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Reinventing the Past:
Remembering the Cultural Revolution and *Red Detachment of Women* —
An Exploration of Chinese Revolutionary Ballet

Grace Levine

In 1939, Hollywood released the film *Gone With the Wind*, which focused on the themes of the American Civil War and southern Reconstruction through the story of a southern belle, Scarlet O'Hara. Recently, the film has been removed from streaming platforms and is set to be re-released with a new introduction. The film has been criticized for its perpetuation of racist stereotypes and its insensitive approach to slavery. At the time of its release in the 1930s, there was incredible sensationalism surrounding it, and it remains “the highest-grossing film of all time, adjusted for inflation.”¹ The story, without historical context, glorifies Confederate culture and misconstrues the nature of Reconstruction and its lasting impact on the American South and Southern culture. It has been met with harsh criticism throughout the years from Black Americans, including Malcolm X. Many Black artists have attempted to confront the “whitewashed nostalgia” that the film celebrates.² Until the new introduction that situates the film in a historical context, which will be written by African American film scholar Jacqueline Stewart, the film will be removed from most streaming services to prohibit ignorant viewing.

The removal of *Gone With the Wind*, along with numerous Confederate statues throughout the United States is indicative of the debate over how to remember certain problematic, or uncomfortable, aspects of history and more generally, how to grapple with our past. Although sometimes unconsciously, and others consciously, films like the one discussed above and statues praising Confederate generals and racist American figures throughout history, perpetuate and instill problematic perceptions of the past, which are historically inaccurate. Today, the U.S. faces the dilemma of how to best use these objects (i.e. preservation or destruction) that represent our past. Can they be displayed without promoting racism against Black Americans? How so? This controversy directly relates to the discussion below of how the proliferation of revolutionary ballet in communist China during the Cultural Revolution impacts the way we perceive the Cultural Revolution; both examples speak to the tremendous implications of how people frame the past through methods of recollecting or reinventing history.

Introduction

Dance is a worldwide phenomenon, which creates complexity in terms of dance criticism and interpretation, especially when applied to an already complicated historical past, such as the Cultural

Revolution. Because it is a global phenomenon, dance “is not simply cross-cultural but pan-cultural and planetary,” which means the medium keeps on changing, expanding, adapting, and so on.³ We see this mosaic-building repertoire very clearly in Chinese dance history. The two predominant forms of Chinese dance during the People’s Republic of China (PRC) were known as *zhongguo wudao*, referring to Chinese dance, and *minzu wudao*, meaning national dance, or folk dance.⁴ The planetary nature of dance is seen through the ever-changing form of both Chinese and national dance within China.⁵ In other words, each dance style is inherently modern, a creation of the 20th-century, made through years of dance transmission, experimentation, and evolution.⁶ This is important because it asserts the innovative character of Chinese dance and choreography in the 20th-century, pre-Cultural Revolution.

Before the discussion of the origins of ballet specifically, as well as its origins in China, a brief overview of the complex political, social, and economic situation of the Cultural Revolution is necessary. The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), also known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, was a ten-year period of revolutionary campaigns launched by Mao, which can be attributed to a variety of interpretations, some more biased than others. One view is that Mao desired to disassemble the divisions within the Party and to “shake up the Party” as a means of revitalizing the revolutionary, or communist, spirit among the members, as seen in his 1966 “Just A Few Words” speech given at the Central Work Conference.⁶ However, there are countless other hypotheses for the cause of the Cultural Revolution. For example, some scholars credit the origin of the series of campaigns to Mao’s intense fear of dissent among Party members and the suggestion that he was personally engulfed with paranoia—this is a more biased possible explanation of the Cultural Revolution. Andrew G. Walder, a well-known sociologist whose research on the Cultural Revolution has dominated mainstream sinology, argues that the revolutionary organization of the 1940s evolved into a system of patronage that annoyed Mao. As a result, “Mao interpreted this as a reversion to capitalism rather than the inevitable evolution of a bureaucratic hierarchy with monopoly control over property and career opportunities,” which according to Walder was a “flawed diagnosis of the diseases.”⁸ For Walder, Mao’s inability to see the reality of the problem is the origin of the Cultural Revolution. I present a small arrangement of varying interpretations of the explanation of the Cultural Revolution in an attempt to highlight the range of opinions within the scholarship surrounding the phenomena.

Regardless of the interpretation of the onset of the Cultural Revolution, that ten year period translated into an attack on feudal and bourgeois elements entering the communist state. In general, the Cultural Revolution was marked by Mao’s desire to reassert the revolutionary spirit among the proletariat, focusing mainly on the youth, who “more readily accepted new ideology and because their bodies did not signify cultural tradition and the past, as did those of their elders.”⁹ The revolution is

commonly associated with the Red Guard Movement, revolutionary committees, sent-down youth, the Cult of Mao, mass mobilization, and general suffering. The events leading up to, and during the Cultural Revolution, are idealistically based on class conflict, mass mobilization, communist revolution, and the mass/Mao line. In reality, the revolution can be seen as an attempt by Mao to reassert his control of the Chinese Communist Party in the wake of global conflict, poor domestic policy, a lack of human rights, and the continuance of capitalist tendencies. Lastly, for my research, it is important to note that many lives were lost during the time, which has been referred to as a “campaign of terror.”¹⁰ Although the estimated number of deaths continues to be debated, some historians believe it to be somewhere between 800,000 and 1.2 million, not including the estimated 36 million deaths that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s in China that can be attributed to the Great Famine.¹¹

In most cases of revolution or widespread campaigning, propaganda is a necessity. Throughout the Cultural Revolution, numerous campaigns encouraged revolutionary outbreaks.¹² Due to the enormous scope of the revolutionary campaigns, a variety of propaganda methods were created; interestingly, the creation of revolutionary ballets and musicals were meant to inscribe communist political ideas, Maoist ideology, and artistic values all in one. As a result, the foundations of traditional ballet were altered and added to, creating an incredibly unique combination of ballet, martial arts, and traditional Chinese Opera. Such ballets, or model operas, include *Red Detachment of Women*, *The White-Haired Girl*, and *The East Is Red*, all of which were released in the U.S. during the Cultural Revolution. *Red Detachment of Women*, specifically, was said to mark the “first big step towards revolutionizing the ballet in China and making it national and popular.”¹³ Although simple and limited in balletic vocabulary, these revolutionary ballets are worthy of artistic, historical, and ethical review.

Traditional ballet originally developed during the Italian Renaissance, then transferred to France where it was popularized in the court of Louis XIV, has had a complex history, made up of intersections between religion and nationalism across the globe.¹⁴ The intricate timeline of the history of ballet, from Louis XIV to Balanchine to Martha Graham and Alvin Ailey, reinforces the idea that “often it is by some personal serendipity or political cataclysm that ballet has found its greatest opportunities to flourish.”¹⁵ In China, before the presence of Soviet teachers and the onset of the Cultural Revolution, ballet was indeed present but was not a total replica of Soviet-style ballet.¹⁶ According to Emily Wilcox, a specialist in Chinese dance and performance, the “first wave of ballet activities in China inherited the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Russian ballet tradition.”¹⁷ During this time, ballet became associated with urban, bourgeoisie, and Western culture, which coincided with a larger trend of modernity and urbanization in China and greater Asia. After the formation of the PRC, institutions like the Beijing Dance School (BDS) were mandated by the

government to adopt Soviet-style ballet and became popularly known as the primary means of balletic transmission. Although ballet was not purely a socialist adaptation, it was popularized as such during the years leading up to the Cultural Revolution.

