

Square Dancing in Contemporary Urban China

Ying Sun

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Birmingham City
University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy



Arts, Design and Media

Birmingham City University

School of Art

United Kingdom

February 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Looking back on my past four and a half years of doctoral research, it has been a time filled with a variety of memories and feelings. I would like to express my sincere thanks to those who supported me during my doctoral study and those who contributed to this thesis. Firstly, I would like to give my deepest gratitude to my director of studies Professor Joshua Jiang and to my second supervisor Dr. Xiao Jiuling, for their unfailing support and expert guidance throughout my research. Joshua's overarching insight into Chinese culture and Chinese contemporary art is unrivalled, and Jiuling's knowledge of urban studies and urban culture is extensive and profound. Both supervisors helped me to position the research in the field and enabled me to grow as a young researcher: I thank them for assisting me in pursuing my academic ambitions.

I wish further to thank the Centre for Chinese Visual Arts (CCVA) for providing me with opportunities to broaden my horizons and deepen my knowledge as I embarked upon my doctoral journey.

Alongside two supervisors, I would also like to thank the China Scholarship Council (CSC) for funding that significantly alleviated financial pressures during my doctoral studies, enabling me to focus solely on my research as I worked towards my doctorate. In addition, I owe a debt of gratitude to everyone who participated in my data gathering: by allowing me to observe the daily activities of their dance groups and granting me interviews to discover their true feelings, they enriched my understanding as I pursued this research.

A special thank you goes to my family, whose love and support have been as unselfish as ever. Through their powerful motivation and spiritual support, the encouragement and trust of my father and mother have stimulated me to keep moving forward. In particular, I experienced a period of illness during my doctoral journey, and their meticulous care enabled me to ride out

the difficulties and stick to my research.

Last but not least, half of this doctoral research coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, nationwide lockdown and quarantine at home. Throughout that time of difficulty and constraint I owed much to my community of friends in the UK: we kept each other company and joined hands. Simultaneously, I must express my thanks to friends who live in other parts of the world: although I will not name them here, their kindness and support in countless ways will remain an abiding memory.

ABSTRACT

Chinese square dance is an activity with distinct Chinese characteristics and typical Chinese elements, which is very popular among middle-aged and elderly people in China and usually takes place in public and open spaces in contemporary urban. This research aims to focus on an interdisciplinary investigation that aims to provide new insights into the square-dancing phenomenon in contemporary China, including exploring the characteristics of the dancing community, the body in dance, and defining the role of square dancing in contemporary urban China. This study obtained effective data through the qualitative research method combining off-site documentary research, on-site observation of multiple square-dancing teams and semi-structured interviews with dancers and audiences. The result delves into the origins of square dancing, focusing on its emergence as a form of collective activity among dama groups. It particularly examines the dynamics of dancing communities and their interactions with neighbourhood relationships, emotional connections, and political influences. Additionally, a notable finding is that square dancing serves not only as a means of fostering nationalist ideology and patriotic sentiment but also as a vehicle for transmitting and contextualising national values. Moreover, square dancing reflects an extreme shift in female body aesthetics during Mao Zedong's revolution of femininity erasure and in a contemporary society characterised by brightly coloured patterns and flowers. Finally, this research discusses the definition of a square as a semantic expression of the location of square-dance activities, one that is floating and intangible. Overall, the study provides new knowledge in the interdisciplinary study of the phenomenon of square dancing and contributes to the inspiration and motivation of policymakers, cultural researchers, urban planners, landscape architects and other communities.

TABLE OF CONTENT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	1
ABSTRACT	3
TABLE OF CONTENT	4
LIST OF FIGURES	7
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	13
1.1 THE PHENOMENON OF SQUARE DANCING IN CHINA	14
1.2 RESEARCH CONTEXT.....	16
1.3 THE CENTRAL FOCUS OF THE STUDY	24
1.4 THE BOUNDARIES OF THE STUDY	27
1.5 METHODOLOGY	30
<i>1.5.1 Documentary Research.....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>1.5.2 Fieldwork.....</i>	<i>36</i>
1.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	50
1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS	53
CHAPTER TWO: THE SQUARE-DANCING COMMUNITY	55
2.1 THE <i>DAMA</i> COMMUNITY.....	59
2.2 NEIGHBOURHOOD RELATIONSHIPS	62

2.3 EMOTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS	71
2.4 POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS.....	81
CHAPTER THREE: THE NATIONALISTIC BODIES IN SQUARE DANCING.....	100
3.1 PATRIOTISM OR NATIONALISM	104
3.2 TRAINING THE BODY.....	113
3.3 WE ARE CHINA.....	127
<i>3.3.1 Becoming One with the Red Flag</i>	<i>129</i>
<i>3.3.2 Body with Pattern</i>	<i>130</i>
CHAPTER FOUR: DAMA BODY AESTHETICS IN SQUARE DANCING	142
4.1 DANCING DAMA IN EVERYDAY AESTHETICS IN EVERYDAY LIFE.....	144
<i>4.1.1 Colourful and Patterned</i>	<i>149</i>
<i>4.1.2 The Flower</i>	<i>154</i>
4.2 ERASURE OF WOMEN’S BODY AESTHETIC FROM THE MASS MOVEMENT OF THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA	159
4.3 THE EXAGGERATED <i>DAMA</i> IN SQUARE DANCING	169
<i>4.3.1 Dama with Folk Aesthetics</i>	<i>170</i>
<i>4.3.2 Dama in Drama</i>	<i>179</i>
CHAPTER FIVE: THE SQUARE	186

5.1 THE SQUARE IS NOT A SQUARE.....	189
5.2 THE SQUARE IS WHERE PEOPLE DANCE	200
5.3 SQUARE IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC	212
5.3.1 <i>A Mobile Cabin Hospital Is a Square</i>	213
5.3.2 <i>The Cloud Square Dancing</i>	216
5.3.3 <i>Shifting From Physical to Cloud</i>	219
5.3.4 <i>Cloud Collective in Everyday Life</i>	222
CONCLUSION	227
GLOSSARY	243
BIBLIOGRAPHY	251
APPENDICES	289

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 2.1 Square-dancing activity against the backdrop of urbanisation. Source: Gettyimages (2019)

Fig. 2.2 Square-dancing group dinner. Photography by Interviewee D3. Photo: courtesy interviewee D3

Fig. 2.3 An excursion for the square-dancing group. Photography by Interviewee D3. Photo: courtesy interviewee D3

Fig. 2.4 The National Square-dancing activity launched twelve sets of authorised square-dancing routines. Source: General Administration of Sport of China (2015)

Fig. 2.5 Notice on Further Standardising Square Dancing Fitness Activities. Source: General Administration of Sport of China (2017)

Fig. 3.1 Square dancing performance at the opening ceremony of the 24th Winter Olympic Games held at the Beijing National Stadium. Source: Xinhua News (2022)

Fig. 3.2 Daily square-dancing exercise in urban open spaces in Qingdao Cangkou Park. Photography by author, Cangkou Park, Qingdao, 2019

Fig. 3.3 Daily square-dancing exercise in urban open spaces in Qingdao Cangkou Park. Photography by author, 2021, Cangkou Park, Qingdao, 2019

Fig. 3.4 Square dancing on the 14th National Fitness Day is a response to the policy of the National Fitness Plan. Source: People's Government of Henan (2022)

Fig. 3.5 Square Dancing for the 12th National Fitness Day on 8 August 2020. Source: Zhengzhou Daily (2020)

Fig. 3.6 The poster from CCTV News Web shows images from China's historical National Fitness Plan. Source: Bin (2020)

Fig. 3.7 Ten thousand people danced the square dancing in Yiyang City to commemorate the 69th anniversary of Comrade Mao Zedong's inscription. Source: Yiyang City People's Government Portal (2021)

Fig. 3.8 Middle school students practised radio gymnastics in Beijing, China. Source: ifeng News (2014)

Fig. 3.9 The 25 July 1966 edition of the Liberation Army Daily reports Mao Zedong's swimming in the Yangtze River. Courtesy of the Liberation Army Daily, 25 July 1966. Source: David (2016)

Fig. 3.10 Weng N. (2017) On the occasion of the 4th anniversary of Chairman Mao's swim in the Yangtze River, a commemorative event was held in Shichahai, and young people carried red-tasselled spears as they swam across. [The Colouful China: Photography spanning 30 years of history]. [Photograph] Copyright © Naiqiang Weng. Photo: courtesy Citic Publishing House, Beijing.

Fig. 3.11 Square dancers with the CPC flag in Qingdao Cangkou Park. Photography by author, Cangkou Park, Qingdao, 2021

Fig. 3.12 The dancers used fans to form three Chinese characters spelling 'Chinese beauty (Zhongguo mei)' in Qingdao Cangkou Park. Photography by author author, Cangkou Park, Qingdao, 2021

Fig. 3.13 Thousands of people in Changsha took part in a square dance spelling '70' and 'Chinese people should strive to become stronger'. Source: Siteng (2015)

Fig. 3.14 1,600 dancers performed a square dance in which they posed to form the characters for 'Chinese'. Source: China Daily (2017)

Fig 3.15 Weng N. (2017) Children perform at the opening ceremony of the 4th National Games held by the General Administration Sport of China in 1979. [The Colouful China: Photography spanning 30 years of history]. [Photograph] Copyright © Naiqiang Weng. Photo: courtesy Citic Publishing House, Beijing.

Fig. 3.16 2008 Chinese soldiers performing 'fou' at the opening ceremony of Beijing Summer Olympics at the National Stadium, Beijing, 2008. Source: BBC Chinese (2008)

Fig. 3.17 A military honour guard march. Source: Ng Han Guan (2019)

Fig. 4.1 A group of colourful tourist dama with colourful scarfs in Urumqi's scenic spots. Source: Lufuyuan (2019)

Fig. 4.2 Colourful and patterned dress of the square-dancing dama in their excursion. Photography by Interviewee W4. Photo: courtesy interviewee W4

Fig. 4.3 Dancing dama in Nanjing Mochou Lake Park. Photography by Interviewee W3. Photo: courtesy interviewee W3

Fig. 4.4 Dama with flower. Photography by Interviewee Y3. Photo: courtesy interviewee Y3, edited by author (2021)

Fig. 4.5 The profile picture in the WeChat group of three square-dancing groups. Photography edited by author

Fig. 4.6 Young girls during the Cultural Revolution fell in love with the Zhongshan suit. Source: China Daily (2015)

Fig. 4.7 Zhuang X. (2011) Female members of Hongjing Brigade, Fangshan Commune, Jiangning County, Nanjing, performed Loyalty Dance. [The Red Album: Photographic Notes of Xiaozhuang]. [Photograph] Copyright © Xiao Zhuang. Photo: courtesy People's Publishing House, Beijing.

Fig. 4.8 Koichi Saito (2018) Androgynous militaristic femininity of women Red Guard. [CHINA 1965-2002 Photographs by KOICHI SAITO (Japanese Edition)]. [Photograph] Copyright © Koichi Saito. Photo: courtesy PHOTO CAMP.

Fig. 4.9 Workers at a factory in Datong, Shanxi Province (Bruno, 2015)

Fig. 4.10 Fan dance in square dancing. Photography by author, Dagang Street, Qingdao, 2021

Fig. 4.11 Handkerchief dance in square dancing. Photography by author, Dagang Street, Qingdao, 2021

Fig. 4.12 The dancers in the square dancing dressed up as waist dancers. Photography by author, Dagang Street, Qingdao, 2021

Fig. 4.13 Su G. (1950) Celebrating the People's Republic of China's National Day (qingzhu zhonghua renmin gongheguo guoqingjie [Photograph] Copyright © International Institute of Social History. Photo: Courtesy of the IISH/Stefan R. Landsberger Collection.

Fig. 4.14 Square dancing with folk aesthetic. Photography by author, Cangkou Park, Qingdao, 2021

Fig. 4.15 The dama's body curves in an urban public space. Photography by author, Cangkou Park, Qingdao, 2021

Fig. 4.16 Square-dancing dama taking selfies. Photography by Interviewee D5. Photo: courtesy

interviewee D5

Fig. 4.17 Square dancers decorate each other's bodies before the competition. Photography by author, Dagang Dance Group Competition Stage, Qingdao, 2019

Fig. 4.18 Wilcox (2020) The drama on the stage of folk dance [China Perspectives]. [illustration]. Artist's collection. © Emily Wilcox.

Fig. 5.1 Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China. Source: Jonathan (2013)

Fig. 5.2 Red Guards hold Mao Zedong's Little Red Book aloft in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China. Source: Weng (1966)

Fig. 5.3 Xinghai Plaza, Dalian, the world's Largest City Square, China. Source: Imaginechina-Tuchong (2018)

Fig. 5.4 The middle of Xinghai Square. Source: Imaginechina-Tuchong (2018)

Fig. 5.5 Square dancing in urban public spaces in Hankou District, Wuhan, China. Source: Chinese Visual (2022)

Fig. 5.6 Square dancing in the pedestrian street. Photography by author, Shanghai Yvyuan subway station, Shanghai, 2019

Fig. 5.7 The morning square dancing in Cangkou park. Photography by author, Cangkou Park, Qingdao, 2021

Fig. 5.8 The various types of square dancing in the evening in Cangkou Park. Photography by author, Badahu Park, Qingdao, 2021

Fig. 5.9 The market space becomes a dance space. Source: Huang (2017)

Fig. 5.10 Screenshot of Hundreds of people entering the aisles of the farmers market to square dance. Source: Wanxiang News (2021)

Fig. 5.11 The dancers still gather in the cold winter, in the community underground parking lot in Hangzhou. Source: Sina News (2017)

Fig. 5.12 Chinese patients infected with the new coronavirus and pneumonia square dancing at a mobile cabin hospital in Wuhan City, Hubei Province on February 17th. Source: Xiong (2020)

Fig. 5.13 Medical team members and patients performing a square dance at a mobile cabin hospital in Shanghai. Source: Xinhua News (2022)

Fig. 5.14 The dancer instructs her husband to help her take a video of square dancing. Source: Dongcheng District Party Committee publicity Department (2020)

Fig. 5.15 In the process of cloud square dancing. Photography by Interviewee D4. Photo: courtesy interviewee D4

Fig. 5.16 Online live streaming dancing, the transformation between collective and individual. Photography by Interviewee D4. Photo: courtesy interviewee D4

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 The Phenomenon of Square Dancing in China

In the 21st century, square dancing has become increasingly popular across the People's Republic of China, with distinct and unique Chinese cultural characteristics. BBC News reported:

‘Night and day, across this vast country, in any open space to which city folk have easy access, dozens, perhaps hundreds of people, mostly women, lose themselves in a fury of dance (BBC News, 2013).’

Square dancing is named *guangchang wu* in Chinese – *guangchang* refers to a square, and *wu* means dancing (Liao et al., 2020). Dancers, audience, dance leader(s), and music are the elements that constitute a square-dancing scene (Chen, 2010). Martin and Chen (2020, p.1) found that ‘the size of the dancing group varies, and the sheer number of people who engage in this public on mass dance practice makes *guangchang wu* a unique phenomenon.’ Generally, the number of dance groups in daily activities is as small as 3-5 people, as many as 70-80 people, in some cities, hundreds or even thousands of people dance at the same time every evening. There are also some organized square dance performances with more than 20,000 people (Seetoo and Zou, 2016). While pinpointing the exact number of square dancers is challenging, information gleaned from reports by the Chinese news media indicates that more than 100 million people gather to dance square dancing in China every evening (Toutiao News, 2019). In addition, square dancing often takes place as an organised activity in various Chinese cities, such as the square dancing event held jointly in 14 Chinese cities with the participation of more than 50,000 square dancers in November 2016 (China News, 2016).

Along with the astonishing growth in the number of participants, any empty, flat, accessible

open space such as a park, street, square, car park or even a sidewalk can be a paradise for square dancers (Seetoo and Zou, 2016). Commensurate with the growing dancer population and the occupation of the city every day, square dancing has received increased attention from the Chinese authorities, official departments, local administration and governments at all levels, who believe that the practice needs to be regulated by local governments ordinances and the policies of the Chinese Communist Party (Zhu and Li, 2021; Cong, 2019). Most obviously, the four departments of the central government released the Circular for Guiding the Healthy Development of Public Square Dancing in 2015, and the Announcement on Further Regulating on Square Dance Activities in 2017 (Martin and Chen, 2020). Moreover, square dancing was the first included as a competitive sport at the 14th National Games of China in 2021, with the aim of boosting the national fitness plan (Chinanews, 2021). At the opening ceremony of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games, square dancing was performed to represent China's image (China Daily, 2022). This phenomenon of government participation and intervention has greatly affected the development of square dancing, and these aspects will be elaborated on and analysed in depth in Chapter 2, the political relationship of the square dance community, and Chapter 3, the nationalism of square dancing.

The above background statement about the dramatic prevalence of the square-dancing phenomenon in China, as well as the researcher's personal experience and observation in daily life, have provided the motivation and inspiration for this research topic. The Introduction chapter will fully set out the context of the research. It will also identify the central focus and research boundaries still under investigation; clarify the research questions, aims and objectives; explain the research methodology and ethical considerations; and finally, set out the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Research Context

Because square dancing is an extremely complex phenomenon, it is necessary to elaborate on the research context of square dancing in different domains in order to clarify the research aims and to delineate the primary focus and most productive directions for discussion. Therefore, the existing literature on the phenomenon of square dancing has been critically reviewed in the context of the research. The following sections summarise the current literature review on the square-dancing phenomenon from five perspectives: physical and psychological health, sociology, human development and ageing, dance performances, and urban study.

Physical and Psychological Health

A number of studies have begun to examine the phenomenon of square dancing from the physical and psychological perspective because square dancing is a form of entertainment and a collective dance activity that has been reported to bolster people's psychological and physical health over time. For example, square dancing can help participants to remain healthy and obtain relief from some diseases, such as issues with glucose levels and type 2 diabetes (Tarr et al., 2016), and to elevate pain thresholds (Zhang and Guo, 2012). In particular, some scholars have studied dancers, most of whom were female, in the belief that square dancing might not only help with body shaping (Liu and Guo, 2013), but might also have a beneficial effect on bone turnover markers and bone mineral density in patients women with postmenopausal osteoporosis (Qin et al. 2018), as well as on muscle strength in lower extremities, body balance and flexibility in postmenopausal women (Sun et al., 2022).

