhabited, as Katherine Verdery defines it in respect to Romania, a "space of legitimation"<sup>84</sup> as they sought ways to link familiar and prized genres from the past with the new political reality. Hence, the first decade of North Korea's existence was a time for cultural revival and enrichment. Not just new dances, but new operas, orchestral music, and more were produced, and these are duly listed in the first edition of the 1956 text, *Haebanghu Chosŏn ūmak*.<sup>85</sup> But, the communist intellectual tradition among accomplished writers and artists who settled in Pyongyang was, at best, limited.<sup>86</sup> To Gabroussenko, the Korean Proletarian Artists Federation (조선 프로레타리아 예술 동맹 *Chosŏn p'ŭroret'aria yesul tongmaeng*), which operated between 1925 and 1935, was only loosely Marxist, because its members came from the privileged class and lacked sympathy for the workers (or peasants) they championed.<sup>87</sup> The bourgeois background of many artists from that time is not in doubt, since building a career in the arts required funds and time—attributes that were not available to the many who struggled daily to put food on a family table. Again, accessing high-quality training tended to require expensive trips abroad.



With her experience of socialism in China and the Soviet sphere of influence, the new direction brought by *juche* and *Ch'ŏllima*, which discarded any remnants of Théophile Gautier's "*l'art pour l'art*" in favor of subservience to state ideology, would not have been surprising to Ch'oe. Lenin had in 1905 stated that literature and art must serve "not the bored 'upper 10,000' suffering from fatty degeneration, but the millions and tens of millions of working people."<sup>88</sup> Lenin, incidentally, is pictured on the frontispiece to the second edition of the journal *Chosŏn yesul*, published in October 1956, where one of the two feature articles is on dance. Broadly stated, totalitarian systems need compliant artists and, despite claims to the contrary, markers of one's individual artistry, such as artistic brilliance, creativity, and flair, are dangerous. Totalitarian leaders generally prefer mediocrity to brilliance.<sup>89</sup> They demand conformity to a discursive but at times shifting ideology<sup>90</sup> and sanction violence to keep celebrity in check—except, of course, the celebrity of leaders.<sup>91</sup> The shifting nature of ideology, Richard Taruskin remarks in reference to how Soviet composers struggled under socialist realism, becomes "a Venus flytrap" that "gobbles up" creativity.<sup>92</sup> It is not surprising that many artists resist side-lining artistry: artistry is the result of many years of competitive training; it is what makes artists special.

*Juche* and *Ch'ŏllima*, however, required compliant proletarian artists—artists found among the ranks of workers and trained by the state. Much as had been the case in the Soviet Union before, as these were nurtured in North Korea, so the bourgeois compromise unravelled. Indeed, it had to unravel since, henceforth, careers in the literary arts would progress according to how writers and artists worked within prescribed stylistic and thematic contexts.<sup>93</sup> Purges of older artists were inevitable.

## Conclusion

By 1957, Ch'oe must have grasped the new reality. It is hard to conclude that she was not aware of how ideology was being brought into line with the pronouncements of Kim Il Sung. This makes her criticism of the new mass work "*Ch'ŏllima*" spectacularly naïve. When considered alongside her 1958 book, *Chosŏn minjok muyong kibon*, and the articles by her and about her in the pages of the journal *Chosŏn yesul*, it is hard not to see arrogance in her criticism and activities.

To approach my conclusion, permit me to briefly step to one side. If we recall how Ch'oe's dance master, Ishii Baku, travelled to Europe to create his dance grammar, it seems reasonable to read connections between what he found in Dalcrozierian *eurythmie* and Mary Wigman's work with the mass dances that emerged in North Korea. (Ch'oe, we should remember, was well travelled, and