The origins of ballet are significant in examining the revolutionary ballets of the Cultural Revolution. For example, it is ironic that a communist state would promote an artistic dance form that has historically been associated with the elite and wealthy, and “which is the quintessentially European form of dance drama”—ideas that sharply contrast with the ideals of communism or Maoism.¹⁸ To revolutionize ballet and re-appropriate a tradition of the feudal and wealthy, Jiang Qing, Mao’s wife, encouraged a revolt in which the “proletariat overthrows bourgeois control of ballet.”¹⁹ According to Eric Mullis, a dancer and philosopher who focuses on the application of pragmatist philosophy onto dance forms, Jiang Qing’s interest in transforming the intention and mission of ballet “would simultaneously draw attention to the working class and the poor, help to modernize traditional Chinese art forms, and diplomatically demonstrate China’s capability in advancing Western art forms.”²⁰

One could say that a specific “political cataclysm” known as the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) encouraged the development of an inherently unique, “innovative fusion of movement traditions.”²¹ However, this would be a narrow interpretation, not only because of the nature of ballet in China’s pre-Cultural Revolution but also because of the contemporary ethical problems associated with ballet that came out of China in the period from 1964-1976. Accordingly, the ballets that were created during the Cultural Revolution have captivated many historians and have had a particularly significant effect on mainstream Western Cultural Revolution scholarship. As a result, Emily Wilcox was inspired to write her new book on socialist legacies and dance after seeing the extensive, yet narrow, research on the topic of revolutionary ballets. Specifically, many narratives focus on the original films and dramas that these ballets were adapted from, as well as broader themes of balletic and aesthetic form.²²

Remembering, or the making and harboring of memory, is more important while discussing the Cultural Revolution than it may seem at first glance. The discussion of any moment in history, particularly those in which a nation’s modern agenda may have to grapple with a problematic past, involves examining how that moment is remembered. The questions we need to keep in mind are: Why are we remembering? How are we remembering? Are we honoring, commemorating, reinventing? And, what are the implications of how we are looking back on this history?

These questions are extremely powerful when reflecting on how pieces or pictures of the past are perceived today. The revolutionary ballets, particularly *Red Detachment of Women*, need to be scrutinized. In this research paper, I hope to examine how we can look at these ballets—as art, as a political propaganda tool, and as a way to remember the Cultural Revolution— with a specific focus

on the ballet *Red Detachment of Women*. In doing so, I will stress the standards with which we can analyze these ballets and how we can appropriately remember them within the context of the Cultural Revolution. A primary argument will develop that stresses the necessity for these ballets to be looked at for artistic, historical, and ethical reasons regarding their relationship to the Cultural Revolution and how they affect how we recall the Cultural Revolution.

Before I continue, it is important to note that the content of *Red Detachment of Women* does not follow the events of the Cultural Revolution. The ballet is set on Hainan Island during the Chinese Civil War and focuses its story on the Red Army, specifically a female detachment of the Red Army. Although the actual content of the ballet follows the internal strife between the Chinese Communist Party and the Nationalist Party (*Kuomintang*), the ballet was performed during the Cultural Revolution. The production of the ballet during the Cultural Revolution is what makes it significant to the remembering of the ten year period in that the choice to glorify the Red Army was intended to fuel the revolutionary spirit of the 1960s, especially among members of the Red Guard movement during the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, while the subject of the ballet is not directly related to the events of the Cultural Revolution, it is still highly useful in examining the historical context of the revolution not only because it was designed at the time to accomplish certain goals, but also because the Cultural Revolution was the historical setting in which the ballet was created and presented.

In Part I, I will introduce the basic tenets of dance criticism that are necessary for examining this ballet in academic terms. After which, there will be a brief overview of the plot of the ballet which I will link with three primary functions of dance that apply to the goals of *Red Detachment of Women*. In Part II, I will propose the different lights in which we can examine the ballet and what implications these options have. In that section, I will define the terms ethicism, autonomism, and moderate moralism in order to engage with alternative ways of viewing, honoring, and investigating not only revolutionary ballets, but problematic historical art. In Part III, I will provide an overview that argues for moderate moralism as the most appropriate way of critiquing this ballet. In doing so, I will scrutinize the ballet in terms of the actual dance movements (i.e. balletic vocabulary and style), costumes, music, and general theatrical elements. The analysis involves the introduction of *Red Detachment of Women* as being seen simultaneously as art and propaganda, as well as being very beautiful and problematic. In the last section, Part IV, I link the ideas established in Parts I and II and the analysis proposed in Part III with the idea of reinventing the past and its effect on how we remember the Cultural Revolution. Throughout the essay, I will touch on the debate claiming that propaganda can be art, as well as the century-old conversation of art imitating life, or life imitating art. Additionally, conversations on the power of dance, the role of the body, gender functions, and other sub-themes will emerge. All of these components allow us to reach and interpret the goal of this

research: how can we simultaneously look at *Red Detachment of Women* as art, as a political propaganda tool, and as a way to remember the Cultural Revolution?



A scene from one of the more contemporary viewings of Red Detachment of Women. Credit: Zhuang Pinghui, "China's top ballet company in shouting match with courts over royalty order for repertoire performed for Richard Nixon," South China Morning Post.

Part I

In popular dance criticism, there are four ways to evaluate a piece of dance: description, interpretation, evaluation, and contextualization. Description, which is the first step in dance criticism, refers to describing the dance in the simplest, most literal terms. The next step is to interpret what you have just described; you ask yourself "What does this mean?" Once we have a basic understanding of what is going on, we can ask ourselves the deeper questions involved with evaluation and contextualizing a dance. In doing so, we need to think about what is being communicated and why. When evaluating a piece, the primary concern is to find the meaning of what is being communicated through the dance and make judgments as to what value a piece has, why that outlook is being communicated, and what the consequences are. Then, we are able to put all the pieces

together and place the dance into a larger, more global context in which we make historical, global, and artistic connections—this is known as contextualization.

Red Detachment of Women is a Chinese ballet that was developed in 1964 under the guidance of Jiang Qing to promote revolutionary and communist ideas through dance. Of course, this ballet is a work of propaganda; its main goals being to reinforce the CCP's position against Confucianism, provide a critique of feudal culture, honor the Red Army, praise the Party, and engage in a conversation of gender roles and equity. More generally, "the basic task of socialist literature and art," like the ballet, is "to create typical models of proletarian heroes."²³ The narrative does so by focusing on a woman who has been unfairly imprisoned by an evil landlord (a marker of feudal, Confucian China—landlords were often portrayed as evil antagonists in CCP propaganda), but escapes and is encouraged to join the local detachment of women to the Red Army. After joining the women, Wu Qionghua and the rest of the detachment plan a surprise attack on the landlord.²⁴ When this fails, a battle ensues in which the leader of the detachment, Hong Changqing, dies a noble death and Wu assumes his position, destroys the landlord's army, and kills him. The plot, based on the movie *Red Detachment of Women* (1960), was most likely chosen by Jiang Qing because it is strongly nationalistic and could be altered to create an emotional, convincing, heroic piece of propaganda. A newspaper article from the ballet's opening day called the "heroic image of the laboring people and the revolutionary fighters of China" displayed in the ballet a "ringing success," indicating that the ballet's initial goal had come to fruition.²⁵ The focal point of the ballet is its reliance on class conflict and the class/line struggles in China to fuel the narrative. According to a scholarly article written at the time about art in China, "all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes or art that is detached from or independent of politics."²⁶

With that brief summary of the plot and the primary reasons for its creation, three connections between the functions of dance and the functions of this ballet emerge. The first of which is "dance as an expression of social order and power."²⁷ Here, we see the use of ballet as a means of reiterating and ingrain communist order and dominance through a heroic story of the Red Army and a heroine, who courageously fought for the socialist cause under Mao.