In addition, square dancing can help meet women's psychological needs, increase positive emotions and subjective well-being, reduce negative emotions (Zhang and Petrini, 2019), improve mental states and episodic memory, and can even enhance cognition and relieve mood (Wang et al., 2016; Ou et al., 2022). Gao et al. (2016) discussed the influence of participation

in square dancing on the symptoms of perimenopausal depression patients and believed that square dancing could improve or prevent depression in perimenopausal women. Zhu and Li (2018) demonstrated the influence of square dancing on the memory and hippocampus plasticity of Chinese elderly people. They believed that square dancing is an aerobic exercise and leisure activity integrating social interaction, cognition and exercise, which is conducive to the maintenance and promotion of memory function. Therefore, the above research can provide a useful concept for this study, which is that square dancing is an exercise and fitness activity that can promote the physical and mental health of participants.

Sociology

A number of studies have begun to examine square dancing from sociological perspectives, including group identity, group cohesion and self-identity. Gao (2015) believes that there are many factors contributing to the popularity of square dance in Chinese cities, including social needs and social conflicts during the period of social transformation in China. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the study of square dancing from a sociological perspective, including the tradeoff between individual and public rights, social governance and social management (Gao, 2015). Zhu and Li (2021) argue that square dancing as a peer-led and long-term interactive practice contributes to identity construction in middle-aged and elderly people and effectively improves participants' happiness on the basis of social recognition. Square dancing effectively promotes the sense of belonging, familiarity and personal self-satisfaction of middle-aged and elderly people, and at the same time, contributes to the collectivised reconstruction of the public aspects of urban communities and promotes social harmony (Zhu and Li, 2021). Lu et al. (2021) examined the structural transformation of identity in the recognition, acquisition and enhancement of membership in square-dancing teams from the perspective of dancing behaviours and actions, rather than merely interpreting identity as

desires and expressions of the individual. In addition, participants actively connect with others, extending their social interaction and their social scope from the private sphere to the public space. To a certain extent, when this interaction develops, public life will have stability and a certain cohesion (Lu et al., 2021).

In addition, some scholars have explored the significance of the group identity and identity construction of square dancers in the constraints of public life under social development. Zhao (2016) contended that square dancing is a kind of communication ritual that functions to strengthen and form group identity. Through group interaction with an emotional connection, square dancing gathers people with the same identity; it completes the processes of group identity confirmation, group goal internalisation and group cohesion formation in the group, thus fulfilling the transformation from 'I' to 'we'. Sun et al. (2021) believe that most female dancers choose to participate in square dancing because they can gain more social opportunities, communicate with others and make new friends. This contributes to the experience of belonging to the group, shapes the individual identity of dancers and furthers the cohesion of the whole group. Moreover, age, employment, income level, and years of education are variable factors that affect the relationship between individual dance experience and group cohesion (Sun et al., 2021; Ou et al., 2022).

Human Development and Ageing

To date, several studies have investigated the-square-dancing phenomenon from the view of human development and the ageing society in China. Huang (2021) focuses on the forming of identity and meaning among middle-aged and elderly square-dancing women in the context of the rapidly ageing society in China. She finds that dancers alter or subvert cultural norms surrounding the ageing process, displaying neither the traditional characteristics of old age of their mothers and grandmothers nor the consumerism and youthful femininity pursued by

young, wealthy women. Dancing women have managed to sidestep previously available models of ageing and are reinterpreting the place of the elderly in China's social hierarchy. In addition, Huang (2016) believes that dancers' participation in square dancing is actually a form of post-socialist collectivism, which is to cultivate their own personality in the group. These participants represent new ways for individuals to express their consumption logic and practice self-management, which can help address the ageing problem in contemporary Chinese society. Sheng (2022) presents a similar argument, focusing on the ageing society of Chinese women and proposing that square dancing is a type of leisure activity conducive to anti-ageing, health-keeping and body maintenance. The dancers' body regulation and beautification have challenged the stereotypes that middle-aged and elderly Chinese women face in today's society. She believes that square dancing not only shows the strategies and struggles of older women who face ageing but also the changing age hierarchy in China's urban socio-cultural landscape, which is producing new social norms (Sheng, 2022).

Dance Performances

Discussions around the origin and definition of square dancing as a category of dance performance are not new. *The People's Dance: The Power and Politics of Guangchang Wu* by Martin and Chen (2020) is currently the only book on Chinese square dancing in Western academia, imparting comprehensive knowledge about square dancing based on the view of professional dance practice. This book was the first written in English to describe the background and development of square dancing. Since the Reform and Opening-up in 1978, the substantial population changes in urban and rural areas coupled with the ageing of the population have led people to yearn for health, prompting them to participate in square dancing. The authors explore the artistic practice of square dancing mainly from the perspective of dance performance skills, such as step, hop and shuffle. They emphasise that dance performance and

competition are important aspects of square dance activities; they demonstrate the process, different levels and scoring standards of competitive events; and they find that the competitive square dance tends to match the standard of professional stage dance. Moreover, Martin and Chen (2020) define the teaching, learning, and organisational relationships within the dance group, emphasising the administrative and prominent role of the lead dancers and professional dance institutions (such as the Senior Culture Centre or Elderly University), and showing the development mode of the square dance group from the inner circle to the outer circle. Further, some scholars have discussed the square dance as a professional dance performance, with features that suggest the square dancing is growing emphasis on dance competition, and the reinvention of musical choreography in dance (Markula,2020).

Obviously, the position that explore square dancing from dance performance is a one-sided discussion based on the context of dance, which has certain connotational deviations from the square dance, whose main purpose is fitness. Moreover, square dance is not limited to the connotation and attributes of dance but has formed a social and cultural phenomenon that integrates the characteristics of fitness, dance, performance, social activity and entertainment.

Urban Study

Several scholars have focused on the phenomenon of square-dancing from the perspective of urban studies. Tian and Wise (2022) argue that the urban spaces of square dancing are related to the social characteristics mentioned above and believe that square dancing is a form of social interaction that impacts the sense of place in the contemporary urban public space. Studies have shown that the square-dancing phenomenon, known as ‘life emplacement’, enhances social embeddedness and a sense of place, and that the formation of participants' collective identities helps participants understand place attachment (Tian and Wise, 2022). The behaviour and interaction of square dance participants in the square express their dependence on and

attachment to the square, where participants can re-understand and construct their own social network (Tian and Wise, 2022).

Qian and Lu (2019) have discussed the publicness of square dancing in cities from the perspective of urban public space and urban civic culture. The daily activity of people's life in the urban sphere largely determines not only people's social lives but also their physical bodies and emotional experiences. Square dancing promotes the feeling of collectivism, overcoming the anonymity and strangeness of contemporary society without contradicting the spirit of individualism that exists in modern cities. In addition, square dancing can be defined as an active urban learning process in which norms, rules and morals of public life are considered and reflected upon as necessary factors for managing the city (Qian and Lu, 2019). Moreover, from the perspective of leisure activity and urban public spaces, some scholars have explored square dancing as a type of daily leisure activity or a public space practice aimed at helping people rebuild their identity, cope with urban challenges and gain a sense of community and identity (Lin et al., 2020).

Some researchers have focused on the public space of square dancing, an aspect that is linked to the health issues above. Zhou, Grady and Rosenberg (2023) look at square dancing from the perspective of therapeutic public spaces, considering the construction of 'healthy' and 'aged-friendly' cities to adapt to changing Chinese demographics. They propose a public-space framework to accommodate the cooperation of dancers in open urban spaces and highlight the potential of these square-dancing spaces for promoting health, well-being, and social networking among the elderly, as well as challenging traditional gendered urban spaces. Specifically, the liveliness of apartment buildings and proximity to functional spaces, has been found to impact physical activity among older adults (Zhou et al., 2023).

Various studies have offered an in-depth analysis of the spatial contradictions and conflicts of

square dancing and suggest possible urban planning strategies, reasonable spatial design methods, and government interventions or supervisory measures to compensate for current urban planners' lack of understanding of space (Liu et al., 2018). In particular, groups of scholars have focused on environmental problems associated with the negative effects and nuisance of noise from square dancing. Chen (2018) stressed that square dancing is an important aspect of Beijing's cultural and natural landscape, enhancing the vitality of the city's spaces and providing health benefits to the participants. However, the space occupation and noise pollution of square-dancing activities have caused controversy over the phenomenon, due to the frequent movement of square-dancing activities and the scarcity of public leisure space (Chen, 2018). Other scholars have proposed some urban planning countermeasures to the noise problems caused by square dancing, including changing the path of music transmission and expanding public spaces (Tong, 2013), and calling for the development of new music transmission systems from the perspective of square dancing itself, and creating more public green spaces in Chinese cities from the perspective of space. The combination of the two methods can achieve the purpose of eliminating the public music noise of collective sports activities in urban space (Zhou, 2014).

The above urban studies on square dancing essentially focus on the planning and design strategies of urban public space, as well as on the norms, rules and morals of public space, the management of space conflicts, and the connection between public space and sociability. However, square dance is a spontaneous behaviour and its specific location in the urban space is not fixed, meaning that the key features of the flexibility of square dance spatial research are ignored by contemporary academic research. Moreover, very few studies have considered the connection between the urban space of square dancing and people's daily life.

In conclusion, current academic research has described various forms of square dancing: a non-

professional dance; a dance performance or sports exercise that tends to be folk, entertaining, spontaneous, participatory, medium-intensity fitness activities; or a mass dance performance. Including the perspective of physical and psychological health, sociology, human development and ageing study, dance performances public mass dance, and urban planning and public space study. It should be emphasised that square dancing is very complex and interdisciplinary, especially the core of square dancing, which is a highly visible cultural phenomenon that influences the development and cutting-edge state of contemporary Chinese urban studies. Large research gaps remain in the comprehensive study of the square-dancing phenomenon. Hence, this thesis will provide an interdisciplinary exploration of the origins, definitions and implications of the square-dancing phenomenon, helping to reveal its underlying cultural connotations, political interventions and aesthetic implications. Its findings will provide a unique contribution to existing knowledge.

1.3 The Central Focus of the Study

From the preceding remarks regarding prior research into the various understandings of square dancing, the central focus of this study – namely the research gap in current academic enquiry – will be summarised below. I will focus primarily on an interdisciplinary investigation that aims to provide new insights into the square-dancing phenomenon in contemporary China, including exploring the characteristics of the dancing community, and defining its role in urban China. Therefore, this study puts forward some noteworthy research questions and central concerns, specifically as follows:

- Who are the participants in the community of square dancing, and how is the phenomenon expressive in contemporary China?

One sub-question asks what are the neighbourhoods, emotional and political relations of the dancing community?

- How do we examine the significance of square dancing in the cultural, political and aesthetic contexts?

One sub-question asks what is the definition of dancing bodies in terms of the Chinese political background, cultural development, and aesthetic transformation?

- Where does square dancing take place, and what is the role of the square in contemporary urban China?

Sub-questions ask how the notion of the square should be re-interpreted in the context of urban China, and what was the cloud square during the COVID-19 pandemic?

This research has four objectives:

- To provide the contextual exploration of the origin and interpretation of the square-dancing communities, by analysing the aspects of social change of the neighbourhood, emotional needs of middle-aged and elderly women participants and political intervention of authority.
- To understand the definition of square dancing by critically examining square dancing as daily exercises and stage performances in response to the development of square dancing with the national ideology.
- To further understand the phenomenon of square dancing through the body aesthetics as presented by Chinese dancing women from the Mao Zedong period to contemporary society.
- To re-interpret the notion of the square in the context of contemporary urban China, and explore the role of square dancing in everyday life.

By considering gaps and context in section 1.2, my critical focus is on an interdisciplinary investigation that aims to provide new knowledge about the understanding of the square-dancing phenomenon in contemporary China, including exploring its origins, definitions and values. Firstly, some scholars have discussed its origins from the perspective of dance origin theory and traditional cultural inheritance, as well as of changes in population structure in the context of urbanisation. However, China's rapid urbanisation is a complex topic, which not only causes changes in population structure but also affects people's socialisation, emotional relationships and the urban spatial pattern. In addition, the occurrence of square dancing is a mass collective form of dance, and a dance performed by one individual is not called square dance. Further, some people involved in ballroom dancing appear to be representing the phenomenon of square dancing: while this may be similar to square dancing, it is excluded

from the scope of this study because it is based on the ballroom dancing of male and female couples and is the evolution of ballroom dancing from indoor to outdoor in the 1980s after the Reform and Opening-up. The present study focuses mainly on square dancing with a large-scale, mass gathering, conformity of presentation, a majority of female participants, and daily and competitive activities. Therefore, this study needs first to explore the understanding of the square dance community from the perspective of square dance as a group of elderly and middle-aged women. It will go on to reveal the context and motivation of the development of square dancing and the unique characteristics of the community exclusive to Chinese square dancers.

Secondly, there are very few analyses of the square-dancing phenomenon from the perspective of visual experience and presentation, as well as of political relationship with the nation. As mentioned in section 1.2, although the definition of square dancing has attracted academic attention, some studies define square dance solely from one single perspective, for example, physical and psychological health, sociology of group identity, human development and ageing, urban planning and public space, and dance performance. However, current academic studies still do not provide a clear and comprehensive definition of square dancing through the lens of the visualised dancer's body movement and behaviours. Especially, the core of square dancing is a highly visible cultural and political phenomenon in urban spaces, little research has focused on the square-dancing phenomenon in terms of Chinese political ideology and cultural background. Therefore, this research will attempt to fill this gap and provide a unique contribution to existing knowledge by revealing the cultural connotations, political interventions and visual aesthetic implications inherent in square dancing.

Finally, as a response to rapid urbanisation and social changes, the square dancing as a spontaneous activity without regional restrictions has unexpectedly spread and become ubiquitous throughout the whole of China: it is found in both rural and urban areas, as well as

in ethnic minority areas. To date, several studies have investigated square dancing in rural areas, with the activity usually located in the rural community service centre where the main participants are local villagers. However, some scholars have found that the current developmental status of square dancing in rural areas is still immature, which is reflected in the fact that to the the dance content of square dancing is not as professional and diverse as that of urban square dancing, and there is lack of effective coordination between government and square dancing activities (such as official support and norms) (Xing, 2018). The square dancing in rural area is not the main sphere of square dancing activities and does not typify the square dance phenomenon, so the rural square dance is not is not the main topic of this thesis. In addition, according to the above research context, most previous studies focused on studies before the COVID-19 pandemic, which has changed people's lifestyles and the routine development of square dancing in China. Therefore, few studies have looked at the impact and change of the special global event of COVID-19 on Chinese square dancing. Overall, the most typical focus of square dancing covered in this research is still concentrated in the urban area, with focuses on seeking to understand square dancing in contemporary urban spaces, as well as its influence on people's everyday lives in that setting. In particular, exploring the understanding of the concept of square dancing and squares during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.4 The Boundaries of the Study

In order to understand the discussion about the square dance phenomenon in contemporary urban China, it is necessary to analyse the organisational forms of square dancing, which helps to clarify the boundaries of this study more clearly, and to elaborate on the types of square dancing that this study focuses on. This study primarily distinguishes between the two types of square dance teams found in the analyses of some scholars. In line with this, Ma (2017) and Martin and Chen (2020) discuss that there are two types of organisations for square dance

activities. On the one hand, there are square dancing groups organised by cultural centres, and elderly universities under the jurisdiction of various administrative districts in different cities (Ma, 2017). At the same time, the daily exercise one gets with this kind of square dancing is usually supported and funded by the government or authoritative institutions. For example, cultural centres have dedicated funds to hire teachers who graduated from dancing majors at Chinese universities, which has improved the professionalism and professional skills of square dancing and square dancers, respectively. The daily activities of these square dance teams are usually carried out in indoor cultural centres or elderly university centres, and the teams also participate in some competitions and commercial performances (Martin and Chen, 2020).

On the other hand, there is representational square dancing. This is a spontaneous self-organised square dance team, which some scholars call a non-professional or amateur dancing team (Martin and Chen, 2020). Spontaneous square dancing is the typical type of square dance phenomenon; it is composed of ordinary residents who do their daily exercise spontaneously and autonomously in public spaces, which can attract and accommodate a wider range of people to enjoy dancing and communities (Ma, 2017; Xu, 2021). Spontaneous square dancing is not only reflected in spontaneous self-organisation but also in spontaneous informal learning in the process of daily exercise. Zhu and Li (2021) found that in spontaneous square dance activities, middle-aged and elderly participants have a long-term informal learning process, and they form a peer-led interactive learning group without the need for professional guidance. In addition, the municipal government has gradually realised the significance of square dancing as a community cultural activity for the landless elderly, and the government has consolidated square dancing activities by funding and organizing performances or competitions (Zhu and Li, 2021). Therefore, there are also cases of government funding for spontaneously organised square dancing, but usually only in the context of competitions and performances.

Using the research on the two types of square dancing found in the literature, this study analysed and summarised the comparison between spontaneous square dance groups and organised square dance groups. There are great differences between the two, as described in Table 1 below:

Form of square dance teams	Organisation	Funding	Activity location	Participants
Spontaneous square dance teams	Spontaneous self-organisation	Self-funded	Public open spaces	Ordinary citizens
Organised square dance teams	Organised by authorised party (usually are cultural centre, elderly university, or athletic association)	Government-funded	Indoor space at cultural centre or elderly university	A student or member of an authority

Table 1: The differences between spontaneous square dance groups and organised square dance groups (*made by author*)

It can be seen that there are obvious differences between spontaneous square dancing and organised square dancing. These are mainly reflected in four aspects: organisational mode, funding method, activity location, and participant identity. The characteristics of spontaneous square dance are related to being a daily activity of ordinary residents, which means it is spontaneous, self-organised, self-funded, and takes place in urban public spaces. The reason

why spontaneous square dance can be the main focus of exploring the phenomenon of square dance is that this type of dance team is in line with the research objectives proposed above: gaining an understanding of the phenomenon of square dance by analysing the feelings and experiences of square dance participants in urban public open spaces and to analyse the relationship between spontaneous mass power and state authority power as well as to explore the understanding of location in urban spaces. Therefore, the focus of this study is on spontaneous square dance teams that involve ordinary residents in daily exercise in public open spaces rather than square dance teams organised by authorised institutions.