knew contemporary dance trends, but also the philosophies and ideologies behind them, in Europe and the United States, as well as in the Soviet bloc and China.) Consider Germany: as the National Socialists took control, Wigman consolidated a group choreography based on the *Volk*, resolving problems associated with moving from individual (solo) to social (group) dances. Wigman also developed *Tanz-Gymnastik*, a method oriented to amateurs that differentiated dance as art from calisthenics as exercise.<sup>94</sup> All this was familiar to Ch'oe and, rather than the *Ausdruckstanz* of the 1920s, it is tempting to draw a line to Pyongyang's mass spectacles from *Tanz-Gymnastik* (and from Rudolf Laban's *Kinetographie Laban*, his system for notating dance based on body effort that was published in 1928<sup>95</sup>). On its journey to North Korea, this line would take in the grand scale and overtly nationalistic opening of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games that Wigman choreographed, "*Olympische Jugend/Olympic Youth*." This celebrated the Führer as the paramount leader and showcased the myths that had been assembled as the official history of the rejuvenating state.

Now, compare North Korea, where thousands-upon-thousands of *ch'öng-sonyön* young adults fill Kim Il Sung square in Pyongyang each April to celebrate the birthday of the "Eternal Leader" in massive, communal dancing, or where many thousands more until recently filled stadiums for the "Arirang" mass performance spectacle. North Korea essentially absorbed Germanic inter-war ideas, not just those of Wigman and Laban but also *Körperkultur* (Body Physical Training), in which mass displays of gymnastics showed off body perfection, and in which the individual communed in unity within the state.<sup>96</sup> With a history running from the German Friedrich Jahn's (1778–1852) *Turnverein* (Turners) and the Czech Miroslav Tyrš's (1832–1884) *Sokols* (Falcons), mass displays were harnessed by Stalin in the Soviet Union, and from Moscow they spread to Soviet satellite states.<sup>97</sup> Mass displays created and used national symbols in the Soviet Union,<sup>98</sup> as in North Korea. The Soviets, then, provided the filter, even though the official line in Pyongyang has it that Kim Il Sung created the first mass display for Korea in 1930.<sup>99</sup>

Ch'oe knew the ideology behind mass displays. She would have seen how this was embedded within *juche* and the *Chöllima* campaign. But she continued to promote her own dances and pedagogy, and to champion the choreographies she had worked on both before and after she had settled in Pyongyang. To do so, I conclude, was tantamount to committing suicide, even if it allowed her choreographies to survive her demise. And, although her reappearance in the pages of *Chosön yesul* in the early 1960s suggests she had won a reprieve, this was never going to be more than a temporary reprieve, and she soon disappeared completely from public view. We may never know whether she died of illness, as North Korea

now claims, or was purged once more and shot for failing to conform, but the latter is, surely, the more likely.