We also see this ballet as a manifestation of cultural identity, perhaps even as a symbol of a clash between cultures. The ballet pulls from many different areas of dance, re-establishing its pan-cultural and global nature. It includes pieces of Soviet-style ballet, adopted from Russia and dating back to the Italian Renaissance, as well as traditional ethnic dances, commodifying the underrepresented culture of ethnic minorities like those in Inner Mongolia. A deeper application of this idea is seen in the comparison between traditional Western ballet and Chinese revolutionary ballet. We see these clashes in the use of music, costumes, style, form, etc.,

which is exemplary of the struggle between modernity and tradition in Cultural Revolution era China. The third linkage is more subtle, but equally important and refers to the cultural and gender norms either perpetuated or attacked by the ballet. It is well-known that socialist governments, including Stalin's Soviet Union and Mao's China, encouraged gender equality in the face of revolution and promoted the expansion of women's rights, seeing them as bodies that were available for mobilization.

In Part II of the paper, once an applicable lens of inquiry for the ballet is introduced, we will elaborate on the three linkages, or intersections, mentioned more specifically to create an intricate analysis of the functions of *Red Detachment of Women*. The three functions can also be interpreted as three major themes vital to this dialogue—dance as social power, dance as a conflict between cultures, and dance as an expression of social order and gender roles.

Part II

There are different approaches to viewing *Red Detachment of Women*; one being as a form of art. When you look at art, various types of knowledge come into play: aesthetic, moral, and ethical.²⁸ The aesthetic value of art is obvious to many, but the moral and ethical implications of some art pieces can be muddled and misconstrued. Not only that, but there is a popular, age-old debate that asks the question “Is all art political?” Some would argue that any piece of art has political aspirations and is politically inclined in one way or another. To that, another person could argue that this statement is too general and gives politics too much credit, taking away from the aesthetic merit of the art. As a result of this debate, and the larger questions over how to view art, various methods of criticism have been developed.

In 20th-century society, “explicit departures from and rebellions against the belief in the autonomy of art” has encouraged “changes in criticism and artistic creativity.”²⁹ The modern trends of examining art as less autonomous has given rise to other forms of criticism, some originating during antiquity, but abandoned in the intermediary period, such as ethical criticism, or ethicism.³⁰ As a result, there are a variety of ways in which scholars, artists, critics, and independent viewers analyze the nature and implications of a piece of art. Most significant to our discussion of revolutionary ballet is the relationship between ethical criticism, the autonomist argument, and moderate moralism. By auditing the three major channels of artistic criticism, we can begin to theorize how and why we should view *Red Detachment of Women*. Furthermore, the three philosophies are relevant to the discussion of how to remember a problematic past.

The first is ethicism. Ethicisms is described as a philosophy that “assert[s] that some ethical values/ disvalues are aesthetic values/disvalues.”³¹ Translating that into ethical art criticism implies that art should not be examined without using an ethical perspective. This field of interpretation

inherently perpetuates the idea that art and life are inseparable, contributing to the venerable debate over whether art imitates life or vice versa. An honorable aspect of this kind of criticism is its reliance on ancient philosophical ideas of humanism, developed by Plato, which allows the interpreter to take into account the ethical and equitable nature, or lack thereof, of a work of art. According to Berys Gaut, a professor of philosophy and a specialist in aesthetics and ethics, ethicism is, in fact, “inescapable” and “unavoidable.”³² He also argues, in his systematic approach to describe the relationship between art and moralism, that the virtue of ethicism and ethical criticism is that any change, or improvement, of a work’s moral landscape can reduce the aesthetic value as a whole.³³

When applying this concept to *Red Detachment of Women*, one could argue that the ballet is ethically flawed because it glorifies the CCP and the Cultural Revolution, which was a period in Chinese history in which thousands of people were killed, punished, and manipulated.³⁴ As I have previously mentioned, even though the ballet does not literally speak to the experiences of the Cultural Revolution, the historical use of the ballet to glorify the CCP, ignite the revolutionary spirit of citizens during the Cultural Revolution, and the inherent relationship between the ideals expressed in the play and those imposed upon Chinese people during the 1960s allows us to relate the content of the ballet to an adoration for Cultural Revolution policies. The issue is not necessarily that the ballet in this case, tells a story of the Red Army, but rather it is the “disparity between representation and reality [that] makes the ballet ethically troubling.”³⁵ This idea, presented by Mullis but not expanded on in a necessary manner, is significant to how we criticize and view the ballet and how we can continue to remember it, Mao Zedong, and the Cultural Revolution.

Secondly, the autonomist argument claims that “art and ethics are autonomous realms of value and, thus, criteria from the ethical realm should not be imported to evaluate the aesthetic realm.”³⁶ If we apply this to our criticism of the *Red Detachment of Women*, an autonomist perspective would argue that the political implications of the ballet, the honoring of the CCP and the Cultural Revolution, has no bearing on the artistic value of the piece. This view is problematic because it ignores the fact that thousands of lives were lost during the Cultural Revolution, which is being glorified in this ballet. In other words, for autonomists “even though it is tempting to judge a work in light of ethical content, to do so would be to make a category mistake in which ethical values take precedence over artistic values.”³⁷

The autonomist argument faces harsh opposition when we juxtapose it with international responses to the continuation of the ballet around the world. We see emotional and political responses to *Red Detachment of Women* performances. In 2017 a performance of the ballet in Melbourne was met with protesters arguing that the show glorifies the Red Army. Among the protesters was the protest organizer, Frank Ruan, who is quoted saying that showing the ballet is “like putting salt on the wounds of some Chinese people.”³⁸ An example with similar sentiments

occurred a few years earlier at Lincoln Center in New York after a performance of the *Red Detachment of Women*. Leo Timm, a reporter for *Epoch Times*, wrote a piece on this performance and explained that his great-grandfather fell into the landlord class, as defined by Mao, and was killed during the Cultural Revolution.³⁹



Australian protest outside of a showing of the Red Detachment of Women. Credit: Kara Bertoncini, "Asia TOPA Review: The Red Detachment of Women is visually spectacular, but politically controversial," AU Review.

If we were to view *Red Detachment of Women* using an autonomist perspective, we would ignore the pleas mentioned above that advocate against the perpetuation of the idealization of the Cultural Revolution and the crimes against humanity committed during those ten years. Instead, an autonomist would set aside these problematic issues and focus on the substance of the ballet such as form, style, music, choreography, etc., but on a superficial level, as it ignores the evaluation and contextualization that dance criticism involves. Today, the Chinese government takes this stance by ignoring the historical context in which this ballet was made, and instead celebrates it for its “distinct artistic achievement.”⁴⁰

Third, is the introduction to what is known as moderate moralism. Noël Carroll, a general philosopher and a philosopher of art, has provided intricate descriptions of what he calls “moderate moralism,” or “moderate autonomism.” In his work, he refers to moderate moralism as based on the precedent that “an artwork may be aesthetically valuable and morally defective.”⁴¹ In other words, when criticizing a work of art using moderate moralism, one could advance the idea that there is a

moral problem with the work in discussion, while simultaneously advocating for the aesthetic value or merit.