1.5 Methodology

Methodology is the philosophical basis for a particular research practice. It is a common scientific discipline, which uses the principles of objectivity, reliability, systematises and accuracy to study and analyse phenomena from a scientific perspective (Logarusic,2021). Methodology, as a scientific discipline, is crucial for reaching basic and relevant knowledge in research (Logarušić, 2021). It involves a systematic approach, precision, and the application of methods and research procedures (Logarušić, 2021). Hahn and Jennings (2014, p.138) state:

‘The purpose of the methodology section is to accurately and clearly describe the research design and the procedures undertaken to collect and analyse data, and to present the rationale for choosing each for the study.’

This research used a qualitative research method that included off-site documentary research, on-site observation and semi-structured interviews. Creswell's work in research design, particularly in the context of qualitative methods, has been widely acclaimed for its comprehensive and practical approach. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is an angle or research method to answer research questions, and researchers can explore detailed and rich details through deep participation and real experience. Qualitative research methods

focus on comprehensive and contextual understanding gained through analysis, interpretation and argument building, which can be used to explain social and cultural phenomena: they aim to answer the ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions rather than the ‘how much’ or ‘how many’ questions that quantitative methods answer (Hancock, 2002; Mason, 2002; Creswell, 2014). A qualitative research method uses an interpretive philosophical approach to clarify how social phenomena or things are experienced, interpreted, understood, constituted or produced (Mason, 2002; Punch, 2013).

Since the aim of this study is to explore a new understanding of the phenomenon of square dancing, including its interrelationship and representation among dancers' activities, dance groups, dance bodies and dance locations, it was appropriate to adopt a qualitative research method to achieve the objectives.

‘Qualitative research is concerned with how the complexities of the sociocultural world are experienced, interpreted, and understood in a particular context and at a particular point in time. The intent of qualitative research is to examine a social situation or interaction by allowing the researcher to enter the world of others and attempt to achieve a holistic rather than a reductionist understanding (Mason, 1996, cited in Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008, p.80).’

According to the above explanation of qualitative research, it is considered reasonable and appropriate to adopt qualitative research in this study, which can enrich and deeply answer the research questions and achieve the research objectives of this study. This approach was used in response to the research question of how square dancing as a phenomenon – and its influences – can be understood in contemporary urban China. A variety of research methods were used in this study, including documentary research on square dancing in China; unstructured observations of five urban and four target dancing groups; and semi-structured interviews with

participants, organisers and audiences of square-dancing activities.

In order to explain how the research methods were systematic and underpinned by a process, it is necessary to state the design of these methods. Primary data and secondary data are the two types of data in this study. The researcher collected secondary data from published materials, daily newspapers, and government-published political documents. Primary data was gathered from fieldwork conducted in the five target cities and four target groups in mainland China. This primary data includes data from onsite observation and interviews with dance participants, the leader of the dance groups, dance teachers, members, and audiences.

In the exploration process of this study, it was necessary to conduct documentary research methods before the field investigation. The documentary research method is a method to comprehensively understand the topic and context to be studied by investigating published and existing materials. Documentary research helped this study to identify major definitions of several key basic concepts, such as community, nationalism, patriotism, woman aesthetics, and square dancing itself. Moreover, through a literature review, this study found the research gaps of square dance in the current academic circle and provided theoretical support for the discussion of this thesis. The literature research will provide information on multiple aspects of the square dance phenomenon, such as the policy guidance for national fitness, the guidance of cultural policies, and the development of urban squares, which will create a social and cultural background for the square dance groups to be investigated.

In particular, before the field investigation, the documentary research helps this study to clarify the location, time and main participants of square dance activities. For example, most of them are middle-aged and elderly women, and they occur in public open spaces at nightfall, such as commercial squares, cultural squares (*wenhua guangchang*), parks and streets. In addition, factual reporting in documentary studies will help to justify and reference effective city and

district selection before field surveys are carried out. For example, the selection of the five target cities for the first trip and four target groups for the second trip in this field observation method research is based on the analysis of literature and reports of secondary materials.

In the process of combing the research methods, this study considers the interdisciplinary nature of the square dance phenomenon, which can be explored under the theoretical basis of social activities, community, performance, body aesthetics, square and so on. In addition, the objective of this study is to explore the community development of square dancing through the analysis of participants and social changes, emotional needs and political intervention. To understand the definition of square dance by critically examining its visual presentation as a daily practice and stage performance, in response to the current and future development path of square dance under national ideology; Through the role of square dance in daily life, and to reinterpret the concept of the square in the context of contemporary Chinese cities.

Therefore, in addition to off-site literature research and visual analysis, a variety of research methods, such as observation and semi-structured interviews, will be developed in the steps of field investigation research. Researchers can gain acceptance and build relationships in the square dance community through fieldwork techniques in order to create an exhaustive profile of square dance participants, their experiences, feelings, and behaviour. The field investigation of this study will be carried out through two trips, during which the research purpose will be gradually clarified, and a more substantive research direction and content will be determined. The first field investigation will be carried out according to the general research direction determined after theoretical gaps and a literature review. The first trip of the field investigation will generate more specific research questions and identify clearer research objectives and research objects to guide the second trip of field investigation. Therefore, the two trips to the field are a gradual process that together contributes to the collection of primary data for this

study.

1.5.1 Documentary Research

The interdisciplinary nature of this study was determined by the documentary research method. Documentary research is a valuable method in education, history and social sciences, and the collection of large and rich secondary data provides a range of sources and methods for research (McCulloch, 2004). Tight (2019) further emphasises the importance of documentary research in the social sciences, providing guidance on research design, data collection, and analysis. Kripka (2015) adds to this discussion by highlighting the method's role in qualitative research, particularly in understanding social reality and knowledge production. These sources, which can include a wide range of documents and audio-visual materials, are essential for understanding the official realm, administrative routines, and the public sphere (Scott, 2014).

This study used documentary research because it focused on the phenomenon of square dancing in China, which, as a daily activity among the public, has attracted much attention. Accordingly, the related reports, news and other literature sources are rich in useful data. In addition, the literary sources on square dancing cover multiple overlapping and independent disciplines, so the boundaries of the literature are difficult to determine clearly. They range from research on the Chinese community and the politics and visual culture of square dancing to the study of urban squares and everyday urbanism. A careful reading of the discussion on several intersecting fields provided me with an extensive and thorough understanding of the popular square-dancing phenomenon in the 21st century as well as its historical, political and cultural context.

However, as mentioned in sections 1.2 and 1.3, research on the phenomenon of square dancing in China has been limited, especially in relation to its political, cultural and visual aspects. Therefore, to establish the research context and construct the arguments presented in the thesis,

this study critically collected and analysed textual and visual data, whether primary or secondary documents, including trend reviews, opinion articles, critical discourse, official-policy documents and published academic works, related to Chinese square dancing in the context of contemporary Chinese cities. For example, to understand the development of square dancing in China in relation to official political ideology, the literature analysed included government publications, archives and news, especially policy documents. Special emphasis was placed on documents issued by the Chinese government relating to political and cultural policies, especially those promoting and regulating the development of square dancing. Policy documents that provide guidance-for the future of China are also of analytical value because they help to predict the development of the Chinese government's policy on the square-dancing phenomenon.

In addition to the textual data, visual data were also useful to reflect the characteristics and process of the square-dancing activities. As Mason (2002, p.103) states:

‘Documents are usually considered to be text-based, but they are not necessarily so, and some commentators will include non-text-based documents – especially photographs – in their discussions of documentary methods.’

Visual data can critically complement the subjective description of textual data, provide a factual record and add objectivity and credibility to the data (Mason, 2002). Visual data in the arts and social sciences is a powerful tool for constructing and interpreting complex information, is a collection of methods and tools for exploration and presentation, and usually visual data is data that occurs or is located in the visual and spatial domain outside of text and text (Mason, 2002). The visual data collected in this research were derived from news reports and newspapers, provided by interviewees in the interview process or photographed as part of

the observation method (which will be described in detail in the semi-structured interview and observation method sections that follow). These visual data were usually accompanied by oral or textual explanations, which helped to reflect more faithfully the phenomenon of square dancing and the social and cultural relations it constitutes.

In the process of documentary research, it is necessary to develop a clear set of steps and objectives according to the research focus of the study for dealing with documentation and visual material based on the research focus of the study (Scott, 2014). These steps in this research were as follows: (1) to determine that the documentary research revolves around the main research topic of ‘square dancing in contemporary urban China’; (2) to review the relevant literature, news reports and government publications (especially cultural and political policy documents) in Chinese and English successively, including a comprehensive review of the literature on this topic; (3) to evaluate each document according to four criteria: authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning; and (4) to conduct an in-depth analysis of relevant literature according to the investigation and research objectives.

1.5.2 Fieldwork

The data collected at this stage of the field investigation were highly focused and significant as the emphasis was placed on obtaining data relevant to the research. To gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of square dancing, the research objects in this stage were individuals and groups participating in square-dancing activities, including dancers, organisers and audiences. However, actual participants in square dancing were the main interviewees. The fieldwork was conducted in two phases over two trips, with the first trip lasting 26 days (May 2019) and the second trip lasting 28 days (November 2021). To achieve the objective of the study, two methods were adopted: (1) on-site observation of the daily square-dancing activities and stage performance of the target square-dancing group; and (2) semi-structured interviews

conducted with group members, leaders and teachers, to take into account the participants' personal feelings and perceptions of square dancing.

Strategy For Select Target Cities

The selection of target cities, dance groups, and the gathering of interviewees was a necessary consideration in this study, which will ensure the rationality of research methods and primary data investigation can be justified, and effectively achieve the research question and research objectives. Square dancing as a national activity has spread throughout various cities in China, but through literature research and a series of secondary data research, the result is that the characteristics of square dance are different in different regions, especially in Han areas and minority areas. However, the context of this study is the phenomenon of square dance in the urban of Han nationality. Therefore, the researcher has made a preliminary determination of the research area before the fieldwork; that is, the minority areas and villages are not within the research scope of this study. Furthermore, the researchers also selected and thought about the target cities to prepare for the first trip.

The researcher visited the five cities of Shanghai, Nanjing, Qingdao, Yangzhou and Shijiazhuang in China on the first trip of this research for the following three reasons. Firstly, this study focuses on square dancing in urban spaces against the background of urbanisation. In contemporary urbanisation in China, Chinese city clusters have formed, represented by the Pearl River Delta (*zhu san jiao*), Yangtze River Delta (*chang san jiao*), Bohai Bay (*bo hai wan*) and Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei city (*jing jin yi*) clusters. Although the Pearl River Delta is a pioneer area of urbanisation, its relatively young population does not conform to the square dancing of

the middle-aged and elderly groups concerned with this study.¹ Therefore, among the five cities in this study, Shanghai, Nanjing, Qingdao, and Shijiazhuang, respectively cover relatively developed urbanised areas. Secondly, because this study focuses on square dancing involving middle-aged and elderly women as the main participants, Qingdao is a city that is obviously reflective of the ageing phenomenon in China (Lu, 2017). Thirdly, as outlined in the research objectives of this study, the presentation of square dancing was to be considered in the context of cultural and political forces. Therefore, the cities visited during the first trip respectively cover the provincial capitals and non-provincial capitals of China. For example, Nanjing is the provincial capital of Jiangsu Province, Shijiazhuang is the provincial capital of Hebei Province, and Qingdao and Yangzhou are non-provincial capitals. Overall, to ensure the accuracy of the field survey, the five cities selected for the first trip cover all these categories and can represent the diversity of the square-dancing phenomenon and its typical impact on cities.

According to the purpose of the first trip, it was to gain a preliminary understanding of the square dance phenomenon in order to inform the choice of target dance groups. Result of the data collection and analysis on the first trip, I chose Qingdao as the target city for the second trip, and conducted an in-depth investigation of square-dancing groups in Qingdao. The choice of Qingdao as the city for in-depth research was prompted by two factors. Firstly, Qingdao, located in the coastal area around the Bohai Sea, has undergone a relatively rapid urbanisation process with the highest economic level and the largest population in Shandong Province.

¹ For example, in Dongguan and Shenzhen in the Pearl River Delta, the proportion of the population aged 65 or above is less than 4%, and Shenzhen also has a young population structure.

Additionally, its ageing rate (aged over 65) was 20.48% in 2022, 1.58 percentage points higher than the national average, which is a relatively high level and in the super-aging level of cities in China (Qingdao GOV,2022). Secondly, this study focused on a discussion of the political and cultural dimensions of square dancing, which is best represented in the non-provincial capital cities because the control of square dancing in these cities is neither excessive nor entirely non-interventional, creating a balance between official and grassroots power. Finally, according to the data in the existing literature, in 2015, the permanent resident population of Qingdao exceeded 9 million, and it will exceed 600,000 people participate in square dancing activity, which means that on average, one out of every 15 people in Qingdao is a square dance participant, that is, square dance participants account for 7% of the city's population in Qingdao, Therefore, the proportion of square dance participants in Qingdao is leading among the cities in the country(Shang, 2016). Overall, Qingdao provided the best conditions for the exploration of square dance activities in terms of the number of participants and dance diversity, as well as its relationship with urban development and state intervention.

Strategy for Selecting Dance Groups for the Case Study

The above section discusses Qingdao as the target city of this study, and the following section will explore and interpret how and why certain square dance groups were selected as suitable case studies. Qingdao has jurisdiction over seven districts, including the Shinan District, Shibei District, Huangdao District, Laoshan District, Licang District, Chengyang District, and Jimo District, with a total of 108 streets and 36 towns (Qingdao Natural Resources and Planning Bureau, 2021). Further, according to the Qingdao Daily (2021) report, the bulletin of the 7th National Population Census of Qingdao, the districts with a high number of ageing population in Qingdao are the Shinan District, Shibei District, and Licang District. At the same time, according to the study of secondary literature, the more concentrated areas of square dance

participants in Qingdao are the Shinan District, Shibei District and Licang District, especially in the parks, squares, and streets near residential areas, where the dancing takes place between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. (Shang, 2016). Therefore, during the second research trip, the research scope was further narrowed down to the square dance teams in the Shinan District, Shibei District, and Licang District of Qingdao. In these districts, Dagang Street, Xinghua Street, and Badahu Street are typical target areas because these areas are relatively diverse, concentrated, safe, and suitable locations for the outdoor activity of square dancing (Lu and Mishi, 2023). The exploration of square dancing in these areas can more systematically reflect the target group selection system in this research method and help this research explore the diversity and comprehensive understanding of square dance.

During the first trip, the on-site observation method was used to identify the gender and number of the main participants, the dance types and the location of the dancing activity, and the groups were roughly divided into categories based on their characteristics to assess their potential as research samples. In line with the research questions and objectives, the study took several basic factors into consideration when selecting samples and determined four target dance groups. The considerations were as follows:

- The four dance groups were represented, with middle-aged and elderly women as the main participants.
- The origin of the four dance groups was spontaneous rather than involving institutions, such as universities for the elderly and cultural palaces.
- Their square-dancing activities were mass gatherings with many people (rather than couples) forming the groups.
- The four dance groups showed variety, ensuring a degree of diversity in data collection.

They comprised different types of square dancing and had different group sizes, from a few to several hundred people.

- The four groups included as many types of interaction as possible, such as online, daily and onstage, but mainly included daily face-to-face activities.
- The locations of the four dance groups covered a wide variety of activity spaces in the city, such as outdoor, indoor and semi-outdoor spaces.

Therefore, according to the above criteria, this study selected four square dance groups in Dagang Street, Xinghua Road Street, and Bahu Lake Street. During the second field trip, four square dance teams were further observed, namely Dagang Street Dance Team, Wudong Qingchun Team, Yewu Dance Team, and Xinghua Dance Team. The selection of these four square dance groups and the participants in the dance groups as the study sample can help the collection of primary data of this study to be reliable and credible.

Strategy for Recruiting the Interviewees

The recruitment and sampling methods used in semi-structured interviews will directly affect the research results and credibility (Jessiman, 2013). Therefore, this section will discuss how this study identified specific participants as suitable research elements. In order to effectively achieve the research objectives of this study, it is appropriate to adopt purposive sampling to ensure the effectiveness and accuracy of sample selection. As Rai and Thapa (2015) state, purposive sampling is usually suitable for qualitative research with relatively small specific sample sets with certain characteristics through reasonable judgment to obtain informational value and representative elements. In addition, purposive sampling ensures a more comprehensive and typical data collection (Robinson, 2014). Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 202) found, ‘many qualitative researchers purposively employ particular sampling methods and then

seek out groups, settings, and individuals where the processes to be studied are most likely to occur'. The purposeful sampling technique allows the selection of a representative group by some specific selection criteria, showing some typical cases of the process (Patton, 2002; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Therefore, in purposeful sampling, the selection of samples needs to meet some specific criteria. Based on the research question and objectives of this study, several basic considerations were taken into account to select the sample. In the field investigation of the first trip, some basic information was gathered, such as the form of the square dance group, the time of the activity, the location of the activity, and the behaviour, communication, and interaction between the dancers, and the positions of the participants were roughly classified, helping to evaluate the potential of these participants as interviewee samples. Furthermore, the criteria for selecting samples in this study were further considered as follows:

- The most important selection criterion is that participants in square dancing should be members of the four spontaneous square dance groups selected above because the spontaneous element is one of the boundaries of this study.
- The target interviewees should be middle-aged and elderly women because one of the research objectives pointed out that the group concerned in this study is middle-aged and elderly Chinese female square dance participants.
- Some of the target interviewees should have participated in square dance performances or competitions because it is clearly pointed out in the objectives of this study to explore the visual expression of square dance activities in body aesthetics and national ideology in different contexts of daily and stage performances.
- The target interviewees should meet the conditions for daily participation in square

dance in urban space. The reason is that one of the objectives of this study is to explore the definition of square dance location by focusing on the process of square dance groups in urban space.

