

**OPERA AND THE CITY: THE POLITICS OF CULTURE IN BEIJING, 1770–1900.** By Andrea S. Goldman. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012. 386 pp. Cloth, \$55.00.

Anyone who walked into a nineteenth-century commercial playhouse in Beijing would have been overwhelmed by a chaotic, eye-dazzling scene: theatergoers occupying the cheapest seats in the “pond” snacking, chatting, and singing along; waiters serving tea, distributing playbills, and flinging steaming hot towels to those who needed to freshen up; “boy actresses” (female impersonators) flirting, via meaningful eye contact, with wealthy theatre patrons sitting in the stage-left balcony seats; court theatre bureau eunuchs on headhunting missions to recruit new talents from the stage; connoisseurs playing the part of opera ethnographers and offering evaluative comments. The sights and spectacles on and off stage in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century commercial theatre in Beijing have drawn much scholarly attention in recent years, and Andrea Goldman’s *Opera and the City* makes a major contribution to our understanding of a theatre culture that is an integral part of the social fabric of late imperial Chinese cities. As various social constituencies—the imperial court, acting troupes, theatre owners, merchants, civil service examinees, elite and commoner patrons—participated in the refashioning and appropriation of the popular theatre tradition, the plotline of this tale about opera and city, as Goldman suggests, would never be a neat, linear one.

*Opera and the City* comprises five chapters, an overture, and a coda. Its appendices include a glossary of *xiqu*-related terms and two comprehensive lists of performance scripts of *Feicui yuan* (Jade Garden) and “I, Sister-in-Law” plays (discussed in chapters 4 and 5) in various archives in Beijing, Tokyo, and the United States. Drawing upon a broad range of primary materials, including biographical and anecdotal sketches of actors, fictional accounts of Beijing theatres, court documents, as well as the production scripts of popular plays of *kunju* and *pihuang* (the musical system that formed the basis of *jingju*), Goldman gracefully and convincingly establishes *xiqu* in late Qing Beijing as a contested site where sentimentality and sensuality were displayed and experienced, gender and class transgressions reimagined, and state power and commercial interests intersected.

Part 1 (chapter 1) explores the demographic composition of urban audiences and their relationships with actors. Specifically, Goldman examines a set of mid- to late-Qing “flower registers” (*huapu*) composed by *xiqu* aficionados to rank and comment upon the talents and demeanors of young boy actresses. Until today, historians have mostly used flower registers to reconstruct a performance history of *jingju* or a social history of homoerotic desires of Qing China. *Opera and the City* situates this group of works in the traditions of *pin* connoisseurship, of courtesan literature, and of urban memoirs. Through her rich and nuanced analysis of these “borrowed discourses” employed by the *huapu* writers, Goldman unveils to us the world of this small urban textual community who distinguished themselves as true *xiqu* connoisseurs with unsurpassed tastes. Their shared expression of eccentricity, however, is ulti-

mately a reflection of these writers' anxiety about their own place "within a long historical and literary legacy . . . among contemporary peers, and place within the slippery social hierarchy" (p. 58).

The patterns of *xiqu* consumption and connoisseurship in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Beijing were further complicated by the variety of theatre venues available for different types of audience clientele. Part 2 (chapters 2 and 3) examines three key theatre venues—commercial playhouses, temple fairs, and private salons—to delineate the spatial dynamics of *xiqu* within the capital city. Various kinds of boundary crossings—ethnic, gender, and class—took place in these theatres and were closely monitored by the state. Qing court patronage and oversight of *xiqu* could be felt at all levels. Goldman's well-grounded study tackles some unexamined assumptions in this regard. First, not all boundary crossings in the opera houses were seen by the Qing rulers as transgressive. As the single most important patron of *jingju*, late Qing rulers seemed to silently indulge in and encourage potentially subversive performances of sexual topics—so long as they helped reinforce preexisting status hierarchy and social norms.