In regards to *Red Detachment of Women*, a moderate moralist stance would argue that yes, there are moral and ethical problems with the ballet, in that it remembers the Cultural Revolution in a light that could be interpreted as highly offensive and biased, not to mention its representation of sensitive subjects. The ballet also functions as a tool in the perpetuation of false history. However, the moderate moralist would also value the aesthetic principles and artistic integrity of the ballet, such as its innovative choreographic style, use of music, and fusion of dance techniques. A *New Yorker* article describes an appropriate response to reviewing artistic style: “there is a place in art for the simple, even the strident.”⁴² In the remainder of this paper, I utilize a moderate moralist lens to explore the *Red Detachment of Women*. I attribute this choice to the idea that the ballet still has aesthetic and historical value, in spite of its ethical issues. If academia were to disregard or limit the use of problematic resources, scholarship would be less fruitful and less enlightening. Although historical representations of the past may be difficult to work with, in that they are highly sensitive or ethically problematic, it remains necessary to study these sources, scrutinize them, and discuss the educational and intellectual value of such.

Part III

After having given serious thought to the philosophies above, I have concluded that the stance of moderate moralism is best to apply when discussing *Red Detachment of Women*. It would be irresponsible as historians and researchers to take an autonomist route of analysis, and it would be too simple for us to assume the role of ethicists in this case. So, the remainder of the analysis on the ballet *Red Detachment of Women* will incorporate ideas associated with moderate moralism. For the purposes of this paper, I will be basing my analysis on the 1964 Beijing Dance Company live production of the ballet which has been recorded, not the film that the ballet was originally adapted from. I will also utilize the four major aspects of traditional dance criticism, which were briefly discussed in Part I, to help frame my analysis.

The dancing in the ballet has come under harsh scrutiny by scholars. I have seen the ballet criticized for its simplification and limited balletic vocabulary as well as for its assumed regressive character in terms of innovation, emotion, and artistic quality as observed by critic R.G. Davis in *Film Quarterly*. It is important to maintain, before condemning the ballet for its lackluster dance vocabulary, that it was not necessarily designed with the hope of outshining Western or Soviet ballet or in an attempt to transform the mainstream balletic technique in the second half of the twentieth century. The ballet was based off of the 1960 film, *Red Detachment of Women*, and modified to create a revolutionary plot with a clear message that supported the CCP and encouraged civilians to embody

the revolutionary spirit. It was intended to be propaganda from the moment Jiang Qing chose this particular story.⁴³ Consequently, the dance techniques and balletic moves may appear simplified in the eyes of Western critiques. This also might be the case for critics with no classical training in ballet, who do not focus on dance criticism. Unlike the critics of today, when the ballet first opened it was praised by the communist Chinese press. In an excerpt from the *Peking Review*, a weekly English-language news source, the opening day of the ballet, October 3rd, was called “a red-letter day for ballet in China.”⁴⁴

With that in mind, Jiang Qing announced her “revolution of Peking Opera” in a speech in July 1964, in which she rendered the transformation of aesthetic and artistic visuals as the “prelude to the cultural revolution.”⁴⁵ Jiang Qing took an acute interest in the arts, specifically theatrical arts, during the Cultural Revolution; a newspaper article from the time is quoted stating, her “prominent role during the Cultural Revolution has raised many questions about her personality and history,” which may be a nod to her past as an actress.⁴⁶ It is also likely that she may not have been the only one who saw the potential in using ballet as a harbinger of revolution and socialist thought. For example, in a 1965 Chinese editorial on ballet, the author wrote that ballet’s development in China had been “swift” to transform “the limitations of the old classical ballet with its princes and princesses,” and was too “far removed from the working people and from modern life.”⁴⁷ More importantly, it is clear that “Madame Mao” was in charge of the revolutionary ballets and the transformation of *traditional, feudal* Peking and Beijing Opera. The incorporation of Western balletic style, ethnic folk dances, and revolutionary extras (music, costumes setting, fists, etc.), has led to the ballet being referred to as “a revolution in which the proletariat overthrows bourgeois control of ballet.”⁴⁸ The finished result was not a simplified ballet that used music as its mode of story-telling rendering it regressive, but rather was an innovative dance fusion that was completely unique to the experiences of the Cultural Revolution, resulting in an increase in the success of ballet as a political tool in China.

Dance, specifically ballet, is assumed to be a strict practice that does not allow much room for individuality or cultural identity. This is an inaccurate assumption. Instead, dance changes constantly, as life and art do, according to history, nation, the individual, the time, and what the dancer or choreographer had for breakfast. I use this extreme example to translate the fact that dance is the result of numerous coincidences, fusions, and interactions. *Red Detachment of Women’s* balletic content, if we separate it from its mission, political implications, or message, was made from a series of interesting interactions between art, nation, and time.

The traditional elegance and grace associated with ballet, demonstrates the primary goal of classical ballet: to “transcend the physicality of the dancers’ bodies by creating the illusion that the dancers are ethereal beings—nymphs and sylphs and such—for whom the rules of touch and extension do not apply.”⁴⁹ Although gracefulness is a necessity to making ballet seem effortless, the

Red Detachment of Women crosses all boundaries and replaces traditional balletic, delicate fingers with rough fists.⁵⁰ In some gender studies of the ballet, scholars state that the “introduction of individual female dance movements that were similar to those of male dancers symbolized the increased social status for women and the gender-egalitarian ideals of the time.”⁵¹ These clenched fists, which you can see in the image above, when juxtaposed with classical arabesques and the use of pointe shoes creates an alarming, yet provocative kind of choreography.^{52*}



Still from Scene Two of *Hong se niang zi jun*. Credit: Rosemary Roberts, “Performing Gender in Maoist Ballet.”

Through the use of both simple (*arabesques*, *grand jetes*, etc.) and complex balletic moves (sixteen consecutive *fouette* turns into a series of *pirouettes* in a circle, intricate footwork with pointe shoes, a series of consecutive *grand jetes* by the cast for a one-minute interval, etc.) combined with the influence of Soviet ballet and Chinese ethnic folk dances, a hybrid dance form that incorporated, but ultimately overcame, a Western form was created.⁵³

The body is not the only tool a dancer uses to create movement and tell a story; they also utilize props and costumes to captivate and inspire the audience. In classical ballet, ballerinas wear tutus, leotards, and pink ballet tights. The solid pink line from shoulders to feet, created by the leotard and tights, fit the dancer tightly and expose most of her body, only covering the parts concealed by the tutu. The tutus are made of tulle fabric which, combined with the fit of the costume, creates an ethereal look, much like a cloud, as the dancer moves. In contrast, the ballerinas in *Red Detachment of*

Women were dressed in a version of Red Army military outfits. This included khaki sets, knee socks, military caps, and a weapon (rifles, machetes, guns, etc.).⁵⁴ Although the military uniform for female Red Army soldiers at the time included long pants, the ballerinas wore shorts that came above their knees. Perhaps, the pants were shortened for dancing purposes (i.e. more flexibility for dancers and pants would disrupt the lines of the dancer's body) or maybe the decision had more to do with gender.⁵⁵ We do see a conversation of gender roles throughout the ballet, which I mentioned earlier with regard to dance representing gender-specific behavior and the phenomenon of the advancement of gender equality in communist states. If we were to look at the shorts in terms of gender, it could be argued that the pants were shortened to sexualize the dancers' bodies through a process of commodification. We see evidence for this in the fact that Xue Jinghua, who played Wu Qinghua in the 1970 film of the ballet, "was among the allowable pin-ups in the 1970s — performing a fetching arabesque in Bermuda shorts, gun in hand, the villainous Nanbatian cowering before her."⁵⁶ The representation of communist women as sexual objects is very different from the images of the women in the ballet, especially when juxtaposed with ballerinas striking powerful poses with rifles, creating an interesting dichotomy of gender. It is also confusing in terms of the communist agenda, which dismissed the distractions of love and sex, but chose ballet, which "is about bodies on display" as a method of political communication.⁵⁷ Simultaneously, the unconventional costumes create a different and exciting atmosphere that aids in the story-telling process, which is integral to ballet.