- The target interviewee samples should include different positions in the dancing team, including leaders and teachers as well as core members and less regular participants. This criterion is used because respondents in different positions may reveal a variety of comprehensive notions about square dancing. For example, the leader of the dance team can reflect in more detail on the organisation of the team's daily activities and stage performances and the relationship with the communities, resident committees, or the relevant cultural departments.

After completing an ethical review through the Ethics Committee of Birmingham City University in the UK and informed consent letters from participants, a total of 26 respondents were recruited for the research over a period of one month. Among them, there are 20 square dance participants and core members (five members of the Dagang Street Dance Team, five members of the Wudong Qingchun Team, five members of the Yewu Dance Team, and five members of the Xinghua Dance Company), four leaders of the square dance team (the leader of the Dagang Street Dance Team, the leader of the Wudong Qingchun Team, the leader of the Yewu Dance Team, and the leader of the Xinghua Dance Team) and two square dance team teachers (one teacher of the Dagang Street Dance team and one teacher from the Yewu Dance Team). The number of respondents successfully recruited is sufficient to achieve data saturation in the above methodological context. It also reflects the broad range of participants' roles, the breadth of their views, and the forthright and clear expression that helped this study achieve the required degree of reasoning.

This study established nomenclature as a representative code for each participant, which

guarantees the privacy and anonymity of the respondents participating in the interview (Saunders et al., 2015). In this study, the code consists of two parts: letters and numbers. The letter is the first letter of the square dance team (the four dance teams are W, D, Y, and X). The representative code also includes a number, which represents the number of respondents according to the order of the interviews. For example, W1 indicates that the interviewee is the first interviewee from the Wudong Qingchun Team; D2 means the interviewee was the second interviewee from the Dagang Street Dance Group.

On-site Observation

By using the on-site method to observe natural events and gathering qualitative data to understand and explain cultural behaviours, a large number of participant behaviours and performances that are unknown to researchers or beyond their expectations can be found (Mason, 2002; Mulhall, 2003). This research examined a range of interdisciplinary dimensions and focused on the square-dancing activity in the setting context. In particular, the observed results were based on the dancers' and audiences' natural interaction, behaviour and movement and visual representations of square dancing rather than being contrived in experiments or taken solely from interviews or written texts.

This observation method was selected because it generally included the use of sensory organs such as eyes and ears to perceive the observed objects; 'Observation fosters an in-depth and rich understanding of a phenomenon, situation and setting and the behaviour of the participants in that setting, it is an essential part of gaining an understanding of naturalistic settings and its members' way of seeing' (Mason, 2002, p.85). In addition, observational data can provide objective and comprehensive information, helping to effectively overcome the differences between what people say and their actual performance and behaviours (Patton, 2002). Therefore, the observation method was considered effective in collecting data and helping

achieve the objectives posed by the study.

As Mason (2002) states, once the researcher has decided to make observations in a certain setting, it is necessary to have a procedure to help the researcher make appropriate strategic decisions, such as the order and logic of each step and the content of the action, the reflection of the behaviour and the situation. In the implementation of the observation method, I established an observation outline and focus based on the following questions, relating the emphasis of this study to possible observations in the field of investigation:

- What is the dancing process during the two to three hours of square-dancing activity each day?
- What do square dancers wear, and how do they dress up? What are their facial expressions like?
- What dance types and movements, and music are featured in daily dancing activities?
- How do the dancers interact before and after the dance?
- How does the dance group represent the competition process? What are the preparation, performance and logistics of the stage performance as a whole?

The process of observation is very important in observational methods, and detailed consideration of the process of observation can help researchers immerse themselves in the research environment to experience and observe each dimension of the environment setting (Mason, 2002). In this case, it was important for the observation process of this study to consider how the researcher was immersed within the setting of square-dancing activities as well as the role of ‘self’ in the scene in order to facilitate the experience and observation of a series of dimensions of square dancing.

The observation method was used on each of the two trips. During the first trip, the researcher was a passive audience member or onlooker observing the daily dancing activities, which were located in open urban spaces. The researcher was situated to the side or back of the dance team but often also appeared in front of the team, which was the best observation position and data generation condition. In this way, the researcher was able to ensure that the observations were not affected by the subjective experience of participating in the square dance, and thus recorded as much objective information about square dancing activities and their impact on the surrounding environment as possible. During the second trip, the role of the researcher in the observation was not only that of an onlooker observing the square- dancing activities in the daily and stage performance situations but also of a ‘participant’ who was integrated into the square-dancing group and made herself a member of the group. Generally speaking, immersion in the environment is the decisive feature of participatory observation (Dalsgaard et al., 2016). Participatory observation provided a useful contribution to the data collection in this study and involved interacting with the participants, communicating, dancing and joining their WeChat (*weixin*) groups to form an experience of square-dancing activities. In addition, according to the research focus, objectives and secondary literature review, the study determined that the sites of observation are the open public spaces in the urban rather than within the private spaces or semi-private spaces.

In the observation method, the researcher will hold a poster showing the QR code, and interested square dance participants can scan the QR code to leave their nickname, age, gender, square dance team, position in the team, contact information, and whether they are willing to further interview the option. This process helped the researcher to collect the basic information of the respondent sample for sampling and screening.

This study recorded and constructed data from observations in two ways: (1) by taking field

notes during and after observation to help observe, record and analyse objective reality; and (2) by writing notes based on the researcher's experience in the environment and its interactions. Firstly, the researcher collected and recorded factual visual data during the two observation trips by taking photographs and videos, thereby recording the objective reality of the square-dancing phenomenon. The photos taken focused mainly on square-dancing group activities and the surrounding environment during spring, summer and winter. On the first trip, photos recorded various square-dancing phenomena in five cities to help narrow the research scope and focus. The second trip included filming the visual performances of daily square-dancing and stage square-dancing activities, including the dancers' movements, costumes, expressions and behaviours. Generally, observation is the best way to record visualisations or to construct visual materials and text. These data contributed to the main aim of this study and provided effective information to satisfy the research objectives of understanding the phenomenon of square dancing through visual experience and presentation. Secondly, at a set time on the night after the observations, the researcher wrote field dairies with a total length of 3,000 words, recording her understanding of and reflections on the scenes and her experience of participating in the square-dancing activity, especially during the 14-day participatory observation on the second trip. Finally, the observation process also helped to confirm interviewee responses during the semi-structured interviews.

Semi-Structured Interviews

This research uses the data collection method of semi-structured interviews to record the experience and feeling of square-dancing activities and build an understanding of the square-dancing phenomenon from the perspective of the square-dancing participants. According to Mason (2002) and Busetto et al. (2012), interviews are a valuable method in qualitative research because they can embody participants' subjective interpretations, perspectives,

attitudes, and experiences. They offer a more open and neutral approach compared to survey questionnaires, allowing for the discovery of personal characteristics and behaviours (Lin, 2013). The primary reason for selecting this method was to generate first-hand insights and divergent new perspectives on the research theme through the process of generating dialogue (Busetto et al., 2012). In addition, semi-structured interviews can assist in-depth data collection on the understanding of the square-dancing phenomenon. Therefore, interviews with square-dancing participants were used to reveal the situation more directly rather than by obtaining information from only the literature, official reports and government documents.

Compared with the limitations of structured and unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews provide both a guiding framework and an opportunity to explore topics relevant to a particular interviewee in a spontaneous manner. A semi-structured interview not only allows for open-ended questions for further discussion but also aims to develop targeted and manageable information for in-depth analysis (Rapley, 2001). Therefore, based on the research questions and objectives, I prepared interview outlines in advance to establish the core questions and then made flexible adjustments according to the actual situation during the interview.

During the interview process, a brief conversation was first held about the participants' personal backgrounds and basic information on their participation in square dancing. Next, the questions and answers were guided by the core questions focusing on the dancers' understanding of square dancing, their reasons for participating and the changes that square dancing brought to them. Briefly list the topic of the interview: 1) The motivations of people who participate in square dancing, 2) the feelings, opinions and experiences of the square dance, and 3) the effects or influence on locations of participating in square dancing. Finally, follow-up or spontaneous related questions were asked to gain a deeper understanding of the reasoning behind, and

implications of the ideas presented. Each interviewee will be interviewed for 45 to 60 minutes, some interviewees will be interviewed after the offline square dance activity, and some interviewees will be interviewed through online Wechat software, both of which are recorded during the whole process.

It is worth emphasising that some of the interviewees actively displayed and provided visual data, such as photos and videos, and described their experiences in square dancing in the interviews based on the photos, making a major contribution to the collection and analysis of visual data in the study.

‘Conversation is filled with verbal references to images and icons. People use verbal descriptions to visualise particular moralities, activities and versions of social order (or disorder). Sometimes informants refer to absent images (including photographs), or they might introduce material images or objects into a conversation (Pink 2007, cited in Mason, 2002, p. 105).’

Therefore, visual data for this study were obtained not only from the documentary research method outlined above but also from interviews and observations. Each interview was allotted one hour, and the entire session was recorded on a handheld device, helping to collect the textual data on the participants' insights and the visual data they were willing to provide. The audio interview was transcribed into Chinese and translated into English.

Data Analysis

According to the processes used for data collection in the semi-structured interviews, onsite observations and the documentary research method were employed. The visual and textual research data were collected from the archives, documents, newspapers and news reports, as well as from the fieldwork of the interview recordings and observations. Due to the nature of

qualitative research, after the collection of textual, audio and visual data for this study, content analysis will be appropriate to identify and label the data. The process of qualitative content analysis is crucial in ensuring the validity and completeness of research results. This process involves a systematic, rule-based approach to analysing verbal and textual data, including transcription, data condensation, category system development, and data display (Schilling, 2006). However, to enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, it is important to consider the concepts of abstraction and interpretation, which can add depth and meaning to the results (Lindgren, 2020). Qualitative content analysis can be further refined by deriving categories from the data, applying them through close reading, and analysing the data qualitatively (Forman, 2007). The content analysis process in this research was divided into four steps:

- ⑩ Organising the transcripts of interviews, as well as the observations, and taking notes about what was relevant and of interest to the research questions.
- ⑩ Clarifying whether different categories can/cannot be linked, and classifying them as primary or secondary topics.
- ⑩ Repeating the steps of classification and association until all the transcripts were organised, followed by considering any possible interrelationships and linking them with the research questions while clearly filing them under primary and-secondary categories.
- ⑩ Reviewing the original recordings and confirming whether the remaining material should be added to the results.

1.6 Ethical Considerations

In line with the methodology of this study, on-site observation and semi-structured interviews are the main research methods utilised – in other words, the research involves real people as its

subjects. Interviews with square dance participants, square dance leaders, spectators and other relevant personnel in the field, as well as recording the phenomenon of square dance by taking photos and videos, are extremely important in collecting data. This research will consider any ethical issues and is cautious about any possible implications related to this research, following the ethical guidelines of Birmingham City University (BCU) relating to research procedure and data gathering. In addition, my goal throughout was to conduct the research without bias or assumptions. My position in this research can be defined as that of an insider familiar with the Chinese context: this starting-point determines how I will analyse the material to achieve the following interpretations and findings. I am more familiar with the Chinese research environment than non-Chinese outsiders. In addition, as a bilingual researcher, my native language is Mandarin, a fact that aids the effective recruitment of interviewees and brings the added benefits of a shared sense of identity and commonality of language. All material gleaned from fieldwork and interviews are recorded without linguistic or cultural barriers. Finally, all the interview materials were collected in Chinese. To ensure that the message is clearly conveyed and understood by the reader, the translation has been undertaken by myself and edited by native English speakers. In order that the translation can be conveyed to the reader, I have made the meaning accurate and clear.

Consent

Ethical guidelines issued by BCU clearly emphasize the importance and necessity of obtaining informed consent from every research participant. The actual consent form should be signed at the time the participant agrees to be interviewed (review Appendix A and B). Moreover, at the end of each interview, details on the informed consent form will be used for the research of the paper.

The researcher obtained legal permission to take images in public places before doing so. The

filming locations of square dance include parks, streets, public open spaces of communities and outdoor spaces of commercial squares. As urban public spaces, these locations allow researchers to film. However, some people will not want to be captured in this way because of their personal views (Lucas et al., 2016; Kara, 2018). With that in mind, the researcher asked permission from all the dancers before taking the photos, and took random photos during the observation, and avoided photographing children. The taking of the image and its subsequent use are two separate processes that require separate consent. Therefore, before I use the photos taken, as soon as the personal information of the participants is involved, I had to obtain permission and ask them to sign an informed consent form, to clearly ask for the consent of the participants guaranteeing that their image will be personally used by me in this thesis and not for any other purpose.

Confidentiality

I was exposed to more dancers under the guidance of my mother, who is a square dance enthusiast. In the initial stage, the researcher needs to establish trust with the participants, so the researcher introduces the research objectives and goal of the study. At the same time, the researcher had better show the participants an ID or some identity proof to prove the authenticity of the researcher's identity. I spoke Chinese with them to introduce myself, to define the aim and purpose of my research, before moving on to free-flowing conversations. In addition, researchers need to explain to all interviewees the contents of the topics and interviews, as well as the process and methods of collecting information (Kara, 2018). For example, in the introduction process, I clearly explained that the participants' personal information would be anonymised.

Data Management

The collected data was handled securely and was not shared with any individuals or

organisations without the express consent of the participants. The data have been stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Specifically, they were stored on a laptop and kept in a folder with a password to make it appropriately secure and protected from unauthorised access, loss, destruction or damage. Under the Data Protection Act 2018, participants have the right to know how their data is stored and used. As such, participants are informed of how their information will be used and have the option to apply to the investigator to stop or limit the processing of the data, update incorrect data or request the complete deletion of their data. All respondents remained anonymous and, unless additional consent was obtained, participants' details were stored separately from any data. The researcher has ensured that the information was used fairly, lawfully and transparently and only for the purposes of the thesis.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

I framed three logical research steps to explore the square-dancing phenomenon. Firstly, the origin of square dancing is explored from the perspective of the community based on collective activities – this is a necessary precondition for square dancing based on a collective group of people. One person dancing is not synonymous with square dancing. Secondly, moving the perspective of square dancing inside the physical dancing body itself, the definition of the square-dancing phenomenon is discussed in the context of visual culture. Finally, square dancing is a unique cultural phenomenon in China, and it should be placed in the Chinese context and understood that it is composed of two terms, which are ‘*guangchang*’ (square) and ‘*wu*’ (dancing). Therefore, it is necessary to focus attention on the more macroscopic perspective of the ‘square’, the hosts of dancing activity, to explore the impact of square dancing on urban space and urban life.

The literature review at the beginning of each chapter in this thesis is specific to the theme discussed, rather than an independent chapter providing an overarching literature review. I have

structured my thesis into six chapters. In addition to the Introduction and the Conclusion, the main body of this thesis is divided into four chapters, in which the phenomenon of square dancing is discussed from three perspectives that correspond to research questions about the dancing community, the dancing body, and the dancing square. Chapter 2 explores the dancing community; Chapter 3 considers nationalistic bodies in square dancing; Chapter 4 is an appraisal of the dama's body aesthetics in square dancing; and Chapter 5 seeks to frame the concept of the square itself.

CHAPTER TWO: THE SQUARE-DANCING COMMUNITY

Chapter Two: The Square-Dancing Community

The phenomenon of square dancing in contemporary urban China developed from an interactive process of participants gathering together. A collective group of people is a fundamental defining feature of square dancing. One person dancing is rarely called square dancing. To enhance our understanding of the square-dancing phenomenon, it is first necessary to clarify its background and contextual development from the view of the collective group.

In this chapter, the term ‘community’ is used to describe the group of participants involved in square dancing to offer a new perspective on the phenomenon. Community is a controversial concept closely related to people's lived experiences in their daily lives. Theorists have provided a number of definitions and analytical methods for a deeper understanding of community. Parsons (1951) offered one of the earliest definitions of the concept of community as a collective group of citizens and their daily activities in a region, and that communities are local environments comprising residents who build relationships with each other through complex social roles (e.g., family or profession). Riger and Paul (1981) support this view of Parsons (1951), and they argue that community can be understood as the social bond and behavioural rootedness of local residents in the city. Therefore, the origin definition of community can be understood as a social relation bond of local residents.

With the development of the concept of community, many sociologists have explored the same proposition, namely that community is both local and relational. Gusfield (1975) was one of the earliest *sociologists* to define community, and he defined the concept of community in two ways: the community initially as a territorial and geographical community, and referring to a sense of belonging to a particular area – the neighbourhood, the town, and the city; Another important usage of community is ‘relational’, which not only reference to location, but also the quality of character of human social relationships. Gusfield (1975) concludes that the two

usages are not mutually exclusive and emphasises the relational usage of community. Bradshaw (2018) and Flora et al. (1992)) define a community as an organization, system, or network facilitated by solidarity, common identity, and common interests, but not necessarily confined to the same geographical location.

The concept of community extends beyond the geographical limitations of space and instead tends to emphasise relationships as its core feature. Kempers (2001) offers a useful concept of community, describing it as the dynamic quality of social relations and community life not just confined to a particular location. Calhoun (1980) notes the community is not simply people in a particular location, it can be more accurately defined as a mix of diverse social relationships and ‘an organised body of people’ that involves relationships, common interests, and common identity. The studies by McMillan and Chavis (1986) reveal that relational groups are characterised by a sense of community and emotional connection between individuals. Delanty (1998) also supports above argument, he argues the concept of community is an expression of the living world and a reflection of social identity, belonging, social relations, and commonality. Similarly, Chaskin (2008) also believes that local communities are characterized by resilience, which is mainly reflected in influencing social and environmental policies and cultures through organizational and collective actions. In other words, a community is a unit of collective connection, affiliation and identity, a convergence of interpersonal networks.