## Notes

1. kh@soas.ac.uk.
2. This article forms a companion to my exploration of how North Korea's developing ideology impacted music, "The Evolution of Cultural Policy and Practice in North Korea, Seen Through the Journal *Chosŏn ūmak* [Korean Music]," in *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary North Korea*, edited by Adrian Buzo (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), pp. 251–256, and extends from my monograph, *Songs for "Great Leaders": Ideology and Creativity in North Korean Music and Dance* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020). My recent research on North Korea has been supported by a fellowship at the National Humanities Center, North Carolina (2017–2018) and by a Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship (2018–2022).
3. "Folk" as in the common East Asian usage: the Little Tradition, in contrast to the court, aristocratic and literati Great Tradition. See Richard Bauman, "Introduction," in *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainment*, edited by Richard Bauman (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. xiii–xxi.
4. Robert Scalapino and Chong-Sik Lee, *Communism in Korea*, vol. 2 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 884–885 and 901; Brian Myers, *Han Sōrya and North Korean Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 90–93; Balázs Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era: Soviet-DPRK Relations and the Roots of North Korean Despotism, 1953–1964* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 132.
5. Judy Van Zile, *Perspectives on Korean Dance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), pp. 186–188; Yukihiko Yoshida, "Lee Tsia-oe and Baku Ishii Before 1945: Comparing the Origin of Modern Dance in Taiwan and Japan," *Pan-Asian Journal of Sports and Physical Education* (2011): 56–57.
6. Ishii's interactions with Wigman (1886–1973) are a matter of some conjecture. His interest, both in Dalcroze and Wigman, is mentioned by, among others, Son Okju ("Korean Dance Beyond Koreanness: Park Yeong-in in the German Modern Dance Scene," in *Corporeal Politics: Dancing East Asia*, edited by Katherine Mezur and Emily Wilcox (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2020), pp. 84–85. Son notes that the Japanese government funded the trips of many artists to Germany, through to the late 1930s (Son, "Korean Dance," 102 and 111). Van Zile states Ishii studied with Wigman and identifies aspects of her expressionist dances filtered through Baku in some of Ch'oe Sūnghūi's 1930s dances ("Performing Modernity in Korea: The Dance of Ch'oe Sūnghūi," *Korean Studies* 37 [2013]: 132–133). In Germany, Wigman certainly invited Ishii to her studio, but his later book, *Watashi No Kao* (1940) indicates he did not take up the offer. However, Kolb notes that he appeared twice alongside her students in the 1925 film *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* (Ways to strength and beauty) (Alexandra Kolb, "Wigman's Witches: Reformism, Orientalism, Nazism," *Dance Research Journal* 48.2 [2016]: 36–37). And, to Wigman as an influence on Ishii we should probably add Rudolf Laban (1879–1958), who Wigman worked with from 1913 on and who is usually considered the founding father of the *Ausdruckstanz* style, for which, see Evelyn Doerr, *Rudolf Laban: The Dancer of the Crystal* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007), pp. 99–101.
7. As noted by Van Zile, "Performing Modernity," p. 128, citing Anthony Giddens and Shmuel Eisenstadt.
8. Taylor Atkins, *Primitive Selves: Koreans in the Japanese Colonial Gaze, 1910–1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2010), p. 171.

9. Judy Van Zile, "Performing Modernity in Korea," p. 136. See also Van Zile, "Blurring Tradition and Modernity: The Impact of Japanese Colonization and Ch'oe Sŭng-hŭi on Dance in South Korea Today," in *Consuming Korean Tradition*, edited by Laurel Kendall (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), pp. 169–194.
10. Emily Wilcox, *Revolutionary Bodies: Chinese Dance and the Socialist Legacy* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019), p. 67, lists the countries Ch'oe visited and performed on during her tour. Wilcox bases her list primarily on an Arirang TV documentary directed by Won Jongun (*Choi Seunghee: The Story of a Dancer* [Seoul: Arirang TV, 2008]). For an exploration of Ch'oe's activities while in the United States, see Van Zile, *Perspectives on Korean Dance*, pp. 185–219, and for Ch'oe's performances in Mexico, see Alfredo Romero Castilla, "Choi Seunghee (Sai Shoki): The Dancing Princess from the Peninsula in Mexico," *Journal of Society for Dance Documentation and History* 44 (2017): 81–96.
11. O Sejun, "Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi ūi wŏlbuk yŏin'gwa namp'yŏn An Mak ūi yŏngnyang," *Han'guk muyong kyoyukhak hoeji* 26.2 (2015): 87–99.
12. Charles Armstrong, "The Cultural Cold War in Korea, 1945–1950," *Journal of Asian Studies* 62.1 (2003): 77.
13. According to former Hungarian Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, Mózés Csoma. "A Mosaic Tracing the Unknown Years of Choi Seung-hee," *JoongAng Daily*, 20 August 2020. <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2020/08/20/national/diplomacy/Choi-Seunghee-iconic-dancer/20200820164000423.html> (accessed 16 May 2022).
14. Emily Wilcox, "Locating Performance: Choe Seung-hui's East Asian Modernism and the Case for Area Knowledge in Dance Studies," in *The Future of Dance Studies*, edited by Susan Manning, Janice Ross and Rebecca Schneider (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2019), p. 509.
15. Emily Wilcox, "Locating Performance," and *Revolutionary Bodies*, pp. 48–77.
16. This was recalled by the former deputy Minister of Culture Chŏng Ryul, when interviewed by Tatiana Gabroussenko in exile in Kazakhstan. Gabroussenko, in her *Soldiers on the Cultural Front: Developments in the Early History of North Korean Literature and Literary Policy* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press), 2010, hints that Ch'oe had an affair with Chŏng.
17. Yi Chŏlju, *Puk ūi yesurin* (Seoul: Kyemongsa, 1966), pp. 34–38; see also Gabroussenko, *Soldiers on the Cultural Front*, pp. 146–148.
18. Sŏ Manil, "Chosŏn ūl pinnae kojŏ, Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi ūi yesul kwa hwaltong (1–6)," *Chosŏn yesul* (1957.10): 64–75, (1957.11): 114–121, (1957.12): 90–95, (1958.1): 88–93, (1958.2): 73–79, and (1958.3): 80–89.
19. Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi, *Chosŏn minjok muyong kibon* (Seoul: Tongmunsŏn, 1991 [originally, Pyongyang: Chosŏn yesul ch'ulp'ansa, 1958]), and *Muyonggŭk taebonjip* (Pyongyang: Chosŏn yesul ch'ulp'ansa), 1958. Note that throughout this article page numbers reference the 1991 reprint of the first book.
20. Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi, "Sŭngnija taehwa rŭl apt'ugo: Chisang ragwŏn e taehan muyong sŏsasi <Taedong kangbanesŏ> rŭl ch'angjakhamyŏnsŏ," *Chosŏn yesul* (1961.6): 16–18.
21. Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi, *Chosŏn adong muyong kibon* (Pyongyang: Chosŏn munhak yesul ch'ong tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1963).
22. The early 1960s allowed some latitude in commentary, or relaxed control, since much the same as happened with Ch'oe and the journal *Chosŏn yesul* can be seen in the pages of the music journal, *Chosŏn ūmak*, where while articles on Soviet music disappeared for the last few years of the 1950s, they reappeared in 1961, and where the promotion of song culture was paused for a celebration of orchestral and instrumental compositions to mark the twentieth anniversary of liberation in 1965. See Howard, "The Evolution of Cultural Policy," pp. 257–259.

