

An Archive Project on Ch'oe Sŭng-hŭi

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Ch'oe Sŭng-hŭi was a colonial Korean dancer born in Korea in 1911 who achieved international fame as an Asian dancer during and after the Second World War. Internationally recognized under her Japanese name, Sai Shōki, Ch'oe learned modern dance between 1926 and 1929 under the renowned Japanese teacher Ishii Baku. In the 1930s, however, she switched styles, incorporating moves from traditional Korean dance and giving her performance an Asian flavor. Occurring during the colonial cultural boom, this shift heightened her reputation around the world, allowing her to perform in Japan (1933–1937, 1940–1944), the Korean peninsula (1929–1933), Taiwan (1936), China (1942–1945), several European countries (1939), the United States (1938, 1940), and Latin America (1940).

Ch'oe's personal and political history—she both collaborated with the Japanese Empire and worked for Kim Il-Sung after liberation—makes it difficult to analyze her work through a critical lens. For example, the Japanese Empire recognized Ch'oe as a renowned artist and celebrity, and after Japan's defeat in the war she went to North Korea in search of a new regime to sponsor her career. Her husband, An Mak, persuaded her to make this decision; Mak, though a proletariat writer, often served as her manager and accompanist during overseas trips.

In an attempt to better understand this volatile public figure, this paper reports on the initial stage of an archive project examining her life. Such a project is vital, because there are discrepancies among sources, and information varies on the most basic facts of Ch'oe's life: even her place of birth and year of death differ across sources. Most documents say she was born in Keijō (currently Seoul);

however, some argue that she was born in Hongcheon County in Gangwon Province. Indeed, a decade ago, Hongcheon County's "Memorial Association of the Dancer Ch'oe Sŭng-hŭi" began hosting events and seminars to celebrate her achievements.¹ In addition, North Korea's Korean Central Television broadcast in February 2003 that Ch'oe was buried and enshrined in the Patriotic Martyrs' Cemetery. On the monument, the year of her death is given as August 8, 1969. However, witnesses testify that Ch'oe died in 1975, either from liver cancer or from being shot after her husband was purged and she attempted to escape from North Korea to Seoul, where her brother-in-law, An Che-Sŭng, lived.²

In regard to written documents on Ch'oe's life and career, there exist several biographical works that provide an outline. In 1936, Ch'oe published an autobiography in Japanese titled *Watakushi no jijoden* [*My Autobiography*]. The following year, her older brother Sŭng-il, a writer who introduced Sŭng-hŭi to Ishii, edited and published a book in Korean titled *Ch'oe Sŭng-hŭi chasŏjŏn* [*Ch'oe Sŭng-hŭi's Autobiography*]. While these are two different volumes with different authors and contents, because the titles are so similar, many people often conflate the two, believing that the Korean book is a translation of Ch'oe's original Japanese autobiography. This confusion remains so common that the 2006 reprint of the Korean book named Ch'oe Sŭng-hŭi as the author.

These autobiographies, however, cover Ch'oe's life only in the period between the 1920s and 1930s. After the Cold War, studies on Ch'oe began to increase. A Japanese journalist, Takashima Yūsaburō, who contacted Ch'oe during the Pacific War, and a Korean dance researcher, Chŏng Pyŏng-ho, have written multiple books on Ch'oe that include extensive primary sources as well as testimonies from her students, followers, and relatives (Takashima [1959] 1981; Takashima and Chŏng 1994; Chŏng [1995] 2004). Since then, other articles and books have been written that address her life and work; however, these are mostly within dance studies or by documentary writers (Kim 2002; Lee 2002).

Critical studies on Ch'oe Sŭng-hŭi began to appear as research on Korean dance became more common in English-language publications. As Judy Van Zile, Emeritus Professor of Dance at the University of Hawaii, points out, many of these early works on Ch'oe are more "laudatory than analytical" (Van Zile 2001, 186); they emphasize her legacy in cultivating Korean dance or defend her involvement with Japan and North Korea. In doing so, they make assumptions about Ch'oe's career while failing to rely on actual facts. Van Zile evaluates American critics' extensive reviews of Ch'oe's U.S. tour through this lens and discusses the theatrical symbolism of her performances vis-à-vis modernity.

I myself, as a historian of modern Japan and East Asia, focus my work on the cultural and political implications of Ch'oe's body while on stage. Using a historical lens, I argue that Ch'oe appealed to a large international audience not only because of her beauty but also because of her flexible repertoire, in which she incorporated different spectators' preferences into her performances. By including reviewers from colonial Korea, Japan, and the United States, I describe how Ch'oe generated competing identities while performing under the Japanese Empire (Park 2006).³

In my previous works, and also throughout this archive project, I argue that Ch'oe's body is both malleable, reflecting the different cultural backgrounds and nationalities of her audiences, and quite restricted, based on her historical conditions. For this reason, any research into Ch'oe and her work requires a scrupulous and analytical approach to her body politics that incorporates multiple ideologies such as imperialism, orientalism, nationalism, and even socialism. As described above, however, existing works often fail to identify specific sources or carefully historicize the nuanced nature of Ch'oe Sŭng-hŭi. Unfortunately, I have even discovered my own original work appropriated in Japanese articles and books without proper citation. Insecurity caused by plagiarism disturbs the attempt to publish well-researched drafts in peer-reviewed journals. Ch'oe's attractiveness as a figure of academic study and the lack of argumentative discourse on her life have allowed researchers (although rarely) to act against academic ethics. Maintaining fairness while citing or utilizing previous studies is the first step in developing an academic discussion on Ch'oe.