All the above studies emphasise the powerful resonance between community and relationships. Community theory has been disentangled from the strict connection with geography, enabling the concept to be summarised as a collection of links, commonalities, and identification with various relationships. Bessant presents three frequently noted explanations that form the basic framework for understanding community: common interests, shared spaces or places, and communication or communal bonds. In other words, the essence of the community is bonding

(Bessant, 2018). And Bessant (2018, p.37) also emphasised:

‘Relations and social relations are as ubiquitous as the air that humans breathe and just as critical to their existence, albeit in very different terms. Every aspect of social life is relational in some sense; indeed, it seems inconceivable that anyone could live completely separate from others.’

Therefore, the community is a collection of links, commonalities, belonging, and identification with various relationships, and relationships create a bond for people to interact in the community, which provides a unique perspective to explore the phenomenon of square dancing. Square dancing is a process in which people interact and communicate, and in this process, a relationship is created among the group, which will contribute to the connotation and character of the community. So, it's important to interpret this concept of community in terms of relationships.

The remainder of this chapter is structured into four sections. Firstly, the chapter clarifies the foundation for understanding the relationships of the square-dancing community in the context of the main participants' group of middle-age and elderly women. The discussion specifically identifies the *dama* (the main participant in the square dancing) and the characteristics of the *dama* within the square-dancing group. Secondly, to understand and interpret the complex dancing community through the range of its relationships in terms of both internal and external aspects is emphasised. The internal relationships among members are discussed from the perspectives of neighbourhood and emotional factors. External relationships are categorised as political relationships in this chapter and discussed with reference to other communities in society and the authorities. These relationships are echoed, demonstrated, and supported using data from interviews, observations, and documentary research on the contemporary square-dancing phenomenon, illustrating its emergence and the characteristics of the square-dancing

community in daily life. In the argument process, typical communities were selected as examples to support the discussion of square-dancing communities, as experienced by *damas* in the context of the People's Republic of China, for example, the People's Communes (*remin gongshe*), Red Guards (*hong weibing*), and work unit (*danwei*).

2.1 The *Dama* Community

In order to understand the square-dancing community and square-dancing phenomenon, it is necessary to explain the positioning of its main participants. Square dancing is considered to be an activity engaged in mainly by middle-aged and elderly women, as has been confirmed by many researchers. Lu, Yang and Qin (2021) state that although the participants in square dancing have become increasingly diverse in recent years, quantitative research into the number of participants in terms of age indicates that the large part of square-dancing participants are middle-aged (45-59), or in a transition point from middle age to old age (59-74), with a slight preponderance of elderly people over middle-aged people. According to Yang's (2017) survey of square-dancing participants in the Shanxi province in 2017, 79.3% are over 45 years old, and 93.7% are female. Ouyang (2021) used the quantitative questionnaire research method to investigate square-dancing participants in Shandong province in 2021: while female participants accounted for 83.09%, distribution by age was uneven, with participants being predominantly middle-aged or older adults, mostly over 41 years old, with 75.29% falling into the 41- 60-year-old category. According to Hou and Song (2015), the majority of dancers in urban China are female, and most are aged 55 or over. This fact is explicable because after reaching mandatory retirement between 50 and 55 years of age, people have plentiful free time and are keen to dancing in public (Hou and Song, 2015). Yang and Qin's (2022) research also supports the idea that square dancing is a predominantly female activity, and the participants are middle-aged and elderly women born in the 1950s and 1960s.

In addition, the fieldwork researcher has observed that the participants are almost all middle-aged and older women with very few men. Consequently, surveys of square-dancing participants in various provinces and cities in China consistently demonstrate that middle-aged and elderly women form the major participants and core groups in square-dancing activities.

Overall, most square-dancing participants are women born in the late 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. Although some participants were born in the 1980s or even as late as the 1990s, they account only for a very small proportion of participants and are not representative. The representative group of middle-aged and elderly women in China, known as *dama*, merits its own particular focus of attention for the incontrovertible reason that the term *dama* has already become firmly rooted in general usage as the label and signifier to denote the main participants in the square-dancing context (Leung, 2021).

Dama is a word that embodies a unique set of semantics and connotations in the context of China; it will therefore be fruitful to elaborate on the meanings of *dama* and their community's inextricable relationship with square dancing. In the conventional Chinese family structure and kinship pattern, *dama* is a term of address used by the younger generation to older female family members. The semantic field of the term has undergone changes over time and has acquired multiple meanings.

In contemporary China, the most prevalent definition of *dama* is a term used to describe retired middle-aged women, late middle-aged or slightly older, who are outspoken and brightly dressed, and usually appear in gathered groups and participate in group collective activities (Huang, 2021; Xu and Tian, 2012). While there are many dialect terms from different regions of China to describe this group of middle-aged and elderly women, the term '*dama*' is the most representative and the most common titular name for this group. Furthermore, an influential news report described a group of middle-aged and elderly women, who were snapping up gold

as *dama*, highlighting that *dama* are a very influential and powerful group of people whose purchasing power resulted in the biggest one-day gold price gain on the financial market (Li, 2020). Since then, they have gained worldwide attention, and the term of *dama* has been included in the economic buzzword list of major Chinese newspapers for the spring/summer of 2013 (Li, 2020).

Hence, square dancing is referred to as synonymous with *dama* dancing, and the organisation of square-dancing groups in China is even sometimes known as the *dama* community. At the same time, this group of *dama* mostly appear in collective groups and are keen to participate in collective social activities in the crowd, especially square-dancing activities, and like to integrate themselves into groups. Overall, the community is formed by the group of *dama*, who are usually representatives of the community life, with a clear sense of community and collective dedication. Moreover, *dama* are keen on square dancing activities, and the organisation of square dancing can be known as the *dama's* community in contemporary China. Therefore, there is an inseparable and profound relationship between *dama*, community and square dancing in the context of Chinese society.

2.2 Neighbourhood Relationships

The above definition of ‘*dama*’ as the main participant in the square-dancing phenomenon provides the basis for exploring the square-dancing community in terms of a range of relationships. Some scholars currently engaged in academic research have studied the characteristics and definitions of the group of square dancing from the perspective of sociology. Tao (2020) stated that the organization of the square-dancing group is usually based on ‘personal interest’s relationships’, with non-utitarian characteristics and a stable structure. personal interest’s relationships refer to the network of common interests and hobbies of square-dancing participants based on emotion, identity and common interests. Tao (2020) further suggests that the square-dancing groups are self-organised and characterised by acquaintance relationships. Participants in square dancing usually join the group via introductions made by acquaintances. The avenue of the familiar acquaintance network tends to provide the most usual *entrée* into the square-dancing community for participants in middle and old age because they are less likely to form new social relationships. In addition, the ‘talented person’ is obvious in the self-organised square-dancing troupe. ‘Talented person’ is usually the backbone member of the team with outstanding dancing enthusiasm and good organisational ability and dedication. ‘Talented person’ usually assumes the responsibilities of organising mobilisation, maintaining the organisation, selecting music, teaching dancing and leading dancing in the square-dancing organisation, and play a guiding role in leading, convening, and organising its management (Zhu and Li, 2021). The literature review cited above mainly discusses the organisational relationships of the square-dancing community from the perspective of sociology, which is related to the self-organised relationships, acquaintance relationships, and talented persons in the organisation.

This section sets out to offer a radical understanding of the collective gathering of the square-

dancing community in terms of neighbourhood relationships, rather than by exploring sociological types within square dancing. This decision was prompted by two factors. Firstly, the neighbourhood is the main place of leisure activities and the basis of social relations within the square-dancing community. Ruonavaara (2022) states that neighbourhood relationships are known as neighbourliness, it can be understood as an informal social relationship that links all members of daily life in a contemporary sociological context, and neighbourliness can be divided into neighbourliness based on community residents and neighbourliness based on acquaintance. In addition, Zhuang (2021) defines neighbourhoods as a connection between social interaction, physical environment and location, especially the emotional attachment of residents living in state-owned enterprise communities. Residents in a neighbourhood are called neighbours, also known as neighbourhoods, neighbours, near neighbours, next door, and so on, and usually form a social group where residents interact with each other. The interpersonal relationships within a neighbourhood are called neighbourhood relationships (Wellman, 2001). These studies collectively underscore the need for a comprehensive understanding of neighbourhood relations that integrates both spatial and social elements.

In support of Henning and Lieberg's (1996) statement that 'the most common neighbour contacts are connected to leisure activities', people value neighbourhoods because they provide social needs, security, and practical social support. Forrest and Kearns (2001) identified neighbourhoods as a place for 'an extension of social purposes', and pointed out the importance of the neighbourhood's recreational and leisure purposes. In the context of the present enquiry, the representation of the square dancing phenomenon responds to the above definition of the concept of neighbourhood, which is usually a daily face-to-face leisure and entertainment activity, largely meet the social needs of participants based on the interaction between geographically adjacent neighbours. Therefore, it is effective to explore the square dancing community from the perspective of neighbourhood relationships.

Secondly, focus on the square-dancing phenomenon itself, most of the participants usually live in nearby residential areas, and the dancing place is generally within walking distance. The dancing location is also usually near residential areas, making it convenient for nearby residents to participate in square dancing (Yang and Qin, 2022). Although some participants may take public transportation from distant residential areas to participate in square dancing, these constitute a minority that does not represent or influence the phenomenon of square dancing as a whole. Spielman (2013) introduces a method for identifying neighbourhoods based on both spatial and social attributes, illustrating the "spatialization" of this concept. Drilling (2019) further underscores the multi-faceted nature of neighbourhood research, emphasizing its role as a framework for social interactions and emotional relationships. Therefore, most social interaction of square dancing is based on the neighbourhood relationship, out of which a series of social interactions subsequently evolve.

In light of the above two factors -- the concept of neighbourhood and the geographical neighbourhood nature of square-dancing activities, this chapter will open by exploring neighbourhood relationships in the square-dancing community and will later expand its reach to consider a deeper set of relationships, including emotional relations and political connections. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt a novel and comprehensive perspective by arguing that the emergence of a square-dancing community is a response to social changes and a product of contemporary neighbourhood relationships against the backdrop of urbanisation, as well as meeting the social needs and social interaction of *dama*.

The Changing Neighbourhoods

According to the research context that has been clarified in Chapter one 'Introduction', the position of this study is to focus on square dancing in the urban setting as influenced by urbanisation. Urbanisation has long been one of the most extensive and contemporary problems

in both developing and developed countries, and has been responsible for changing the social interaction of neighbourhoods in China. A wealth of previous research has established that urbanisation occurring in the wake of the Reform and Opening-up Policy of 1978 brought significant change to China's social and economic operational mode, with large numbers of rural people moving to cities, thus generating an enthusiastic body of participants for square dancing (Martin and Chen, 2020). However, the popularity of square dancing is not merely the result of a large number of immigrants against the backdrop of rapid urbanisation. A deeper and more nuanced discussion is required in order to consider the concerted effects of a wide spectrum of changes in social interactions and neighbourhood relationships in response to urbanisation, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the origins and evolution of square-dancing communities.

As Wu (2022) points out, China's rapid urbanisation not only brought about dramatic demographic and economic changes, but also led to the evolution of urban spatial patterns. The changing pattern of urban spaces in China has necessarily entailed a comprehensive re-imagining of neighbourhood relationships compared with previous eras. Wu (2022) summed up the four types of neighbourhoods during urban development in China – namely, traditional neighbourhoods, work-unit neighbourhoods, urban villages (*cheng zhong cun*), and gated communities (*fengbi xiaoqu*). Residents of traditional neighbourhoods are familiar with each other and have established close relationships. Traditional Chinese communities are characterized by a series of spatial and architectural features that have evolved over time. For example, the courtyard houses in alleyways (*hutong*) in Beijing and Shanghai's alleys (*lilong or longtang*) both emphasize the importance of social interaction in traditional neighbourhood-based neighbourhoods (Wu, 2022).

With the expansion of the urban population and the vigorous development of urban

construction, it has become the norm for people to live in more independent high-rise gated community buildings and for individual windows to connect unfamiliar individuals. The residents no longer know who their neighbours are. For example, as in the megacity Beijing, narrow alleys and *hutongs* are disappearing; some of the *longtangs* in Shanghai have been replaced by high-rise and high-density gated communities in the process of urban construction, and in many cities, gated communities and high-density buildings with concrete predominate instead of low-rise and low-density rural building forms (Wu, 2022). At the same time, face-to-face interactions in neighbourhood spaces in China have been reconfigured, and the location of social spaces for residents has been shifted (Gaubatz, 2021). Based on the above impacts of urbanisation on the layout of urban neighbourhood spaces, Chen and Gong (2022) have conducted a preliminary discussion on the current neighbourhood relations. The development of urban construction and changes in urban social spaces have been further detrimental to the social integration of local neighbourhoods and have brought higher social loneliness to contemporary neighbourhood relations.

With the acceleration of urbanization, some scholars have analysed that the neighbourhood relationship in most residential areas is thin, distant and indifferent, and residents lack social interaction, communication, unity and connection. To some extent, most of the relationships between neighbours are strangers in contemporary urban communities, and the relationships are more complex, superficial and utilitarian; in other words, the problems of loneliness, indifference and lack of tolerance in the relationships between neighbours (Wu, 2022). Similarly, Liu (2016) also put forward the same view that the neighborhood relationship, which used to play an important role in interpersonal communication, has gradually become dull, distant, conservative, indifferent and strange. To some extent, neighbourhood indifference hinders social communication among residents. In closed living Spaces, residents lack communication and socialising among themselves, as well as a sense of community (Liu, 2016).

As a result, people deliberately develop a variety of local social interactions through other means (Chen and Gong, 2022). Therefore, urbanisation in China has increased the distance between people and reduced the interaction between neighbours. As a consequence of rapid urbanisation, neighbourhoods have always been the focus of research into how urbanisation affects social interactions within the local neighbours.

The emergence and birth of the square-dancing community is in this context of alienation of neighbourhood relations and acts on contemporary neighbourhood relations. Photographic images can often accurately capture a ‘true picture’ of the daily square-dancing phenomenon (Fig. 2.1). The background to square-dancing activities in urban spaces is usually or almost invariably high-rise apartment buildings, which might suggest the cold, alienated, superficial and sparse nature of neighbourhood relationships in an urban setting. However, square-dancing activities have the power to inspire the individual *dama* and other participants to go out from individual doors at the back of the gated community and to gather in the open space in front of the building to dance together, communicate and even get to know each other. As my analysis revealed, square dancing is one result of urbanisation (or in areas on *route* towards urbanisation), and it is a new expression of the social activity of the *dama* group among contemporary urban residents. Square dancing can enhance community coexistence and interaction between previously unknown individuals to foster a climate of familiar neighbourhood relationships.



Fig. 2.1 Square-dancing activity against the backdrop of urbanisation. Source: Gettyimages (2019)

Collectively Neighbourhood

In view of the new pattern of neighbourhood relationships generated within the square-dancing community (see above), it is further worth considering what can be understood by neighbourhood relationships in the context of contemporary square dancing, especially their significance to most participating *dama*. The stimulus for this enquiry has its roots in Section 2.1, which considered the *dama* community, that generation of retired *dama* who are the embodiment of contemporary community relationships and social life, shaped by different aspirations and understandings gleaned from personal experience. Among those interviewed for the research reported in this thesis, many interviewees (X2, Y3, D1, D3, and W2) often reflected on their life in the previous Mao period, which they described as ‘collective life’ and ‘*danwei*’ (work unit) life. the interviewee X2 recalled:

‘During the Mao period, we lived in collective groups, and the neighbours were very close. Maybe the neighbours next door would know the smell of what my family ate tonight, and we would even share the dishes with each other. Now we don’t even know what the neighbour next door looks like.’

The interviewee D3, a *dama* born in the early 1960s, has rich experience in square dancing and collective community relations:

‘Before I retired, I lived in the compound of my *danwei*. The *danwei* is our home. All our daily life is organised around the *danwei* and managed by the *danwei*. Therefore, our previous habit was to put ourselves in an organised collective, and we have a lot of trust in the people around us.’

Throughout the interview results, it was found that for this generation of *dama*, who were born in the late 1950s, 1960s, or early 1970s, there is a contrast between their previous and their present lifestyle and neighbourhood relationships. Indeed, most of the *dama* had experienced the *danwei* system during the Mao Zedong era, and within 30 years after the Reform and Opening-up policy. *Danwei* traditionally refers to a work unit or an organisational entity, often associated with state-owned enterprises and institutions during the socialist era. In addition, the *danwei* system is usually referred to as the state-owned enterprises with an exemplary model of collective community life (Bjorklund, 1986), and experienced by the generation of dancing *dama*. During the Maoist era, *danwei* were multifunctional urban institutions covering all aspects of urban livelihood. It was not only a workplace but also played a significant role in the lives of individuals as it encompassed various aspects of their daily existence. Residents living in the *Danwei* compound rarely had to leave the place, and collectivisation within the *danwei* compound affected their daily life to a high degree (Lu, 2006). In addition, *danwei* often have a collective decision-making structure, and decisions related to work and living

arrangements are made collectively, strengthening the collective sense of responsibility. And the *danwei* provides a wide range of social services to residents, so social interaction within the *danwei* compound is also enhanced (Bray, 2005). As a result, residents living in *danwei* courtyards embody a very high level of collectivised life, when they are not retired, most of these dancing *dama* live in the *danwei* system, which binds them together and organises their extreme collective life within neighbourhoods.

As a result of retirement and lay-offs from state-owned enterprises, a considerable number of the *dama* have left the social relationship mode based on the *danwei*. In China, the legal retirement age for female workers is 50, and 55 for female cadres and professionals. Many middle-aged women who are still eager to continue work are forced to retire and withdraw from society (Unger, 1993). In such circumstances, along with the unprecedented migration mentioned above, the alienation, thin, distance and indifference about neighbourhood relationships (Wu, 2022; Liu, 2016), and the urban-related isolation from the land and living space they are familiar with, these *dama* are separated from particular neighbourhood relationships, social organisations or social identities, and it is less and less possible for them to live in a circle of familiar acquaintances. It also makes their neighbourhood relationship gradually separated from the original social interaction based on the collective based on collective *danwei*. Therefore, in the process of urbanisation, this generation of *dama* has experienced a seismic shift in neighbourhood relationships, away from the extreme collective and dependent relationships of the *danwei* system in the Mao era, to the indifference, alienation, and strangeness of relationships in contemporary social life.