National Ballet of China in the Red Detachment of Women. Credit: National Ballet of China.

The ways gender functions in the ballet are multiplexed. However, instances of questionable costume choice, heroic female characters, and the blending of male and female dance moves stipulate

the previously mentioned theme of dance as a means of reinforcing or reinventing cultural and gender norms.⁵⁸



Credit: *A Modern Revolutionary Ballet* (May 1970).

Another important aspect of the ballet, in terms of the actual dance and theatrical content, is the use of music. According to R.G. Davis, a theatre critic for the *Film Quarterly*, the ballet's reliance on music to do the storytelling is regressive. Although some could argue this, I do not see a more dramatic use of music in this ballet as compared to others. In fact, there are important Chinese opera techniques applied to the dance, which use exacerbated body movements to aid the narrative. Martha Graham, considered to be the mother of modern dance, is known worldwide for her dance technique and her expansive involvement in modern dance and choreography in the twentieth century. She is also well known for her ability to create and perform movements that were incredibly raw, emotional, and telling. To "expand the possibilities of story-telling through gesture," she borrowed and adapted "the flexible staging of Asian dance-drama forms like Nō, kabuki, and Chinese opera."⁵⁹ What interested her in Chinese opera was its ability to use a few steps to indicate something greater, "a few moments the passage of years."⁶⁰ I believe this can be said regarding *Red Detachment of Women*. Although it is inaccurate to claim that it is merely a continuation of Chinese opera, there are similarities in the narrative arch, story-telling methods, and the incorporation of body and music. For example, the close-ups of the dancers, included in the filmed version of a live performance, show how telling their faces are and how much emoting they are doing on their own, regardless of the music. Facial expressions were extremely significant to Chinese opera and also play a large role in this ballet. Not only that, but some of the works of Chinese opera that were being made in the first half of the twentieth century contributed to the nature of Chinese dance that we see in revolutionary ballets, such

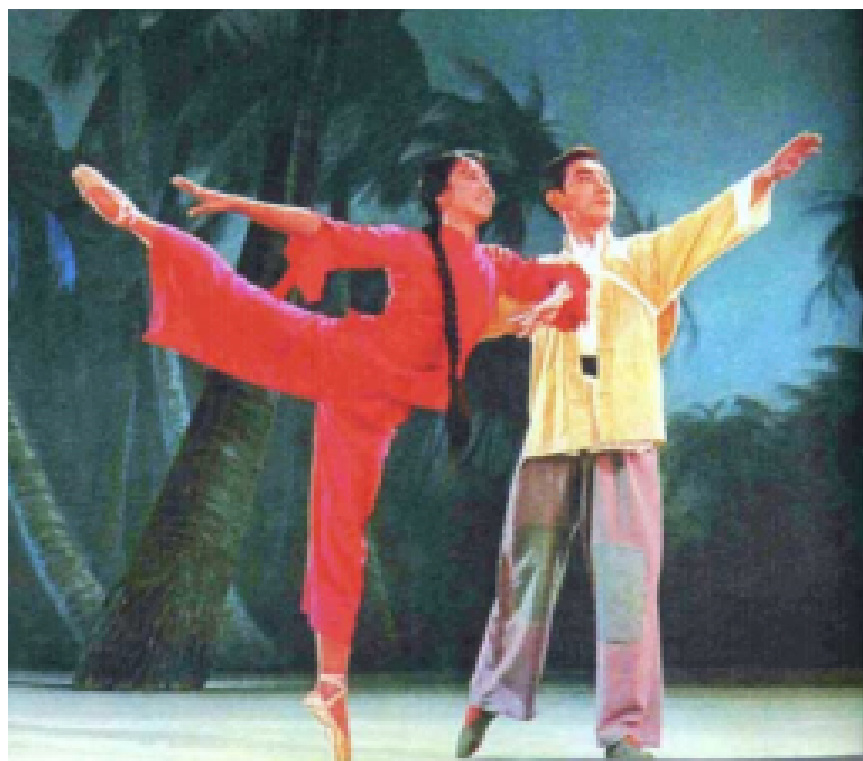
as *Red Detachment of Women*. The new choreography that artists like Yu Rongling were experimenting with “made dance a more central component of Chinese drama, as well as an emerging symbol of national identity.”⁶¹ That is not to say that the ballet itself is not indistinguishable from Chinese opera; the ballet is inherently unique, relying on a mix of pre-established dance and performance tools in order to render something new and revolutionary.



Scene from Red Detachment of Women with Wu Qinghua in a tattered red jacket grasping a red flag. Credit: University of Westminster Archive.

With that in mind, the soundtrack is vital to the ballet, because it is familiar to the native Chinese viewers of the ballet. For example, many of the songs are altered versions of “The East is Red” or other popular nationalist songs that many people would recognize and resonate with, reinforcing the communist agenda. But, that does not mean that “the dancer is a mute emoter, sometimes almost a puppet to the soundtrack.”⁶² Similarly, the 1965 film “The East is Red,” which celebrates the history of the CCP beginning in 1921 and ending in 1949 with the formation of the

People's Republic of China, has a powerful soundtrack.⁶³ The dance epic includes revolutionary and historical songs, like “The East is Red,” as powerful modes of persuasion that rely on the emotions of the viewers, as well as the sensationalism of the performance to successfully endorse and engrain the superiority and fantastical nature of the Communist Party. In an extensive work by Paul Clarke, Laikwan Pang, and Tsan-Huang Tsai entitled *Listening to China's Cultural Revolution: Music, Politics, and Cultural Continuities*, Clark writes “that without films as a medium of promulgating, popularizing, and elaborating the music of the Cultural Revolution, musical memories of those years would probably be much less significant.” The importance of music within Chinese films at the time, as well as the incorporation of music in ballets such as *Red Detachment of Women*, plays a key role in the element of nostalgia that would emerge in the 1990s in China concerning the Cultural Revolution, which is discussed in more detail later in the paper. The following short anecdote summarizes the idea that these songs were so recognizable and popular that many Chinese people remember them today and are overcome with emotion upon hearing them. “When they went outside, this was what was coming out of the loudspeakers in the streets. The Chinese have a joke about this: ‘Eight hundred million people watching eight shows.’”⁶⁴



Still from Scene Two of Hong se niang zi jun. Credit: Rosemary Roberts, “Performing Gender in Maoist Ballet.”