To this end, and because the importance of Ch'oe's life and work spans genres and regions, this project has the long-term goal of unifying a wide range of materials on Ch'oe Sŭng-hŭi within such diverse fields as music, fine art, literature, gymnastics, and mass media. It aims to collect original documents in languages including Chinese, Spanish, French, German, and Russian, and compile them on the basis of their exact date and year. It also seeks to analyze the records left behind through Ch'oe's international network. By doing so, this project aims to relocate colonial arts and entertainment in modern Asian history.

An exciting discovery comes from dialogue with Professor Alfredo Romero Castilla at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), who presented little-known data on Ch'oe's tour of Latin America in a seminar at the University of Tokyo on July 6, 2018, where I participated as a commentator.⁴ The Spanish and Portuguese sources included in this project are thanks to Professor Romero. The next step of the project is to determine a tentative logistical plan for the

archives; I plan to categorize materials based on language. Please note that the given language of a record refers to the original. Since the focus is on primary literature, the project includes few secondary studies, with the exception of those already mentioned in the text.

Japanese

「欧州で活躍する崔承喜」『会館芸術』第八卷第六号（一九三九年六月）、二〇-二二頁。

「外遊を控へて張切る崔承喜 アチラの抱負を語る」『東京朝日新聞』（夕刊）一九三七年八月一五日。

「崔承喜の美容運動」『ホーム・ライフ』第一年第四号（一九三五年一月）、九八-九九頁。

『崔承喜パンフレット』第二輯、崔承喜舞踊研究所、一九三六年。

「“新版唇判断”人気者の唇を覗く小西久遠氏」『読売新聞』（夕刊）一九三七年七月一〇日。

「「半島の舞姫」好評」『東京朝日新聞』一九三八年二月二二日。

「半島の民謡踊りを世界的舞踊に…美人舞姫、崔承喜さん着桑」『新世界朝日新聞』一九三八年二月一三日。

「半島の麗人 崔承喜さんの舞踊 千余の観衆を魅了 充実したプログラム 何れも拍手の嵐！」『新世界朝日新聞』一九四〇年四月九日。

石井漢「崔承喜のこと」『舞踊日本』第一〇号（一九三四年八月）、六-八頁。

金賛汀『炎は闇の彼方に』日本放送出版協会、二〇〇二年。

小宮裏二「崔承喜を見る」『舞踊新潮』一九三六年一〇月。

崔承喜『私の自叙伝——半島の舞姫』日本書荘、一九三六年。

高嶋雄三郎・むくげ舎編『崔承喜』（増補版）むくげ舎、一九八一年〔学風書院、一九五九〕。

高嶋雄三郎・鄭炳浩編『世紀の美人舞踊家崔承喜』エムティ出版、一九九四。

朴祥美「「日本帝国文化」を踊る——崔承喜のアメリカ公演（一九三七-一九四〇）とアジア主義」『思想』第九七五号、二〇〇五年七月。

平林久枝「崔承喜と安漠」『季刊 三千里』第一四号（一九七八年五月）、一六六-一七三頁。

三島由紀夫『わが思春期』集英社、一九七三年、三五-三六頁。

村田春彦「哀れ崔承喜」『舞踊新潮』一九三七年一月。

Korean

金載元「欧州에서의 崔承喜——白耳義公演의 成功을 보고」『朝鮮日報』一九三九年三月一四日。

이애순『최승희 무용예술연구』국학자료원, 二〇〇二年。

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〔紐育에서〕崔承喜「米国通信」『三千里』第一〇卷第一〇号（一九三八年一〇月）、五六-五九頁。

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『韓國芸術総集——演劇編 II 演劇・映画・舞踊』大韓民国芸術院, 一九九〇年。

韓雪野「舞踊使節 崔承喜에게 보내는 書——戯画화된 朝鮮情調」『四海公論』一九三八年七月。

Chinese

崔承喜「中國舞踏藝術的將來」『人民日報』一九五一年二月一八日。

English

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Francisco Chronicle, January 12, 1938.

“Sai Shoki Makes Good,” *Seoul Press*, February 23, 1937.

“Sai Shoki, Premier Korean Dancer to Give Concert Today at Curran,” *The New World-Sun Daily*, April 7, 1940.

“They All Dance,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 12, 1937.

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Spanish and Portuguese

Alfredo Romero Castilla, “La danza moderna en el mundo: la gira latinoamericana de Sai Shoki” (2017) DOI: 10.1106/9788575063156.

Notes

1. Special thanks to Mr. Heonsub Lee, who kindly provided me with brochures and pamphlets published by this memorial association.
2. Hong Ch'ong-ja, “W'olbuk ch'önjae muyong-ga Ch'oe Sünghüi üi pigükchök ch'oeu,” *W'olgan mal*, no. 110 (August 1995), 202-207; *Saraimün shinbwa, muhüi Ch'oe Sünghüi* (Seoul: KBS Media, 1998; VHS, 60 minutes).
3. The Japanese version first appears in Shisō (2005), and the update can be found here: *Teikoku to sengo no bunka seisaku: butai no ue no Nihonzō* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2017).
4. Thanks to Professor Manabe Yūko at the University of Tokyo's Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, who invited me to this event.

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