

One of the strengths of the book is how the author challenges conventional narratives surrounding Indian dance. She delves into Shankar's experiences as a foreign performer in the Western world but effectively disproves the notion that his success was simply attributed to orientalist fascination. Muni argues persuasively that Shankar's willingness to integrate Western dance forms, performance discipline and presentational rigour into his work was not a rejection of his own culture but a testament to his openness to artistic evolution and innovation. In doing so, Muni calls into question the simplistic characterizations of Shankar as an impressionistic adventurer and instead paints a nuanced portrait while negotiating complex cultural intersections.

In the lucid introductory chapter, Muni sets the tone for the book while recalling her association with Uday Shankar and his wife Amala Shankar (an illustrious dancer/choreographer). But the author must be credited for the immaculate balancing act that she sustains in the narrative of the book, wherein she not only writes in admiration of Uday Shankar but also objectively assesses the varied criticisms of Shankar's body of work and adequately offers rejoinders through her insightful and insider's knowledge of Shankar's *oeuvre*. Muni's careful selection of the guiding tropes, like the grammar and historiography of dance, to signify Shankar's style and philosophy is embodied in her statements such as, 'Kapila Vatsyayan criticized Shankar's dance and choreographic works, emphasizing the (undisciplined) free flow of movements and the grammarless-ness of his dance' (p. 12) and '[Joan] Erdman's research ... creates an opportunity for a historiographic exercise to understand the scope of the word "translation" when the work has not intentionally been recognized as a translation by the choreographer himself' (p. 15).

The book showcases Shankar's role as a cultural ambassador, bridging the East and West through his art. Through an interweaving of compelling arguments, Muni highlights the importance of celebrating his contributions as integral to India's cultural heritage: 'It is an effort to address the layered history in which Shankar becomes the agent of an intercultural conversation' (p. 16). To challenge traditional beliefs and advocate Shankar's inclusive philosophy of dance, Muni invites readers to re-evaluate his legacy and the impact of his transcultural experimentations. Her exploration of gender and of emotive expressions in Shankar's productions lends depth to the reader's understanding of his artistic vision and the cultural contexts in which he operated. A collation of rare pictures, archival evidence and quotes from interviews, as well as anecdotes of people from Shankar's world, are also part of the charm of the book.

Uday Shankar and His Transcultural Experimentations is a thought-provoking and meticulously researched book that offers a fresh perspective and resource on the life and work of Shankar to performers, students, researchers, pedagogues and culturalists. Muni's astute analysis makes this book a vital addition to the literature on Indian dance, transcultural exchanges and the legacy of Uday Shankar.

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Contemporary Chinese Queer Performance. By Hongwei Bao. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2023. Pp. vii + 157. £104/\$162.69 Hb.

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I have always found queerness in contemporary China a rather depressing topic, especially for those of us who live in it, yearning desperately for a utopia, never to come, and it never stops wounding us. What forms of conviviality are possible when not only is queer survival

foreclosed, but the political regime is such that confrontational activism is hard to imagine? *Contemporary Chinese Queer Performance* traces how Chinese queer artists and activists respond to and against the milieu that produces this forlorn sentiment.

But what does it mean to talk about 'queer' in China, insofar as 'queer' is a reclaimed concept from Western activist discourse and queer studies from the 1990s? To this end, Bao curates an archive of performances that played a role in performatively bringing into existence 'queer' identities. Here, 'queer' refers to a minoritarian way of life that challenges gender and sexual norms predominantly in urban China where LGBTQ discourse emerged during the 1990s *vis-à-vis* transnational circulations.

Thematically, Bao highlights the 'soft activism' of community building, engagement with social media and cultural activities, as direct confrontation against the existing regime in China often results in incarceration. The book thus joins the conversation in the West away from the hermeneutic of suspicion towards attention to minor forms of conviviality. Here, readers will find productive dialogue with Hentyle Yapp's *Minor China*. Meanwhile, the book's case studies on performance art complement Meiling Cheng's *Beijing Xingwei*. Content-wise, chapters 1 and 2 use formal analysis to parse the historical contexts of being queer in China, where Ren Hang's non-anthropocentric photography and the affinity between queerness and socialism in the film *Lan Yu* gesture beyond liberal humanism. Chapters 3 and 4 employ a transmedia lens onto the soft activism of Beijing Queer Chorus and filmmaker Fan Popo without recursing to visibility politics. Finally, chapters 5–7 discuss transnational aspects, from the use of avant-garde theatre in rethinking narratives about queer China to the seemingly apolitical digital performance of food sharing by diasporic artists to create world building.

The ambition of documenting so many case studies is valuable for the field of queer studies in constructing an archive that often escapes critical attention. The book's strength shines through when the author delves into the production and circulation of each performance in their material, historical and discursive contexts through engagements with archives and interviews. Bao's attentiveness to being queer in China, which is different from the West, is to be applauded, and would prove useful for the anglophone audiences who are less familiar with the history of Chinese thoughts or wanting in lived experience. That said, some close readings of the performance's political registers are at times eclipsed due perhaps to the book's wide coverage and the constraint of its length. What readers might want to see is perhaps a more thorough untangling of the theoretical concepts the author uses in his analysis as they move across Chinese and Western contexts. For example, the discussion of Ren Hang's photography offers a comparative reading of the aesthetics of *ziran vis-à-vis* affect theory and Deleuze and Guattari. Readers, however, may find that the use of theory does not necessarily extend it. How does reading across different contexts compel us to rethink the terminology we use to discuss aesthetics and politics for the specificity of China? These questions might push the book to a different focus, and I raise them here less as a critique and more as a call for attention for future studies on comparative and transnational research on China.

Overall, the book provides a vivid archive of queer performance in China around the millennium with keen attention to its specific divergence from, and connection to, the West. It raises urgent questions about the relation between art and activism, aesthetics and politics, in a milieu where – unlike the liberal regime that often tolerates and works to capitalize and depoliticize protest – expression of discontent results in violent repression. What forms of queer sociality can we imagine when we find ourselves with the more demanding task of an 'unspeakable' life?