23. The North Korean honor system inherits Soviet practice but adds some distinctive elements (notably the premier award, the “Kim Il Sung Prize (*Kim Ilsŏng sang*).” Below the premier award but above “laudatory artist” (*kongmin paeu*), people’s artists occupy eight ranks.
24. Ch’oe Sŭnghŭi, “P’yŏngnon: Yesulchŏk chŏnt’ong kwa yesulchŏk ch’angjo,” *Chosŏn yesul* (1965.4): 37–39; “Muyong ch’angjak kyŏnghŏm: Tongmu ‘P’ungnang ŭl ttokko’ e taehayo,” *Chosŏn yesul* (1965.7): 38–42; “P’yŏngnon: Muyong sop’um ŭi sasang yesulchŏk nop’i rŭl wihayŏ,” *Chosŏn yesul* (1966.9): 41–45.
25. Ch’oe Sŭnghŭi, “Rodongdang sidae e ch’allanhi kkotp’in muyong yesul,” *Chosŏn yesul* (1965.10): 24–29 and 32.
26. Ch’oe Sŭnghŭi, “Inmin ŭi aeguk t’ujaeng ŭl panyŏngghan uri nara muyong yesul,” *Chosŏn yesul* (1966.11): 23–27.
27. Chŏng Pyŏngho, *Ch’umch’unŭn Ch’oe Sŭnghŭi, segye rŭl hwaŏjabŭn Chosŏn yŏja* (Seoul: Ppurikip’un namu, 1995), p. 214; Hwang Kyŏngsuk, “Pukhan muyong ŭi t’ŭkching e kwanhan yŏn’gu” (PhD diss., Sungmyŏng yŏja taehakkyo, Seoul, 1994), p. 119.
28. Han Kyŏngja, “Ch’oe Sŭnghŭi yesuri Han’guk ch’angjak ch’um e kkich’in yŏnghyang,” *Nambuk munhwa yesul yŏn’gu* 3 (2008): 251.
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57. Sin Tosōn, "Taejung kayo ch'angjak ūi poda nop'un paljōn ūl wihayō! Taejung kayo ch'angjak ūi hyōnsang'tae – hyōbūhoe esō han t'oron," *Chosōn ūmak* (1959.6): 6–10.
58. Ch'oe, *Chosōn minjok muyong kibon*.
59. Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*, pp. 40–42.
60. Mun Chongsang, "Kim Sunnam ūi 'Sōyang ūmak kwa tongyang ūmakwa ūi ch'ai' e taehayō," *Chosōn ūmak* (1956.2): 58–65; Wōn Hūngnyong, "Kim Sunnam ūi kwagō kayo ch'angjak esō nat'anattōn pandongjōk purūjyōa sasang," *Chosōn ūmak* (1956.3): 65–79.