However, for many dancing participants, the deep roots of Maoist-era ways of living and behaving collectively under the *danwei* system have anything but waned. The square-dancing community re-assembles these dismantled experiences and draws heavily on the collective life

values and social habits of the Mao period and the *danwei* system. The *dama* are used to living in collective groups, and this collective habit is an indelible part of their daily life. Collectivism as used here refers to a worldview that breeds habits defined by ‘social proximity, interdependence, and shared values’ (Qian and Lu, 2019, p.698), and involves social behaviour that is primarily determined by groups (such as families, tribes, work groups, or political or religious associations) with shared goal guidance (Halbwachs, 2020). In the square-dancing community, the collective is a characteristic of neighbourhood relationships, as well as affects the relational bonds of the square-dancing community. This collectiveness is manifested in the social interaction of dancers in the square-dancing community, including chatting, dancing, going on extra trips together, having dinner together, etc. Therefore, the neighbourhood relationships nurtured by square dancing highlight the unique role of the square-dancing community as an antidote to the logic of alienation and individualisation in post-reform urban China, while simultaneously hinting that Maoist values of collective are not altogether a thing of the past.

2.3 Emotional Relationships

The analysis of neighbourhood relationships in the previous section revealed that the square-dancing community is the product of social changes in response to China’s rapid urbanisation process. This community meets the social needs and promotes collective neighbourhood relationships for the group of *dama* who have grown up since the Mao Zedong era; it also creates a receptive setting within which the collective social habits and shared values of collective life and the *danwei* system can beneficially continue. Taking this line of argument further, the foundation of neighbourhood relationships based on collective social habits helps to foster other interactions within the square-dancing community on a deeper level, as demonstrated in the emotional relationships between the dancing *dama*. As Bender (1978)

points out, in certain settings the idea of ‘community’ went far beyond people's understanding of the ‘social relationship network’ and was bound together by emotional bonds and emotional interconnectedness. And the community involves the human experience of a close emotional relationship between the self and the other (Bender, 1978).

I intend to argue that the square-dancing activity creates a new community to provide an emotional connection and fill the emotional needs of the current generation *dama*. Owing to the acceleration of urbanisation and the rapid development of the social economy, various emotional problems have been exposed in contemporary society. The prevalence of individualism, the weakening of emotional connection, and the widening of psychological distance between people ultimately combine to reflect the loneliness of middle-age and elderly individuals and the emotional indifference of social groups (Yan, 2015). Therefore, in the research context of this generation of *dama*, the section heading ‘The First Generation of Lonely Mothers’ has been created to delineate the emotional characteristics and current emotional situation of *dama*, and to provide contextual support for the understanding of emotional relationships within the square-dancing community.

The First Generation of Lonely Mothers

Yu and Rosenberg (2019) argue that China's population is aging rapidly, subject to relocation experiences and constant changes in living and neighbourhood environment types, and the current urban space has brought insecurity to the older generation who are familiar with the previous unit system. Especially middle-aged and elderly women, their social relations have undergone great changes, and they have gradually become the first generation of lonely mothers. Zhang (2017) points that the family planning policy implemented in 1979, also known as China's one-child policy, gave birth to the first generation of lone mothers, and these policies had a significant impact on family outcomes, including an unbalanced sex ratio, increased

challenges in early education, and unintended consequences for the lives and bodies of the current generation of middle-aged and elderly. Two reasons can be cited for *dama* being called the first generation of lonely mothers in the process of Chinese society (Chen, 2021), including the phenomenon of empty nester and the one-child policy. The one-child policy is one of the family planning policies, which is officially introduced in 1980 and started to be implemented in urban areas to curb population growth (Fong, 2002). The policy limited urban residents in mainland China to one child, leading to the formation of one-child families on a large scale (Fong, 2002). The conditional two-child policy was introduced in 2013, signalling a relaxation of the strict fertility policy. With the development of society and the seriousness of China's aging society, the one-child policy in China was ended in 2016 and the two-child policy was fully implemented (Basten and Jiang, 2014). In several interviews, most interviewees had similar stories, as exemplified in the words of the interviewee (X4):

‘I do square dancing for my own retirement, because I only have one child, and they work hard and need to take care of their family. I don't want to burden and stress my only child.’

Hence, China's first generation of lonely mothers will soon enter (or have already entered) the middle-aged and elderly population since the one-child policy. In most cases, these middle-aged and elderly women live alone as their husbands are not yet of retirement age and are required to work or hold positions in society, and most of their children have left the family to work and go to school on campus or to start their own families. Therefore, most Chinese parents with an only child and that child's departure are likely to feel lonely and depressed.

As the strict one-child policy has been implemented nationwide, the urban nuclear family has become the main family-type development trend, i.e., more and more young couples do not live with their parents, and they leave their family of origin to live separately (Yang and Du,

2021). There are more and more empty nesters that are a derivative of the nuclear family and the ageing phenomenon. According to Li and Lee's (2022) statement, empty nesters make up half of China's middle-aged and elderly population, with those living alone accounting for about 10 percent of the total elderly population and 41.9 percent of elderly households, and these numbers are increasing rapidly. 'Empty nester' refers to people who live alone and lack the care of their children or have less communication (including emotional communication) with their children. As a result, the proportion of empty nesters suffering from psychological problems is as high as 60 percent (He et al., 2020). Empty nesters tend to feel lonely and depressed; they are more emotionally vulnerable and more eager for support and care from the outside world. Overall, the section heading 'The First Generation of Lonely Mothers' properly describes one of the diverse characteristics of *dama* in square-dancing communities: loneliness, emptiness, and a lack of sense of belonging in contemporary social life.

Collective Belonging

Based on the above summary of the emotional characteristics and emotional needs of the square dancer, some scholars have acknowledged the positive effects of square dancing on feelings of emptiness and loneliness. Lu, Yang and Qin (2021) argue that square dancing can be regarded as a form of public exercise activity that has both spirit-dancing and fitness functions, enabling dancers to produce emotions that fill their emotional void. Yao et al. (2021) state that square dancing combines the function of catharsis and social communication in sports, which can alleviate the feeling of loss and loneliness among elderly and middle-aged people. Gao et al. (2016) argue that since most participants do not have much dancing experience, square dancing can allow middle-aged and elderly people who have more leisure time to return to learning, and this learning style can allow them to experience a sense of achievement in learning and alleviate the loneliness brought about by changes in empty-nest families and nuclear families.

In addition, a body of current research suggests that there is emotional belongingness in square-dancing activities, an aspect that is mainly explored from two perspectives: self-identity and self-belonging; and sense of place in square dance. Mi (2016) points out that the gender-differentiated labour market in China enables middle-aged and elderly women to participate in square dancing to achieve a process of subject construction, from which they can rediscover their sense of identity, belonging and the meaning of life. Moreover, Mai and Hao (2020) have combined the discussion of belonging and identity in square-dancing activities and believe that elderly women can create a strong sense of belonging in their daily leisure space and improve older people's subjective well-being by reconfiguring or reinforcing their sense of identity in square dance activities. Li and Lee (2022) argue that when dancers engage in square-dancing activities, through communication and interaction with other team members, they can reduce their negative emotions, such as psychological loneliness, loss, or emptiness, and thus increase their sense of belonging. Tian and Wise (2022) believe that square dancing could promote people's emotional sense of belonging to a place, and help participants express their emotions, show their identity, and feel 'at family' in the public dancing spaces. Furthermore, place dependence and place attachment influence the sense of place in square dancing. Place attachment often considers personal attachment in terms of personal identity and is guided by the desire of participants to increase socialisation and well-being (Tian and Wise, 2022).

However, considering that one of the significant characteristics of square dancing is that the location is flexible and can be moved anywhere at any time, this will challenge the sense of belonging to the place proposed above. In addition, the borderless nature of square dancing is that the identities of participants and audience can be switched at any time during activities, and participants can change dancing teams according to their preferences. Therefore, the above views on the sense of belonging constructed by identity cannot be accurately defined.

It should be noted that the discussion of the square dancing community in this chapter is rooted in a collective group activity, the most obvious characteristics of collective belonging in square dancing have not been explored. I argue that the square-dancing communities have become an organisation in contemporary Chinese society not only to fill emotional emptiness and loneliness, but also to promote the participants' emotional relationship of collective belonging as expressed by this generation's *dama*. D1, as the monitor and leader of the square-dancing team, has rich experience in square-dancing team organisation and coordination. According to her:

‘Our group is a collective family. Each member has a strong sense of collective and group cohesiveness. I remember when our team participated in the city-level square dancing competition in February, every member got up at 5 am and actively rehearsed the dancing. We all felt very excited instead of hard and tired. After the competition, our group won the prize. Every member was honoured to win the award for the group.’

It can be seen that the sense of belonging in square dancing is actually reflected in the strength of the collective. The sense of belonging comes mainly from the unity and cooperation as expressed in collective square-dancing activities. I argue therefore that the sense of collective belonging can more accurately describe the emotional relationships of the square-dancing community. Lockett (1988) considered that Chinese collective belongingness, known as group orientation, is a key feature of Chinese society. In other words, the sense of collective belongingness has its own unique significance in China, where the culture places great emphasis on forming a collective society and pursuing harmony and belonging within a group, whether within a family, a group of friends, colleagues, a class, etc. With the continuous penetration of square-dancing competitions and performances, the sense of collective

belonging is not only reflected in daily square-dancing activities, but also more obviously in square-dancing competitions. According to interviewee Y1, a leader and dancing teacher of the Yewu Dance Team who is experienced in square-dancing events and competitions:

‘We can not only have good health and mood, but also bring honour to our team by doing square dancing. Some performances and competitions can greatly promote the cohesion of the team and make our daily training more active. Although we are old in terms of biological age, we are not old in our aspirations! Our team works hard every year to participate in district-level, city-level, and national competitions. Everyone twisted into a ‘rope’, to win glory for the collective!’

The findings demonstrate that this strong sense of collective belonging is embodied in a group of middle-aged and elderly women in a spontaneous, unforced, and unorganised collective activity. This finding resonates with the discussion on neighbourhood relationships in square-dancing communities (see previous section), and emphasises that China's collective culture plays a core and key role in square dancing, which not only affects social relationships in square-dancing communities but also affects emotional relationships.

This group of *dama* went through the collectivisation era when they were young, and they still retain some residual emotions for the collective. They have strong empathy for the group cohesion generated by this rhythmically consistent and orderly collective activity. The sense of collective belonging of the community established through collective activities is related to or can be evidenced by many events in the historical community. For example, the members who eat in the canteen of the people's commune; the Red Guards (*hong wei bing*) who dancing the loyalty dancing on the roadside; the members who live in the *danwei* system; and the members who ate and worked together in the large canteen of the people's commune (*ren min gongshe*).

Although the emotional relationships in the community experienced by *dama* in Chinese history were formed by strong collective cohesion and collective cultural values, that cohesion is constantly being challenged in contemporary society. Overall, the ways in which square dancing is mobilised by a group of middle-aged and elderly women in response to negotiating restless social changes, to meet the emotional needs of this particular ‘first generation of lonely mothers’, to achieve emotional connection and fulfilment by constructing a collective sense of belonging, are a response to concerns that the collectiveness of the revolutionary era.

Sisterly Love

In addition to the emotional connection derived from a sense of collective belonging, a further compelling finding to emerge from this study is the existence of sisterly love (*jiemei qing*) in the *dama* community: this is also a bond of emotional relationship and a heightened emotional response to the sense of belonging. Some *dama* often refer to their relationship as sisterly. As expressed by W2, a key member of the dancing team:

‘When I dancing in the square-dancing group every night, it is the happiest moment of my day, as if all my worries have been forgotten. After dancing for a period of time, I got familiar with the dancing members and even made some kind ‘sisters’. We always gather together to communicate with each other about daily trivia, and to encourage each other, which makes me feel warm.’

Interviewee D3 provided photos of some of their daily activities, explaining in more detail the expression of sisterly emotions in square dancing:

‘Take a look at these pictures (Fig. 2.2 and Fig. 2.3). In addition to dancing, sometimes we also organise together to travel, eat, go shopping, etc. We wear the same clothes together during activities. For each activity, we will adopt a

variety of poses to take pictures. Very beautiful, and the sisters are very happy and excited!’

‘We have a sisterly relationship, not only helping each other in daily life, but also missing each other during the holidays when we can’t dancing for a few days. We are like biological sisters, even better and deeper than some blood relatives. If any member in our group is in trouble, we will help each other. In short, in this team, we are like a big, united family.’



Fig. 2.2 Square-dancing group dinner. Photography by Interviewee D3. Photo: courtesy interviewee D3



Fig. 2.3 An excursion for the square-dancing group. Photography by Interviewee D3. Photo: courtesy interviewee D3

Initially, this sisterly love is a reflection of activity-orientated friendship involving wide-ranging forms of mutually shared experience; eventually it develops to shape deeper emotional relationships covering the situation of the ‘First Generation of Lonely Mothers’ in response to China's unique urban changes, political background and social changes. As participants commented, the emotional connection of the square-dancing community is not only reflected in its square-dancing activities, but is also instilled in daily activities, where the women participate in square dancing together and share their private lives, such as going to the food market, travelling, playing card, and having a party. In turn, the participants could maintain a sense of collective belonging and sisterly love during the square play activity. Furthermore, it is worth noting that this sisterly love is unique to the current generation of *dama* groups due to the fact that in the genealogy of this generation of *dama*, they usually have blood sisters. The

emotional bond between square dancing sisters is even stronger than that between blood sisters. It may well be that the phenomenon of blood-related sisterhood will be lost to the following generations who will experience a different kind of sisterhood as the effects of the one-child policy are felt. The word ‘sister’ will no longer apply when the next generation of women attains middle or old age, and perhaps a different term will be coined.

2.4 Political Relationships

In order to build a more comprehensive definition of the square-dancing community, this section will adopt an external perspective to explore political relationships between the square-dancing community and other authorities in society as well as its institutions, official departments and authorities. As a daily square-dancing phenomenon in which grassroots residents participate, square dancing has spread throughout all cities and regions of China. The development of the contemporary square-dancing phenomenon has been profoundly influenced or driven by the obvious intervention of governments, officials, and institutions.

In order to further in deep interpret the political relationship between spontaneous self-organised square-dancing teams and external authorities in the growing phenomenon of square dancing, this study collected and analysed primary data from interviews, as well as the secondary data from second material. According to the interviews with the interviewees in the field research, most of the data confirmed that daily spontaneous square dancing usually involves no funding and support from the government and authorities, and the dancers pay for the daily square dancing activities by themselves. The reason behind this is that the participants regard square dance activities as entertainment and leisure activities, and the main purpose of their participation in square dance activities is not to obtain economic benefits, but to have hobbies and interests in square dance activities. For example, interviewee Y1 is the leader of the Yewu Dance team, responsible for the operation and organisation of the daily square

dancing team. When asked if square dancing will receive some funding, she said:

Our team, including other teams I know, did not have the support of the government or some authority. In fact, we do not need any money for our daily activities. Each person will pay a membership fee of 2 yuan per month, which is used as the electricity fee for charging the stereo. Although I am the leader of the team, I do not do it for money, and it is purely because we have the same interests, to organise together. In addition, if we need to buy some costumes and props for the performance, the team members will also pay for them themselves. However, after participating in the square dance competition or performance, sometimes the organiser can give us some rewards.

These data help this study prove that spontaneous square dancing usually has no government funding for daily exercise. Even if there is some authoritative funding for square dancing competitions or performances, the purpose of participants participating in these events is not directly or indirectly related to founding. However, it is obvious that the daily square dance has the intervention and promotion of the authorities, which can be explored from two aspects: the introduction of policies to regulate and manage square dancing activities; Organize dance competitions and commercial performances to promote the development of square dancing. Therefore, the following chapter will be divided into two parts to clarify the political relationship between spontaneous square dance activities and their external authorities.

Policy Driving Behind Daily Spontaneous Square Dancing

The policy-driven discussion around the development of square dancing will be relevant to the level of administrative development in China. Specifically, the administrative divisions of the People's Republic of China are in the form of a pyramid, which can be briefly summarized as follows: the State, provincial-level administrative districts, prefectural-level administrative

districts, municipality cities, townships, districts, and streets (Cartier, 2004; Mirra, 2022 and). However, the context of this study has been clearly identified in the introduction chapter as the phenomenon of square dancing in urban areas. Therefore, this section will not consider areas at the rural, and township levels, and will discuss the policy drivers behind the political relations of square dancing groups primarily at the national level, the provincial and municipality level, and the district street level.

At the national level, the intervention of relevant central government departments in square dancing can be analysed in terms of promoting authorised routines, training certified instructors, formulating policies, and holding square dancing competitions. The initial intervention in square-dancing activities was the National Square Dancing Event (*quan guo guangchangwu huodong*) hosted by the General Administration of Sport of China (GASC) (*guojia tiyu zongju*) and the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China (*zhonghua renmin gongheguo wenhua bu*), and co-organised by provincial sports and cultural departments in 2015 (Seetoo and Zou, 2016). At a press conference for the event, organisers announced 12 sets of authorised square-dancing routines and promoted them nationwide. As the official document states (highlighted in Fig. 2.4),

‘Different communities will no longer have different dancing methods in the future, but there will be a national unified square dancing with scientific choreography, which will bring people positive energy and help promote the orderly development of square dancing’ (General Administration of Sport of China, 2015).

The 12 sets of authorised square-dancing routines accompanied by favourite pop music and red songs, such as the viral hit ‘China Taste (*zhongguo weidao*)’, ‘Little Apple (*xiao pingguo*)’, ‘The Coolest Ethnic Style (*zuixuan minzu feng*)’. The sets of square dancing incorporate many

dancing genres, such as aerobics, Latin dancing, and folk dancing (General Administration of Sport of China, 2015). To promote these formal square dancers, the GASC set out to train a group of certified instructors to teach the masses. One typical example is the National Square Dancer Training Program (*quanguo guangchang wu rencai peixun kaoping*), in which central government agencies centrally train, formulate and certify square dancers. At the end of the training, dancers who graduate from the program receive a certificate indicating their level of completion before returning to the city square-dancing teams to teach square dancing (Sohu News, 2020).