Now that I have introduced a moderate moralist's stance and applied it to my aesthetic analysis of *Red Detachment of Women*, we see the complexity of analyzing not only a revolutionary ballet, but art in general. Within the analysis, the relationship between the classical ballet of the West, traditional Chinese dance, and ethnic folk dances of minority groups within the ballet becomes significant, specifically concerning music, costumes, and the dancing itself. The combination of these expressions of dance also indicates a defining characteristic of the ballet and the Cultural Revolution in general—the struggle between tradition and modernity, and the role of domestic and foreign policy in shaping such campaigns. The different agendas, meanings, and symbolism within art contribute to its mesmerizing and inquisitive nature. Therefore, when criticizing art, and looking at other criticisms of art, we need to be skeptical. In the following section, I will expand on the ethical segment of moderate moralist analysis.

Part IV

“All dance is charged with power,” is an important concept relating to our discussion.⁶⁶ The power behind *Red Detachment of Women* lies within Mao, the greater CCP, the Communist Cultural Revolution Group, and its ability to persuade and manipulate. More subtly, the power of the ballet, specifically today, influences how we choose to remember the Cultural Revolution and revolutionary ballets more generally.

I have mentioned memory, remembering, and reinventions of the past numerous times in this essay thus far, but I have yet to develop this idea with regards to *Red Detachment of Women*. The way we remember the past affects our understanding of it in a plethora of ways, some more dramatic than others. This idea is shown in the rewriting of history in textbooks in order to advance a nation's political agenda or as a means of forgetting a problematic past (i.e. German textbooks glazing over Jewish concentration camps). Without scrutinizing representations of the past, people accept information at face value or, in terms of the ballet, neglect to see it for what it really is—a piece of propaganda. This does not imply that we should not view or appreciate the ballet.

The 1990s saw the onset of the renewal of Mao worship and the proliferation of “Red Classics.” The reproduction of Red Classics, such as *Red Detachment of Women* and its 2006 television series, has “functioned to maintain Party foundation myths that validate and morally legitimize its continued rule while accommodating a major shift in class politics in Chinese society.”⁶⁷ More generally, this trend towards Maoist veneration depicts a modern struggle between politics and the demands of the market in China. For example, reinventions such as *Red Detachment of Women* are indicative of “the state's desire to maintain the integrity of sacred Maoist mythology versus producers' desire to demythologize and humanize so as to appeal to audiences.”⁶⁸ This perspective promotes the idea that there is a lot more to this phenomenon than simple nostalgia. But the real

question lies in how do the people profiting from, and entertaining this Mao revival, grapple with Mao's role in the Cultural Revolution? ⁶⁹

As historians, scholars, artists, researchers, and human beings we must acquire a set of tools that allow us to view things critically and provide us with the ability to admit that our perception may be problematic. In the case of *Red Detachment of Women*, we can recognize that it is a highly problematic ballet due to its glorification of the government and the Red Army in particular during the Cultural Revolution. I have already established this. Knowing this, should the ballet be suspended? I believe it should not be completely suspended.

I believe the ballet should not be discontinued because it would contribute to an aspect of the Cultural Revolution being historically lost, or forgotten — which is dangerous, in my mind, no matter how problematic a work of art is. Destroying or prohibiting the preservation and proliferation of a historical object alters the understanding of future generations, creates ignorance within the population, and benefits the perpetrators of the past. To honor the lives lost and look back on the history of the Cultural Revolution in China, *Red Detachment of Women* can be a useful tool when used appropriately. For example, the ballet is a period piece, meaning it allows researchers to explore the nature of revolutionary ballets and general theatrical performances in Maoist China. It also allows us to see how propaganda functioned during the Cultural Revolution and the influence it had at the time, just as big-character posters and other propaganda depictions inform our understanding. Perhaps most important, the ballet acts as a time capsule to view art, dance, politics, and propaganda during the Cultural Revolution, while also functioning as a glimpse into understanding Maoist China. I reached this conclusion by relying on the philosophy behind moderate moralism.

But how can we learn from the ballet in the ways mentioned above without perpetuating the biased remembrance of the Cultural Revolution that it embraces? An attempt should be made to honor the lives lost during that time, especially for those with family who see the ballet as insensitive and inappropriate and reflect on not only the Cultural Revolution but Mao's China in general.⁷⁰ For me, it is possible to do this and render the ballet educational. Whether this translates into continued performances that include trigger warning or introduction, similar to what is planned for *Gone With the Wind*, or whether the ballet has to be discontinued and only the film of the ballet live on, remains to be seen. To some, the continuation of live performances may be seen as insensitive and inappropriate, having people pay money to attend the show. A better option may be to allow the film version of the ballet to be accessed freely to the public for educational purposes, rather than combine the viewing experience with all of the fanfare that accompanies a live performance. That being said, it could also be argued that the filmed version of the ballet could become a powerful ideological tool, which is especially plausible given the historical power of film to influence ideology. However, I do believe it is possible to establish a respectful, educational, and unproblematic method of viewing *Red*

Detachment of Women. Incorporating an open discussion is necessary in order to create an appropriate means of examining the ballet.

It is also noteworthy to mention that various audiences may not see the ballet as problematic as others. To many, it is an emotional performance that is extremely moving. It is a nationalist ballet in simplest terms. This is why the ballet is the go-to performance to bring foreign dignitaries to view when they visit China, such as President Richard Nixon's visit in 1972. Different groups of people will respond differently to the ballet depending on several factors. For example, for dignitaries in the 60s and 70s, the ballet was intended to be a sensational indication of communism's success and China's ability to incorporate Western and modern qualities within a work of socialist art. On the other hand, to contemporary Chinese people, the ballet today is a relic, or a reminder, of how many innocent lives were lost under Mao's regime and more generally of the oppression of the communist party. To Western audiences the ballet may seem distasteful for the same reasons mentioned above; some may be against the glorification of communism over capitalism, while others may sympathize with those who have lost family members to the Cultural Revolution. Considering that, this paper was not written intending to diminish the power of the ballet, which is immense, but rather to shed light on its hidden capacities.



Richard Nixon and Jiang Qing (1973) during the performance of Red Detachment of Women. Credit: Zhuang Pinghui, "China's top ballet company in shouting match with courts over royalty order for repertoire performed for Richard Nixon," South China Morning Post.

The last installment of this conversation is multifaceted and subjective. I have mentioned before that dance is powerful and functions for very specific reasons. It could be argued that some dance, including the ballet adaptation of *Red Detachment of Women*, functions for

the government, or ruling class, by promoting social order and glorifying a political administration. This situates the proletariat, in this case, as powerless compared to its idealistic portrayal in the ballet. Ideally, to Mao, the power rested in the proletariat. This ballet, which reinforces the CCP's role in telling the masses how to think, actively silences the voices of the masses, rendering them powerless. This is ironic for Mao, his Cultural Revolution, and his imagined "proletarian power." It is also relevant to the problems that surround the contemporary showings of *Red Detachment of Women*. If all dance is considered powerful and this particular dance reinforces a controversial, repressive, and sensitive period of communist government under Mao Zedong, then is it not obvious why the celebration of the ballet could have adverse effects? Not only is the ballet an issue for many Chinese people, but it should also be a problem for the Chinese government, since the ballet could misconstrue the contemporary government's statement on the Cultural Revolution's legacies. Possibly even aligning the current Chinese government with that of Mao's in the 1960s, or expressing a sense of nostalgia for the past.