61. Boris Krasin's 1918 report to the Moscow Proletkult, as translated in Marina Frolova-Walker and Jonathan Walker, *Music and Soviet Power, 1917–32* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), p. 16.
62. As Ri Ch'angu sets out in his *Chosŏn minyo ūi chosik ch'egye* (Pyongyang: Yesul kyoyuk ch'ulp'ansa, 1990). See also Howard, *Songs for "Great Leaders,"* pp. 35–42.
63. Sŏ, "Chosŏn ūl pich'nae kojŏ" (1957.10): 64–75, (1957.11): 114–121.
64. Ch'oe, *Chosŏn minjok muyong kibon*, pp. 10–66.
65. The term used here for "school" was adopted from a Japanese term (*ryū*). It has become a standard term in both Koreas, used particularly to delineate the "schools" of the instrumental genre of *sanjo*.
66. This had to be the case, because Kim Il Sung had described folksongs as soft and lyrical. Kim Jong Il kept this description, later describing folksongs as "gentle and yet beautiful and elegant," "light and clear" (Kim Jong Il, "On the direction which musical creation should take," talk to creators given on October 25, 1968. <http://www.korea-dpr.com/lib/Kim%20Jong%20Il%20-%201/ON%20THE%20DIRECTION%20WHICH%20MUSICAL%20CREATION%20SHOULD%20TAKE.pdf>).
67. Ch'oe, *Chosŏn minjok muyong kibon*, pp. 127–158.
68. As Van Zile notes, the ephemeral nature of dance makes it challenging to discuss evolution over time; titles of Ch'oe's dances are sometimes given in English, or translated and retranslated in various sources, making it "difficult to know if dances are, in effect, 'the same,' or are actually difference dances" (Van Zile, "Performing Modernity," p. 126).
69. Reproduced in Van Zile, *Perspectives on Korean Dance*, p. 192.
70. Ch'oe, *Chosŏn minjok muyong kibon*, pp. 105–125.
71. "For this same reason, Kim is given credit for inspiring its creation in the score, published in 1988 and featuring the then new dance notation.
72. Developed by the Korean People's Army Ensemble as the second opera, Kim Jong Il criticized it in a speech after its premiere on October 28, 1971: "This opera does not have a plot-line of reverence for the Great Leader ... this opera contains many instances of the lives of characters not being depicted truthfully ... [it] includes many songs whose words have not been poeticized." Hence it was reworked, and because of this, publications often position it as the fourth revolutionary opera to be created.
73. Ch'oe, *Chosŏn minjok muyong kibon*, pp. 159–179.
74. Chaewon Kim, "Dance," in *Performing Arts of North Korea. Korean Musicology Series 10*, edited by Keith Howard, pp. 209–211 (Seoul: National Gugak Center, 2019). For a more detailed account, see the same author, Kim Ch'aewŏn, "Pukhan ūi sinjŏn t'ongch'um chaenggangch'um ūi pyŏnhwa wa chŏnsŭng," *Kongyŏn'gwa Ribyu* 25.1 (2019): 48–62.
75. Ch'oe, *Chosŏn minjok muyong kibon*, pp. 181–206.
76. Ri Hŭngsu, "Ssangmu (Pich'ŏndo) ūi hyŏnsangsŏng," *Chosŏn yesul* (1966.1): 27–29; Wi Pyŏngt'aek, "Nongak mu," *Chosŏn yesul* (1989.8): 72–73.
77. Chongsŏng Pak, *Chosŏn minsok muyong* (Pyongyang: Munye ch'ulp'ansa, 1991): 60.
78. Pak, *Chosŏn minsok muyong*, p. 100.
79. Pak, *Chosŏn minsok muyong*, p. 105.
80. Han, "Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi yesuri," p. 238.
81. For example, Anon, "K'al ch'um," *Chosŏn yesul* (1985.11): 35; Han T'aeil, "Koguryŏ mudŏm pyŏkhwa rŭl t'onghayŏ pon 'k'al ch'um'," *Chosŏn yesul* (2003.6): 74–75.
82. An Pyŏngju, Min Hyŏnju and Pae Suŭl, "Sin muyong kyeyŏl ūi Nam-Pukhan kŏmmu pigyo." *Han'guk muyong kidok hakhoeji* 3 (October 2002): 21–33.
83. Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi, *Muyonggŭk taebonjip* and *Chosŏn adong muyong kibon*. A chronological table of Ch'oe's known choreographies and performances is given by Han, "Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi yesuri," pp. 238–244.

84. Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1991), p. 17.
85. Ri Hirim, Ri Hwail, Chu Yöngsöp, Han Ŭngman, Han Pyönggak, and Mun Chongsang, *Haebanghu Chosön ũmak* (Pyongyang: Chosön chakkokka tongmaeng wiwönhoe), 1956. Note that a second edition of this title published in 1979 offers very different coverage, reflecting the post-juche constellation of North Korean music and dance and omitting all mention of non-compliant works.
86. Gabroussenko, *Soldiers on the Cultural Front*, p. 167.
87. Gabroussenko, *Soldiers on the Cultural Front*, pp. 76–79.
88. Vladimir Lenin, “Party organisation and party literature,” in *Lenin Collected Works 10* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House 1962), pp. 47–48.
89. Mussolini, Dikötter writes, “not only surrounded himself with mediocre followers but also frequently replaced them. The worst, by most accounts, was Achille Starace ... ‘Starace is a cretin,’ one follower objected. ‘I know,’ Mussolini replied. ‘But he is an obedient cretin’” (Dikötter, *Dictators*, p. 13, citing Roberto Festorazzi, *Starace. Il Mastino Della Rivoluzione Fascista* (Milan: Ugo Mursia, 2002), p. 71.
90. Fernando Coronil and Julie Skurski, eds, *States of Violence* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), pp. 3–6.
91. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, MI: Black and Red, 2010): 64.
92. Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 89.
93. As De Ceuster writes in respect to fine arts (Koen De Ceuster, “To be an Artist in North Korea: Talent and then Some More,” in *Exploring North Korean Arts*, edited by Rüdiger Frank (Vienna: University of Vienna/MAK, 2011), pp. 69–71. See also Koen De Ceuster, “South Korea’s Encounter with North Korean Art: Between Barbershop Paintings and True Art,” in *De-Bordering Korea: Tangible and Intangible Legacies of the Sunshine Policy*, edited by Valérie Gelézeau, Koen De Ceuster and Alain Delissen (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 160–162.
94. Susan Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 2, 8 and 85; see also Scott Venters, “‘Would you Die for the Fatherland?’ Disciplining the German Commemorative Body,” *Theatre History Studies* 35 (2016): 39–71.
95. For a discussion of possible influences from Laban and other notations on the North Korean notation system, see Howard, *Songs for “Great Leaders,”* pp. 190–194.
96. After Karl Toepfer, *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture 1910–1935* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 1997.
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100. As given in the title of the *Chosön yesul* issue, although elsewhere written as “kangbyön esö (강변에서)”.



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