In reality, few square-dancing participants strictly follow these routines in their daily square dancing. Square dancing is more spontaneously organised with voluntary mass participation. In most instances, groups are free to choose their favourite musical accompaniment, rhythm and form. Unlike broadcast gymnastics, eye exercises, etc. – unified choreographed square dancing cannot be imposed on the masses through administrative measures. However, it is indisputable that the promotion of unified routines has a certain guiding effect on the daily activities of spontaneous square dance groups.



Fig. 2.4 The National Square-dancing activity launched twelve sets of authorised square-dancing routines. Source: General Administration of Sport of China (2015)

In the same year of 2015, four central government departments – namely, the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, GASC, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China (*zhonghua renmin gongheguo minzheng bu*) and the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (*zhonghua renmin gongheguo zhufang he chengxiang jianshe bu*) – issued a joint policy titled ‘Circular for Guiding the Healthy Development of Public Square Dancing (*guanyu yindao guangcahngwu jiankang fazhan de tongzhi*)’. Further, in 2017, the GASC issued the policy document ‘Announcement on Further Regulating on Square Dancing Activities (*guanyu jinyibu guifan guangchang wu jianshen huodong de tongzhi*)’. To date, these are the only two official documents relating to square-dancing activity, and their

release and implementation have a significant function in guiding the future development of square dancing (Li, 2020). They serve as programmatic documents intended to guide government at all levels and relevant departments to take specific measures to manage and standardise square-dancing activities.

The 2017 policy on square dancing activities ('Announcement on Further Regulating on Square Dancing Activities') is – as its title implies – a relatively complete guideline for regulating square dancing activities at the present time. It has major significance for the development of square-dancing activities and can be summarised under four main headings (General Administration of Sport of China, 2017) (as shown in Fig. 2.5). Firstly, it can be understood as the management of site conflicts: 'Multiple measures are taken to increase the supply of venues for square dancing fitness activities.' Secondly, it can be interpreted as regulating the ideology of square-dancing activities: 'Strictly regulate square dancing fitness activities. Guide square dancing participants to establish and practise socialist core values (*shehuizhuyi hexin jiazhi guan*).² Make them become a positive force for family harmony, community harmony, and a

² Socialist core values are the basic value system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, emphasizing the wholeness of each value element. This holistic thinking is reflected in the fact that each aspect of the values is interrelated and mutually reinforcing, and together they build a harmonious social value system. Socialist core values actively respond to the new features and problems of the current social development, guiding the social development with more contemporary concepts. Against the backdrop of globalization and informatization, the values of patriotism, dedication, honesty and friendliness have a broader social consensus and play a positive role in building a modern society. Socialist core values are both universal common human values and integrated with Chinese characteristics, emphasizing the unique value orientation that Chinese society needs in the process of modernization. This combination takes into account both world trends and Chinese national conditions, making the core values more attractive and operational. They provide a clear direction for the long-term development of the country and society, set the correct values for people to pursue, and serve as a moral guide for China's modernization. Socialist core values emphasize the unity between individual values and the common interests of society. They emphasize the all-round development of the individual, and at the same time advocate that the individual should serve the society and create value for the society.

harmonious society (*hexie shehui*).³ Thirdly, it proposes management measures for square dancing groups: ‘Sports departments should provide assistance to registered square dance fitness teams in terms of fitness venues, activity exchanges and talent training. It actively guides and specially trains the person in charge of the square-dancing fitness team to become a social sports instructor.’ Finally, it emphasises the need to establish and improve the square-dancing-related departments of linkage to jointly manage the working mechanism. Overall, the aim of this policy is to comprehensively intervene in and regulate the operational mode, dancing content and political ideology of the square-dancing community.

This emphasis not only respects the dignity and freedom of the individual, but also emphasizes the interconnection and mutual promotion between the individual and society. Overall, the socialist core values are a unique value concept formed in China since the reform and opening up and in the context of the new era, inheriting the traditional culture and responding to the needs of the times, with distinct originality and Chinese characteristics. They are the moral cornerstone for the advancement of Chinese society, laying a solid value foundation for the construction of a rich, strong, democratic, civilized and harmonious society.

³ Socialist Harmonious Society is a brand-new concept for the goal of social development. First, a harmonious socialist society emphasizes comprehensive and coordinated development. While the traditional concept of socialism focuses on the development of the economic base, a harmonious society extends its attention to comprehensive and coordinated development, including economic, social, cultural and political dimensions. It pursues not only material prosperity, but also a harmonious situation of comprehensive development of the people and overall progress of society. Second, a harmonious socialist society focuses on the harmonious coexistence of man and nature. While pursuing economic growth, it places special emphasis on the harmonious relationship between human beings and nature. This means not only promoting green development, but also focusing on the protection of the ecological environment in the process of urbanization and realizing the concept of harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature. Finally, a harmonious socialist society highlights social equity and justice. In the process of promoting economic growth, it emphasizes the need to ensure social fairness, so that all social classes can share the fruits of reform and development. Moreover, the concept of justice permeates all levels, including the construction of the rule of law, social governance, cultural construction and other aspects, advocating the building of a fair and just, harmonious and orderly society.

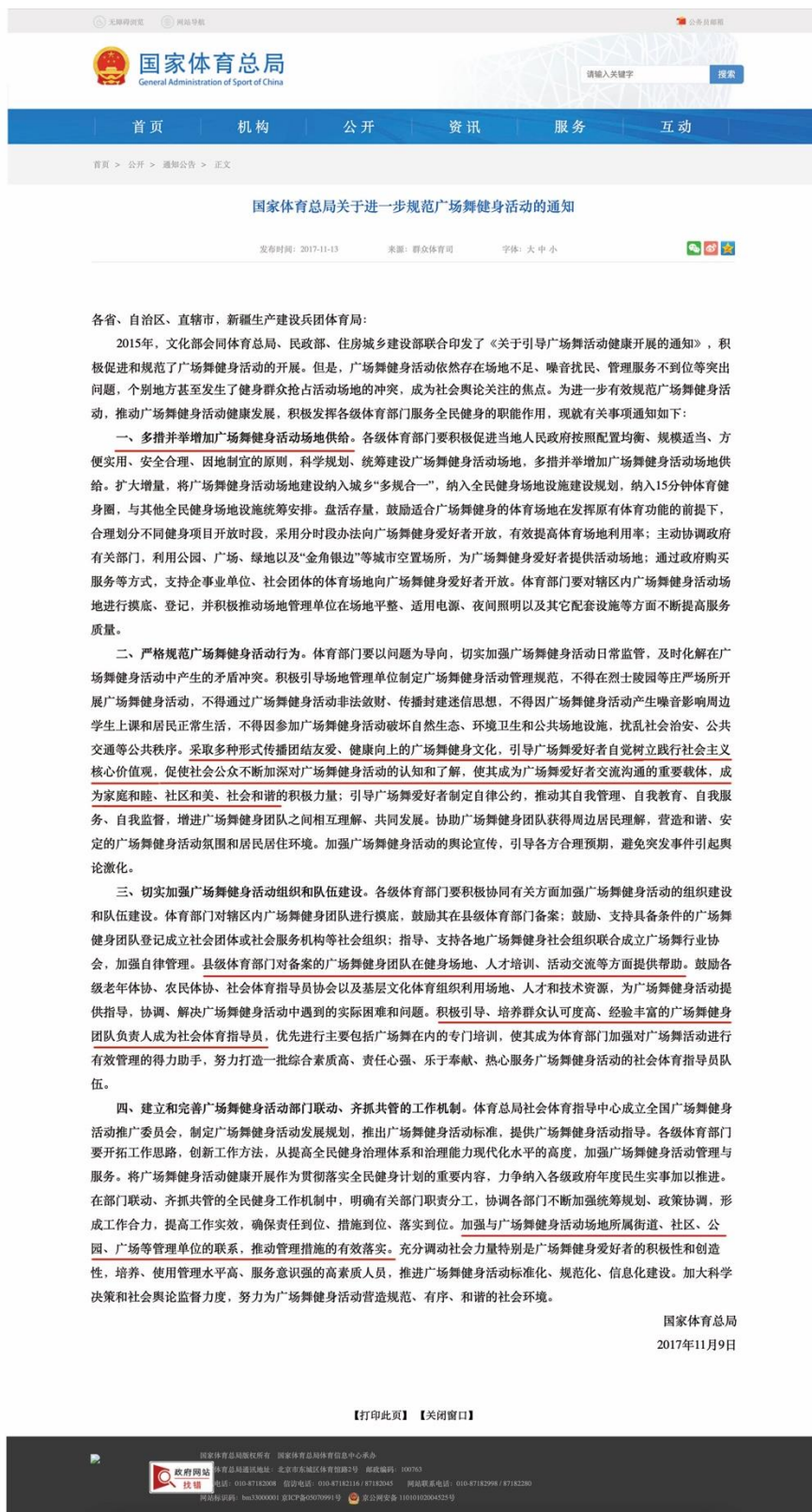


Fig. 2.5 Notice on Further Standardising Square Dancing Fitness Activities. Source: General Administration of Sport of China (2017)

The intervention in square-dancing activity at provincial and municipal levels is generally a response to the relevant policies and guidelines issued by central government. Specifically, the Municipal Government, the Municipal Bureau of Sports, the Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism and other relevant authorities have also promoted and organized the establishment of square-dancing associations to standardise and manage square-dancing activities. In August 2016, for example, in response to the 12 sets of authorised square-dancing routines issued by the central government, the Hunan Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism released 20 sets of square-dancing routines to be shared across the province. The 20 dancing routines collectively referred to as ‘Let's Dancing the Innovative Square Dancing of Socialist Core Values (*yiqi tiao shehuizhuyi jiazhiguan yuanchuang wudao*)’ were produced by Hunan provincial sports department (Martin and Chen, 2020). In addition, cities at all levels are also keen to hold various square-dancing competitions in response to directions given in the national guidelines.

Below the provincial and municipal level, exploration of the political relationships of square-dancing communities is related to the subdistrict (*jiedao*). As mentioned in the 'Announcement on Further Regulating on Square Dancing Activities', ‘The objective of the policy is to promote the effective implementation of management measures, which need to strengthen the connection between square-dancing activities and the subdistrict, communities and management department of square and park where the venues are located.’ In particular, the subdistrict – along with its subdistrict offices (*jiedao banshi chu*) - is the significant administrative unit designated by central government to be responsible for and assist in the management of square-dancing activities. Subdistrict offices are administrative agency of the people's governments of municipal districts or prefecture-level cities. Generally, urban areas are divided into districts, which are divided into subdistricts, and each subdistrict is contains residential neighbourhoods or residential communities (Long et al., 2016).

The survey data gathered during this research indicate that the subdistrict office is the administrative government department at lower level with direct responsibility for managing square-dancing communities. In addition, the subdistrict office usually organises square-dancing activities and selects square-dancing groups to participate in competitions at the higher municipal or district level. Of the four target square-dancing communities surveyed in the course of this research, two dancing communities were named their subdistrict, for example, the Dagang Street Square Dancing Group and the Xinghua Street Square Dancing Group. The interviewee of D1 is the leader of the Dagang Street Square Dancing Group. She remarked specifically on the relationship between the square-dancing community and the subdistrict:

‘The square-dancing team is attached to the subdistrict. If we have difficulties in everyday exercise, our subdistrict cadres and staff will help to solve them, such as providing venues and lighting. The subdistrict office will also plan appropriate activity areas, civilised dancing does not disturb the public, which is very helpful to promote the movement of square dancing.’

The above results show that the relationship between authority at all levels and square dancing is mainly from the perspective of relevant policies and participants' feelings. The intervention on square dance at the national and provincial levels covers a relatively comprehensive directions, including the content, time, place and behaviour of square dance activities. The subdistrict office plays a more supporting and coordinating role in daily square dance activities, as well as organising square dance competitions and selecting appropriate square dance teams to participate in high-level competitions. The findings of various levels of authority on interventions for square dancing can further lead to valuable arguments in this study.

I argue the intervention of the national government is not so much to promote the development of square dancing, but to suppress the spontaneity in the spontaneous square, so that the square-

dancing activity can develop into a spontaneity activity based on national control. Furthermore, the aim of the Chinese government's regulation of square dancing is to prevent spontaneous mass gatherings of communities from becoming uncontrollable mass disturbances that threaten social security and stability by deviating from the national ideological line, leading to social chaos in much the same way as in the time of the Red Guard. The Red Guard was a mass community movement of the People's Republic of China in the period of the Cultural Revolution.⁴ It originated from the Tsinghua University Middle School and was founded under the sway of extreme left-wing thinkers. The Red Guard Movement was an important organization during the Cultural Revolution. It not only promoted the development of the Cultural Revolution, but also led to national unrest. The famous Red August in 1966 signalled the personal support of the Red Guards by Chairman Mao Zedong.⁵ During Beijing's Red

⁴ The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was a uniquely original social transformation in China under Mao Zedong's leadership. Launched in 1966, the movement aimed to emphasize the dictatorship of the proletariat and to remove old ideologies and institutional mechanisms in order to consolidate the socialist system. First, the Cultural Revolution emphasized the widespread mobilization of the masses, especially the participation of proletarian revolutionaries, and the ideological struggle through large-scale mass movements. This mass nature was not common in previous social movements, reflecting its innovation in form. Second, the Cultural Revolution was characterized by a challenge to established authority, a critique of the Party's bureaucracy and intellectuals, aimed at breaking down the old social structure, and emphasized social change under the leadership of the proletariat. It was a unique attempt at self-revolution within the socialist state, resulting in a large-scale social movement with intellectual depth. However, the Cultural Revolution also brought about great social chaos and upheaval, leading to widespread brain drain, cultural destruction and social instability. Its negative impacts have led to great differences in subsequent social evaluations of the period. The Cultural Revolution was both a positive attempt at socialist construction and a great shock to social stability, and its uniqueness and originality left a deep mark on Chinese social history.

⁵ Mao Zedong was born on 26 December 1893 in Shaoshanchong, Xiangtan City, Hunan Province, into a peasant family and died on 9 September 1976 in Beijing. Appointed leader of the people of the People's Republic of China

August, Mao Zedong publicly promoted the movement at a massive rally in Tiananmen Square on 18 August 1966. Subsequently, the movement developed rapidly and began to appear in various parts of China (Yang, 2016).

The Red Guard launched many violent struggles, such as attacking the Four Olds (old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits), and clashed with the People's Liberation Army (PLA). In addition, the Red Guards have become more and more radical in their actions in society, often physically harming people who appear to be dissidents, a persecution that has not been regulated or stopped by the party or government authorities. As a result, the Red Guard movement quickly spiralled out of control in society, often causing social conflict and threatening public safety. By the end of 1968, the PLA violently put down the National Red Guard, at which point the group was dissolved as a formal movement (Yan and Gao, 1996). All this is simply to illustrate how an unregulated group (the Red Guard) once caused significant trouble and inflicted serious harm and civil strife on the Party, the country, and people living in the country.

Following the implementation of the political program of the Road to Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (*zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi daolu*) after the Reform and Opening Up in 1978, people's lives - including in the fields of culture and the arts - have become particularly diverse and dependent on and disseminated to the global market (Mirra, 2022). A few years later, the '1989 Tiananmen Square protests and massacre' was a student protest and massacre that was quickly suppressed by the Chinese government. '1989 Tiananmen Square protests and

between 19 June 1945 and 9 September 1976, he was the President and leader of the Chinese state. He was a Marxist, socialist proletarian revolutionary, strategist and theorist, and the principal founder of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the People's Republic of China (PRC).

massacre' and the power dynamics are reminders that the highest authority of the state can step in when it feels threatened.

Therefore, in the current political and social background of the 21st century, the government will control and regulate civil organisations to prevent mass riots and maintain social order and stability. This political behaviour is called *Zhaoan* in China. *Zhaoan* (offering amnesty and enlistment to rebels) refers to the resettlement behaviour of illegal local or underground civil organisations by the legal regime of a country (Zhang, 2014). Usually, it is nothing more than granting conditions to allow the government to control them, giving the organisation a chance to become legal again. At present, there is no legal regulation or definition of the square-dancing community in China. Therefore, it is imperative for the Chinese government to create positive support for square-dancing activities while at the same time constraining and managing them, so that square-dancing can always develop along the lines of Chinese state ideology.

In addition, based on the preceding analysis of the political relationships between the square-dancing community and its external administrative and social institutions, I argue that intervention in square dancing by authorities at multiple levels is gradually impacting the development of square dancing, and the intervention in daily activities of square dance is more about the norms of dance content, so as to affect the current cultural communication content and the norms of mass cultural ideology.

This is primarily because, with its exponential growth, square dancing has come to be regarded as a form of mass culture in contemporary China, in terms of its dancing forms, music, lyrics and other related content. Peng et al. (2020) support this argument, they also state square dancing can be viewed as a means of disseminating mass culture consistent with the aims of the Communist Party of China (CPC) (*zhongguo gongchan dang*). As Chinese society has

developed, the contemporary phenomenon of mass culture, of which square dancing has become a symptomatic manifestation in recent years, will continue to gather pace (Peng et al., 2020).

The concept of mass culture mainly refers to the culture that appears in a region, community or country and is accepted and believed by the public mass (Macdonald, 1953). Mass culture as it manifests itself in China evidently bears some marks of the Soviet model - namely propaganda and pedagogy rather than placing emphasis on entertainment, as in the West (Macdonald, 1953). The core force driving China's mass culture is related not only to politics and economy, but also significantly to the power of ideology. The Chinese version of mass culture has been more or less utilised for political purposes: as a product of politics, it is used to mobilise the masses and to raise their consciousness (Hong, 1994).

The development and expansion of square dancing as one expression of mass culture that is both mass-produced and intended for mass audiences, and will inevitably influence the general pattern of mass culture in China. On the one hand, it positively shapes national personality and perceptions of social development; on the other hand, it has multiple social effects that merit evaluation and discussion on a variety of levels. Both these factors have compelled the state to introduce a series of measures to manage their effect, development, and value, and have a purpose to further regulate the masses' political ideology, public orientation, and cultural identity.