Conclusion

This paper has touched on some major themes and implications surrounding *Red Detachment of Women*. Most notably, I have briefly discussed the nature and role of ballet during the Cultural Revolution, the standards we use to view dance and art, and how we can remember *Red Detachment of Women* appropriately. The nature of Chinese dance and specifically ballet's status as a "foil to Chinese dance," had a significant effect on revolutionary ballets, which contributes to their position as complex historical and artistic manifestations of the Maoist legacy.⁷¹

Red Detachment of Women invites historians to discuss several themes present during China's Cultural Revolution, such as Communist art, literature, and propaganda, while also allowing researchers to get a small glimpse of how state-sponsored propaganda functioned during the time. For dance historians, the ballet is a depository of knowledge with particular regard to socialist dance. The more subtle conclusions we can gather from the ballet regard its socialist legacies. *Red Detachment of Women*, specifically the ballet version, contains a variety of "alternative socialist space[s]," that insinuate a version of "collectivity that neither presumes autonomous individuals nor is subsumed to a unitary state power."⁷² In other words, the ballet functions in a complex way that creates niche spaces for the formation of socialist legacies and continues to explicitly and implicitly highlight the collective emergence of socialist remembrance. For example, gender, ethnic dance, communism, the Red Army, ballet, music, theatrical details, and interpretation all function individually and collectively to create a unique fusion of art, politics, and history.

The complexity of the ballet, one of the primary reasons for writing this essay, is what encourages and necessitates a deep and thorough discussion of how we can analyze and

interpret *Red Detachment of Women* while we view the performance and its initial intentions and implications, as well as its modern-day manifestations and associations. The disparity in philosophies of thought and reactionary emotions in terms of the ballet is evidence enough for the careful considerations that need to go into historical discussions of how we remember and grapple with our own histories.

I believe that *Red Detachment of Women* is a fascinating tool, or heuristic device, that we can employ to study the Cultural Revolution. The details of the ballet are indicative of the larger themes present throughout China at the time. The design of costumes reveals the manner in which gender functioned in society, while an analysis of the fusion of different dance cultures communicates the tensions between tradition and modernity, China and the West, and capitalism versus communism. These examples exemplify how the ballet attempts to explain the complex phenomenon that was Chinese politics, economy, and society at the time. Perhaps most enlightening, however, is the idea that *Red Detachment of Women* can be used as a lens to view the nature of the Cultural Revolution scholarship in general. The ballet's complex history and multifaceted contemporary manifestations highlight the resourcefulness and complexity of modern academia regarding the subject. *Red Detachment of Women*, with its problematic past and unclear future, is the perfect example of how historical scholarship on the Cultural Revolution can be over-simplified in some instances, and in others appear as images of "barbarism, violence, and human suffering."⁷³ Studying the Cultural Revolution, or rather *Red Detachment of Women*, requires the understanding that historical thinking is not always about history. Historical thinking, or the ability to scrutinize and interpret, while drawing from a variety of disciplines, is paramount, as it can alter our perceptions of any history, as shown through each author's interpretation of the Cultural Revolution.

Lastly, in an attempt to continue this conversation, I would like to leave readers with a few questions: What is art's ideological purpose? Is art ever just for art's sake? And, lastly, is all art propaganda? My research has continuously brought to light the significance of the multilateral relationship between art and history. Therefore, I would like to share one last example of the hidden powers of art that highlight how art, or dance, can have implicit and explicit historical consequences: "art has the power to upset, to disturb, to make us question our assumptions, to change us. But it also has the power to celebrate our cherished convictions, to pacify us, to be, as Matisse put it, 'like an appeasing influence, like a mental soother, something like a good armchair in which to rest from physical fatigue.'"⁷⁴

Notes

1. Jennifer Schuessler, "The Long Battle Over 'Gone With the Wind'," *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 14 June 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/14/movies/gone-with-the-wind-battle.html>
2. Schuessler, "The Long Battle."
3. Gerald Jonas, *Dancing : The Pleasure, Power, and Art of Movement*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams in Association with Thirteen/WNET, 1992), 11.
4. Emily Wilcox, *Revolutionary Bodies : Chinese Dance and the Socialist Legacy*, (Oakland, California: U of California, 2018), 2.
5. See Emily Wilcox for more detailed information on the nature of dance performance before and after the Cultural Revolution.
6. Wilcox, *Revolutionary Bodies*, 2.
7. M. Schoenhals, *China's Cultural Revolution, 1966-1969: Not a Dinner party*, (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 22-26.
8. Andrew G. Walder, *China under Mao : A Revolution Derailed*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 8.
9. Eric Mullis, "Aesthetics, Ideology, and Ethics of Remembrance in Red Detachment of Women (Hongse Niangzi Jun, 红色娘子军)," *Dance Chronicle* 40.1 (2017): 53-73, 60.
10. Walder, *China Under Mao*, 6.
11. Walder, *China Under Mao*, 376 ; Yang Jisheng, Edward Friedman, Jian Guo, and Stacy Mosher, *Tombstone : The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962*, 1st American ed., (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).
12. There are many examples of campaigns, all of which stem from a common theme in Maoism, which is self-criticism. Self-criticism was used as a means of punishment and transformation. Methods of self-criticism transferred into a general criticism of old, or "traditional" elements of Chinese society. As a result, the variety of campaigns launched during the Cultural Revolution (i.e. "Struggle, Criticize, Transform, "Cleansing of the Class Ranks," "One Strike, Three Anti," "Anti May 16 Element," "Anti-Confucianism," etc.) simultaneously increased the factionalism and mobilization among Chinese citizens.
13. *Peking review*. English edition. [Peking]: Peking review, No. 6. "Ballet: First Success in Revolutionization." February 5, 1965. 30.
14. Beverly Haviland, "Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet," *Common Knowledge* 20.2 (2014): 369-70, 370.
15. Haviland, "Apollo's Angels," 370.

16. Wilcox, *Revolutionary Bodies*, 123.
17. Wilcox, *Revolutionary Bodies*, 123.
18. Jonas, *Dancing*, 21.
19. “‘Red Detachment of Women’: A New Road for Chinese Ballet.” *The Drama Review: TDR* 15.2 (1971): 262-67. 263.
20. Mullis, “Aesthetics, Ideology, and Ethics,” 57.
21. Mullis, “Aesthetic, Ideolog, and Ethics,” 64.
22. Wilcox, *Revolutionary Bodies*,” 122.
23. Rosemary Roberts, “Reconfiguring Red: Class Discourses in the New Millennium TV Adaptation of ‘The Red Detachment of Women’,” *China Perspectives* 2 (102) (2015): 25-31. 26.
24. The protagonist, Wu Qinghua, has two different spellings of her name. In the original 1960 film, the woman was called Wu Qionghua, which was later changed to Wu Qinghua for the ballet. There are obvious intentions for this name change, most notably Jiang Qing’s efforts to rename things, place, and people to symbolize modernity and model examples. Such efforts to rename individuals to embody the revolutionary spirit was seen in the model city of Xiaojinzhuang, as demonstrated in Jeremy Brown’s work “Staging Xiaojinzhuang: The City in the Countryside, 1974-1976.”
25. *Peking review*. English edition. [Peking]: Peking review, No. 41. “Kaleidoscope of Attraction.” October 9, 1964. 26.
26. Colin Mackerras, “Chinese Opera after the Cultural Revolution (1970-72),” *The China Quarterly*, no. 55, (1973): pp. 478–510, 479.
27. Jonas, *Dancing*, 10.
28. Berys Nigel Gaut, *Art, Emotion, and Ethics*, (Oxford;New York: Oxford UP, 2007).
29. Noël Carroll, “Moderate Moralism,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 36.3 (1996): 223-238. 223.
30. Noël Carroll, “Art and Ethical Criticism: An Overview of Recent Directions of Research,” *Ethics* 110.2 (2000): 350-87, 350.
31. Noël Carroll, “At the Crossroads of Ethics and Aesthetics,” *Philosophy and Literature* 34, no. 1 (2010): 248-59. 259.
32. “Ethicism,” *The Free Dictionary*, Farlex, www.thefreedictionary.com/ethicism.
33. Gaut, “*Art, Emotion, and Ethics*,” 252.
34. For the purposes of this paper, I will not be able to go in depth on the killings, punishment, and manipulation of the CCRG during the time. However, I will mention that the experiences of the sent-down youth, the actions of the Red Guards, and the conflicts between workers’ unions and the military are excellent sources of information that highlight the complicated and the disastrous nature of the Cultural Revolution. Less disturbing information about the manipulation employed during the time can be found by researching the