Further, Goldman calls for a reevaluation of our use of *yabu* (the elegant division) and *huabu* (the flowery division)—the traditional generic designations for *kunju* and all other types of regional operas—as fixed conceptual categories. These labels, Goldman suggests, have never been neutral, objective ones. They embedded within themselves aesthetic hierarchies with value judgment and reflected the court and literati commentators' attempts "to impose a modicum of stability upon the contested cultural field of opera genre" (p. 119). However, the Manchu rulers did not always share the cultural tastes of the Han social elite. Chapter 3 gives an in-depth analysis of how the late Qing court's active patronage of *pihuang*—rather than imposing strict regulations as had been done by earlier rulers—proved to be a more effective way to turn urban entertainment to meet its own ends.

When it comes to attesting the central spot *xiqu* occupied in Qing Beijing, perhaps nothing serves as better witness than the performance itself. Part 3 (chapters 4 and 5) provides contextualized reading of two popular plays and story cycles. The author illustrates the tension between class and gender transgressions in commercial performances, and how the court appropriated this tension to suit their own purposes. The strength of these chapters lies in Goldman's detailed analyses of *pihuang* and *kunju* performance scripts—scripts of full-scale *kunju*, "scene selections" (*zhezi xi*), and court-commissioned plays—in her reconstruction of the performance history. In each case, the revision, selection, and omission of stage scripts reflect the messages the audience would likely have received. As Goldman states, "The traces of live performance captured in surviving scripts can be read as a gauge of audience likes and dislikes" (p. 147). Goldman's analysis shows how the court's appropriation favored a romanticized narrative of male brotherhood, and action-play violence eventually replaced sex and romance in the court version of these *pihuang* operas. The late Qing court's sponsorship and patronage of *pihuang* opera shaped the aesthetic trajectory of *jingju* into what it is today.

Just like a beautifully executed *jingju*, *Opera and the City* is an animated performance with verve, fueled by the author's passions about Chinese performing arts. The field of Qing theatre studies has produced rather teleological narratives because of its focus on select historical events, such as the rise of *kunju* in the seventeenth century, Wei Changsheng's introduction of Sichuan *qinqiang* opera into Beijing in 1779, the arrival of Anhui *xiqu* troupes in Beijing to celebrate Emperor Qianlong's eightieth birthday in 1790, and the decline of *kunju* in the nineteenth-century. *Opera and the City* canvasses the complex ecosystem of eighteenth-century *xiqu* in Beijing. The book tells a story more complex and interesting than the trite narrative of *kunju* giving way to the up-and-coming *jingju*. Anyone interested in performance study, Chinese urban history, or late imperial China overall would find *Opera and City* an inspiring read.

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**KINESTHETIC CITY: DANCE AND MOVEMENT IN CHINESE URBAN SPACES.** By SanSan Kwan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 175 pp. Paper, \$27.95.

What is Chineseness, and how is it produced outside of China? How is movement constitutive of and generated by space and identity, and how can we learn about places through their choreographies? These are two of the guiding questions in SanSan Kwan's much anticipated *Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces*, the first English-language scholarly monograph on Chinese contemporary dance.

While Kwan's book deals substantively with works by major Chinese contemporary dance companies—Jin Xing Dance Theatre of Shanghai, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan, City Contemporary Dance Company of Hong Kong, and Chen and Dancers of New York—it is not primarily a study of dance works, companies, or choreographers, nor is it a study of contemporary dance in mainland China. Reflective of Kwan's training as a scholar of performance studies, the book explores movement and choreography broadly conceived, inquiring into the relationship between movement, identity, and urban space. Kwan's methodology combines kinesthesia (the body's awareness of motion) with choreographic analysis to inquire into "how cities move" (p. 2); as such, the book gives nearly equal weight to analyses of concert dance works and of bodily experiences of moving in cities. The five cities that Kwan examines in the book are Shanghai, Taipei, Hong Kong, New York, and Los Angeles (primarily the middle three); thus, the book has an impressively transnational scope that aims at "decentering mainland China as the source of Chinese identity" (p. 9).

*Kinesthetic City* is organized by geographical site, with the preface and

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