Cult of Mao and perhaps the era of the Mango mania.

35. Mullis, "Aesthetics, Ideology, and Ethics," 66.

36. Carroll, "Ethical Criticism," 351.

37. Mullis, "Aesthetics, Ideology, and Ethics," 63.

38. Naaman Zhou, "Chinese Ballet Show Draws Protests for 'Glorifying Red Army,'" *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 17 Feb. 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/feb/18/red-detachment-of-women-chinese-ballet-show-draws-protests-for-glorifying-red-army>.

39. The landlord figure has come up several times. The land-owning class in Mao's China came under severe scrutiny for their imagined tyranny and repression directed towards the peasants that they leased land to. The harsh treatment of landlords by the communist government manifested in several ways, most commonly through intense sessions of self-criticism, and in some cases, this punishment became more physical. The landlord figure, to Mao, was much more dangerous in his imagination than in reality.

40. Mullis, "Aesthetics, Ideology, and Ethics," 67.

41. Carroll, "Moderate Moralism," 231.

42. Joan Acocella, "A Ballet from the Cultural Revolution," *The New Yorker*, The New Yorker, 9 July 2019, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/07/06/seeing-red-dance-joan-acocella.

43. It is not clearly determined why Jiang Qing chose ballet, instead of creating an entirely new form of dance and theatrical performance. However, we can speculate that ballet was chosen from the Soviet model, as were many policies in China at the time. Ballet was also a powerful method, as its Western origins could be seen as establishing legitimacy—they "sought to demonstrate New China's cultural sophistication by developing elite Western art forms." Also, by adopting and adding to classical ballet, they could reappropriate a bourgeoisie custom to something that the common member of the proletariat could relate to. See Rosemary Roberts.

44. *Peking review*. English edition. [Peking]: Peking review, No. 41. "Kaleidoscope of Attraction." October 9, 1964. 26.

45. Hao-Jan Chu, "Mao's Wife--Chiang Ch'ing," *The China Quarterly*, no. 31, (1967): pp. 148– 150, 150.

46. Andrew Watson, *The China Quarterly*, no. 39, 1969, 138.

47. *Peking review*. English edition. [Peking]: Peking review, No. 6. "Ballet: First Success in Revolutionization." February 5, 1965. 30.

48. "'Red Detachment of Women,'" 263.

49. Jonas, *Dancing*, 9.

50. *Red Detachment of Women*, directed by Pan Wenzhan and Fu Jie, (1970; Beijing: Beijing Film Studio).
51. Rosemary Roberts, "Performing Gender in Maoist Ballet: Mutual Subversions of Genre and Ideology in *The Red Detachment of Women*," ed. Carolyn Brewer, *Intersections*, 13 Mar. 2008, <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue16/roberts.htm>.
52. See Rosemary Robert's "Performing Gender in Maoist Ballet: Mutual Subversions of Genre and Ideology in *The Red Detachment of Women*" for more detailed information on how each balletic movement has a gendered history and how the manifestations of gender concerning to specific dance moves is vital to the discussion of gender in *Red Detachment of Women*.
53. Wenzhan and Jie, *Red Detachment of Women* (1970).
54. Wenzhan and Jie, *Red Detachment of Women* (1970).
55. In 1950, *The Dove of Peace*, a Chinese dance-drama was met with harsh criticism after it showed the ballerina's legs. Perhaps the shorts were used in *Red Detachment of Women* in response to the backlash of traditionally exposed female bodies in ballet.
56. Mark Gambino, "The Red Detachment of Women Marches Forward – but to Where?" *The Conversation*, 2 Dec. 2019 <https://theconversation.com/the-red-detachment-of-women-marches-forward-but-to-where-73124>.
57. Roberts, "Performing Gender."
58. The symbolism in the ballet, which is so thorough and detailed, has warranted entire papers dedicated to the extrapolation of hidden meaning in the ballet. Our discussion on costumes could be much longer, but for time's sake I will only say one thing about the antagonist's costume. The transformation of her from wearing a bright red-set of clothes and having a long-braid to her cutting her hair and accepting the military clothes of the Red Army is indicative of much more. Her initial red costume shows that she embodied communism authentically and then accepted the communism mission full-heartedly and dedicated her life to the Red Army.
59. Jonas, *Dancing*, 207.
60. Jonas, *Dancing*, 207.
61. Wilcox, *Revolutionary Bodies*, 7.
62. R. G. Davis, "The White-Haired Girl. A Modern Revolutionary Ballet," *Film Quarterly* 27.2 (1973): 52- 56. 53.
63. *The East is Red*, directed by Wang Ping, (1965: Bayi Film Studio).
64. Acocella, "A Ballet."
65. "Eight hundred million people watching eight shows," refers to the fact that *Red Detachment of Women* was one of eight model operas that the Chinese public was able to watch during the Cultural

Revolution. These model operas are also known as yangbanxi, all of which were intended to be modern in thematic and theatrical terms.

66. Jonas, *Dancing*, 207.

67. Rosemary Roberts, "Reconfiguring Red: Class Discourses in the New Millennium TV Adaptation of 'The Red Detachment of Women'." *China Perspectives* 2, (102) (2015): 25-31, 25.

68. Roberts, "Reconfiguring Red," 30.

69. Orville Schell, "Once Again, Long Live Chairman Mao," *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 1 Dec. 1992, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1992/12/once-again-long-live-chairman-mao/306586/.

70. When I write Mao's China in general, I am referring to the numerous campaigns that were launched under Mao's government that were ultimately extremely deadly or harmful. For example, the Great Leap Forward, which, according to some, was the precursor to the Cultural Revolution after its monumental failure, is estimated to have seen between 20 and 45 million deaths (numbers depend on source). See Walder's *China under Mao: A Revolution Derailed* for his estimated number of deaths for the Great Leap Forward and other deadly campaigns under Mao's administration.

71. Wilcox, *Revolutionary Bodies*, 127.

72. Xiao Liu, "Red Detachment of Women: Revolutionary Melodrama and Alternative Socialist Imaginations," *Differences-A Journal Of Feminist Cultural Studies* 26.3 (2015): 116-41. 120-121, 136.

73. Yiching Wu, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: Harvard UP, 2014), 3.

74. Gaut, *Art, Emotion, and Ethics*, 1.