The Competition Drive Behind Spontaneous Square Dancing

What should not be ignored is more connections between spontaneous square dance activities and external authorities in the context of square dance competitions. Generally, many square dance teams will participate in square dance competitions, which are organised by the government and authorities in response to national policies and receive relevant funding and

training (Martin and Chen, 2020). GASC has issued two policy documents to manage and standardise the rules of square-dancing competitions since 2019. ‘National Square Dancing Competition Rules’ and ‘Management Measures of National Square Dancing Competition Event (Trial)’. The official documents demonstrate that the GASC and the National Square Dancing Fitness Promotion Committee (*quanguo guangchang wu jianshen huodong tuiguang weiyuan hui*) play a significant role in coordinating and leading square-dancing competitions across the country. Especially the document referred to above – ‘Management Measures of National Square Dancing Competition Event (Trial)’ - subdivides the competition structure into three categories (General Administration of Sport of China, 2019):

- National competitions are hosted by the GASC and the National Square Dancing Fitness Promotion Committee. These include the China Square Dancing series competition (*zhongguo guangchang wu xilie dasai*), Beautiful China Village Square Dancing Series competition (*meili zhongguo xiangcun guangchang wu dasai*), National Square-Dancing Competition (*quanguo guangchang wu dasai*), and others.
- Regional competitions and performances organised by provincial, municipal, and district-level sports administrative departments, cultural and tourism departments and square-dancing group associations.
- Square-dancing competitions are organised and sponsored by private enterprises (Martin and Rose, 2020, p43).

As one important factor, most square dance team samples and square dance participants selected for this research have participated in square dance competitions in the above three categories. For example, the Dagang Street Dance Company once participated in the national square dance competition (*Quanguo guangchang wu dasai*) in Beijing on behalf of the dance

team in Qingdao city. From the interview data of the participants, it is clear that their participation in the competition usually receives little financial support, but they can receive some prizes promoted by sponsors. Although participants of the square dance competition can get certain prizes, it is not the main driving force for participating in the square dance competition, nor is it the main purpose of daily square dance activities. Interviewee X2 said:

‘The square dance competition is organised by an official authority; we participate in the competition voluntarily to win glory for the team, and we love it. In fact, we receive no reimbursements, no performance payment, and no economic benefits. At most, we get some prizes after participating in the competition, which are simple prizes, such as toilet paper, shampoo, and other small gifts. If we can go to other places to participate in the competition on behalf of the province, the travel and accommodation expenses will be funded by the government and the Cultural Affairs Bureau, and other expenses will need to be paid by ourselves, but we are happy, and we are willing.

The above data further clarifies that spontaneous square dance teams usually do not receive funding from the government and authorities for their daily dancing activities. However, when participating in square dance competitions, they will receive awards from the state or government but not funds. In addition, square dance competitions are an important way to promote the development of square-dancing activities and regulate the daily square dancing activities. Specifically, in national competitions, the requirement for two key dancing types should be satisfied at the same time. One of these is nationally recognised dancing, and the other is innovative dancing (General Administration of Sport of China, 2019). In this case, any group wishing to compete at the national level must learn and perform at least one of the 12 sets of authorised square dance routines mentioned in the section of ‘Policy Driving Behind

Daily Spontaneous Square Dancing’. The promotion of square-dancing competitions and the promulgation of relevant rules and policies in the interventions in square dancing at the national level signal that square-dancing competitions conform to the political agenda of the national fitness plan. Indeed, square dancing competitions, as an ‘invisible force’ (Martin and Chen, 2020, p. 35), filter down to the level of provincial and municipal governments through the transmission of political ideology and differentiation of political power by the central government. Therefore, the more obvious finding is that the relationship between external authority and daily spontaneous square-dancing activities is reflected in the management of content and the intervention and control of activities rather than funding or financial assistance.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, this chapter clearly illustrates the emergence of square dancing and its role as a community in the daily life of contemporary urban residents. It defines the characteristics of this community from three perspectives (neighbourhood, emotional relationships, and political relationships), providing a fundamental context for the explorations presented in each subsequent chapter. First of all, the characteristics of the main participants in this study are clarified: a group of middle-aged and elderly women called *dama*, and the square dancing community is the *dama* community.

Secondly, square dance mainly takes place in the neighbourhood and is a social bond in contemporary neighbourhood relations, responding to the indifference, alienation, and strangeness of contemporary neighbourhood relations in the context of urbanisation (Lin et al., 2020). This is echoed in the introduction section of Chapter two on the idea that communities are aggregations of social relationships, networks, or meeting points for interpersonal relationships (Margot, 2001; Craig, 1980; Kenneth, 2018), which is a unit that reflects the collective agency capacity (Robert, 2008). The collective neighbourhood relationship

interpreted in this study expands the previous understanding of self-organisation, acquaintance relationships, and talent guidance in square dance community relations (Tao, 2020; Zhu and Li, 2021). In addition, the entertainment and leisure purpose of the community proposed by Forrest and Kearns (2001) supports the findings of the square dance community in this study. Moreover, the view that a square dance community can meet the social needs of current neighbours and build new social bonds is also supported by Henning and Lieberg (1996), who proposed that a community is a place where residents socially interact with each other. Furthermore, the square dance community makes up for the deeper interpretation of community relations by previous scholars, that is, the collective neighbourhood relationship of the square dance community, especially the target group concerned by this research of middle-aged and elderly women born in the 1950s and 1960s. The collective neighbourhood relationship indicates that the collective relationship they experienced in the 1950s and 1960s is still left in the contemporary social neighbourhood. Therefore, the square dance community is not only a social bond in the field of neighbourhood relations under the current background of urbanisation but also a re-embodiment of collectivised social relations.

Thirdly, this chapter explicitly discusses the *dama* as a group of middle-aged and elderly women known as the first generation of lonely mothers, who are facing the emotional problems of loneliness, dolefulness, and even depression. Zhang and Goza (2006) and Zhang (2017) argue that in the context of the retirement and empty-nest phenomena, most square dancing participants are labelled as lonely mothers, facing some form of loneliness, stress, and depression. The literature review on community sentiment also pointed out that relational community is characterised by a sense of community and emotional connection between individuals (Seymour, 1974; David and David, 1986). The long-term interaction of residents in the community can promote the emotional connection between residents, thus contributing to the community's commonality and sense of belonging (Gerard, 1998). Therefore, the square

dance community in this study is the emotional bond of these *dama*, which is embodied in the sense of belonging to the dancing community and the value of sisterhood.

Finally, this chapter concluded that the political relationship between the square dance community and the external authority is the necessary direction for the existence and development of the square dance community. This view complements the previous discussion of community. Furthermore, the chapter analysed the power of government or authority to regulate and control square dancing in different contexts of daily activities and competitions. Next, it discussed that the square dance community is a mechanism of mass culture dissemination and a tool for the government to control the ideology of the public. As discussed in the final section of this chapter, state intervention in square dance activities has become gradually more obvious and has changed the presentation of the square dance phenomenon. The next chapter will elaborate further on expressions of political ideology as evidenced in the nationalistic style of square dancing.

CHAPTER THREE: THE NATIONALISTIC BODIES IN SQUARE DANCING

Chapter Three: The Nationalistic Bodies in Square Dancing

As examined in the previous chapter, the square-dancing community is the *dama* community formed by the interweaving of neighbourhood relationships, emotional relationships, and political relationships. In particular, as demonstrated in the discussion of political relationships, large-scale square-dancing activities have signalled a move away from the original spontaneous grassroots format to a politicised format in which the ever-expanding phenomenon has become intimately related to the power of the nation in China. The intervention in and regulation of square dancing by national political forces and its administration under the aegis of local societies have caused square-dancing activities to evolve in an ongoing cycle of change, highlighting the need for a new understanding of the phenomenon that reflects its altered representation.

Investigations into the phenomenon of square dancing and its development in Chinese society in recent years have continuously highlighted its significance in representing the public face of the nation. For example, at the opening ceremony of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games, square dancing on the national stage was used to present China's image to the world. Square dancers, ranging in age from 5 to over 70, perform square dances as a warm-up act in the Opening Ceremony show to celebrate the Winter Olympics, 4 February 2022 (Xinhua News, 2022). The photograph in Fig. 3.1 was taken by a Xinhua reporter and documents the square dance staged at the Bird's Nest of the National Stadium. Participants in the square dance performance consisted of ordinary people wearing different styles of performance clothing, including children in tiger costumes, students in green overalls, women in yellow down jackets and red scarves, and young people in sportswear (Breaking Latest News, 2022). Zhang Yimou, chief director of the opening and closing ceremonies of the Beijing Winter Olympic Games, China Daily reported Zhang Yimou's interview,

‘China is a country full of square dance activities. People can see square dances in any city. People will only sing and dance if they are happy in life, so I think it's a great form of performance that represents the prosperity and happiness of the Chinese people today.’ (China Daily, 2022)

In this case, square dancing has not only been recognised within China, but also has become a symbolic expression of the country’s national ideology and image.



Fig. 3.1 Square dancing performance at the opening ceremony of the 24th Winter Olympic Games held at the Beijing National Stadium. Source: Xinhua News (2022)

The daily routine of square dancing involves musical accompaniment as an important element. In addition to popular music, the most common accompaniment is ‘Red Songs’, also known as revolutionary songs. These songs are a means by which China shapes and controls cultural experiences to gain people's collective acceptance and obedience to the nation’s political ideology (Liu et al., 2020). In the field observation, the most popular and frequently used red

songs in square dance include: ‘Ten Farewell to the Red Army’, ‘Sing a Folk Song to the Party’, ‘The Most Dazzling Ethnic Style’, ‘My People, My Country’, ‘China Red’, ‘Follow the Party’, and ‘Socialism is Good’. These popular music usually have their own lyrics. For example, ‘Without the Communist Party, There Would Be No New China’ is a Chinese patriotic song in the People's Republic of China, the lyrics of which declare: ‘The Communist Party of China has worked hard for the nation; The Communist Party of China is dedicated to saving China; It [CPC] pointed the way to the liberation of the people; It [CPC] led China to the light.’

With the development of square-dancing activities in urban public spaces, Red Songs can penetrate the physical space and resonate in the city streets and alleys. These lyrics and melodies resound in the streets every night, constantly shaping the political, revolutionary, and patriotic atmosphere, simultaneously conveying patriotic sentiments and the great image of the CPC to both dancers and the public. This chapter considers the political significance of square-dancing activities and the innovative ways utilised by square-dancing *damas* to express their political identity.

Using illustrative examples from the daily routine practise of square dancing as exercise coupled with some milestone square-dancing performances and competitions over the years, I point out that one argument of this chapter is that square dancing is a platform for presenting the patriotic physical dancing body and increasingly connecting with the nationalistic ideology within this group of people.

This chapter opens with a critical consideration of the difference between patriotism and nationalist ideology, including a review of the current development of square dancing within nationalism. The consequent discovery of the inevitable connection between square dancing and patriotism leads into the second part of the chapter, which offers an in-depth reinterpretation of how the dancing body of square dancing serves as a platform to reflect

patriotism. This part suggests the internal aspect of the physical training of the dancing body can evoke the sentiment of patriotism and promote the dynamic development of nationalist ideology, as inferred by reviewing the evidence of the historical collective physical activity of radio gymnastics and mass swimming. In the final section, this chapter supports this argument by considering dancers' external body visualisation of Chinese characters or patterns in square-dancing activities to provide evidence that the patriotic physical dancing body representation of 'We are China' is at the core of the development of nationalism in contemporary China.

3.1 Patriotism or Nationalism

To discuss the square-dancing phenomenon as a platform to present the patriotic body and reflect nationalist ideology, it is important first to understand the more general context of these two political concepts of patriotism and nationalism in the context of China. This will help to understand the body in square dancing and why it is necessary and indispensable to connect the patriotic body to square dancing. Patriotism is connected to but not synonymous with nationalism, and this section will attempt to delineate some of the semantic nuances that distinguish the two terms.

Miller (1987) offers a relatively comprehensive definition that distinguishes patriotism from nationalism, he argues that patriotism is loyalty to the land one lives in, ignoring or diminishing the concept of nation. In subsequent work, Hobsbawm (1992), a famous leftist historian and one of the doyens of nationalism research, was aware of the potential for confusion between patriotism and nationalism and sought to distinguish the two concepts. He initially used terms such as 'national-patriotism' and 'national-or-state-patriotism'. Instead, he tried to distinguish nationalism from patriotism, which is distinguished by the construction of official political power and territorial integrity of the state, and nationalism highlights the significance of official national political ideas (Hobsbawm, 1992). Conceptually, a more recent study is provided by

Bitschnau and Mußotter (2022), who argue that patriotism and nationalism are two concepts often used interchangeably, but they do have different meanings and implications. While both involve pride in one's country, it's important to examine the differences between the two critically. Patriotism can be seen as love and devotion to one's country, values, culture and traditions. Patriotism encourages individuals to make a positive contribution to society through active citizenship, promoting solidarity and social cohesion. However, nationalism often includes a belief in the superiority of one's own people over other nations, and tends to emphasise loyalty to one's own country, which can sometimes lead to exclusive attitudes toward others and even aggression (Bitschnau and Mußotter, 2022). In addition, Yu-Sun (1996) highlights the distinction between nationalism and patriotism in Chinese Communist ideology, with the Party emphasising patriotism as a tool for consolidating its rule. In summary, it is necessary to distinguish the difference between nationalism and patriotism, that is, patriotism emphasises love for one's country while recognising its imperfections and promoting positive contributions within society. Nationalism tends towards an intense pride that can sometimes result in exclusionary attitudes or aggression towards others based on notions of superiority.

Patriotism

In China, patriotism is generally the core and foundation of contemporary nationalism; nationalism is the national ideology that comes from the sublimation of patriotic feelings. Following the Tiananmen Square protests and massacre in 1989, the Chinese government under the Communist Party initiated a patriotic education campaign that ran widely throughout China (Fewsmith, 2001). Zhao (1998) discusses the patriotic education campaign initiated by the communist government to appeal to nationalism and ensure loyalty. Wang (2008) explores the links between history education, national memory and national identity formation. Zheng and Cherng (2020) analysed primary school textbooks in China to reveal the narratives used to

reinforce Chinese nationalism, including depictions of China's history, territorial claims, the form of government, and the portrayal of the foreign 'other' as the enemy. These papers emphasise the role of state-led nationalism in shaping Chinese identity and defending communist rule.

A number of scholars have provided different perspectives on the contemporary value of patriotism. Wang and Jia (2015) argue that patriotism remains important in economic globalisation because it helps safeguard national sovereignty, achieve national goals, and respond to international challenges. Patriotism is important for safeguarding national sovereignty and interests, helping to realise the Chinese dream, and responding to the challenges of a complex international environment. Soutphommasane (2012) defends free forms of patriotism as a civic virtue in a multicultural society, emphasising the role of national identity of tolerance and mutual respect. Nathanson (1989) addresses concerns about extreme forms of patriotism concerns and proposes a moderate form of patriotism that allows for critical engagement with one's country while still maintaining loyalty and concern for its well-being. Taken together, these papers demonstrate that patriotism can have contemporary value in a variety of contexts, including national goals, multicultural societies and civic engagement.

Some secondary material could help this study to explain in greater depth and richness the understanding of patriotism in contemporary China. With regard to Xi Jinping's speeches at state conferences in recent years, it is clear that Xi Jinping is firmly committed to influencing the Chinese way of thinking through patriotic education and propaganda. For example, Xinhua reported that Xi Jinping re-emphasised the importance of the patriotic united front in the 2017 19th National Congress speech: 'We must hold high the banners of patriotism and socialism, and endeavour to achieve great unity and union, taking into account commonality and individuality' (Xinhua News, 2017). A glance at the record of Xi's public speeches shows that

he has repeatedly emphasised patriotism as the cornerstone of the national spirit. In 2018, the Organisation Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Central Propaganda Department (CPCD) jointly issued a directive calling for the "promotion of the spirit of patriotic struggle"; an idea put forward by President Xi Jinping, specifically calling on the Chinese people to oppose any unpatriotic thoughts and behaviours, to combine love for the motherland, the Communist Party, and socialism, and to insist on safeguarding the unity of the motherland and the unity of the nation (Xinhua News, 2018). Thus, Xi Jinping's patriotic propaganda combined with that of nationalists to promote the fusion of state nationalism and popular patriotism into a state-led nationalist movement.

The most recent patriotic display by the Chinese leader Xi Jinping took place during the thirty-first collective study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee in 2021 when he stressed the need to promote great patriotism to provide spiritual support to realise nationalism (Breaking Latest News, 2021). Xinhua News (2015) reported on Xi Jinping's speech, in which he emphasised that 'patriotism is the core of the spirit of the Chinese nation, that patriotism is deeply rooted in the hearts of the Chinese people, that it is the spiritual "gene" of the Chinese nation', and that patriotism sustains the national unity of the Chinese land, and inspires generation after generation of Chinese children to struggle tirelessly for the development and rejuvenation of the motherland (Xinhua News, 2015).

As a result, patriotism in the Chinese context was compared to a kind of spiritual idea or force that firmly unites the Chinese nation. Xi likened patriotism to genetics which determines the basic structure and performance of living beings and stores all information about human life. Xi Jinping was implying metaphorically that patriotism is passed down from generation to generation and therefore is innate, cannot be chosen and is embedded in every Chinese individual. This idea reflects the CPC's strong commitment to implanting patriotism in every

Chinese individual. This is seen as the first manifestation of nationalism, namely devotion and love for the nation. This patriotic education and propaganda is linked to mass activities involving the body and provides a new space for reflecting on square-dancing daily activities and performances.

Nationalism

The concept of nationalism refers to a dynamic ideological movement based on the interests of one's own nation. Kohn (1939) a famous scholar of nationalism in the twentieth century, he argued that the interpretation of nationalism in western context could not be earlier than the second half of the 18th century and that, like a number of historical movements, it had deep roots and had become more and more prevalent amongst mankind since the French Revolution. Özkırımlı (2019) and Chistyakov (2015) define nationalism as an ideological and political movement that encompasses the ideas of popular sovereignty, common citizenship and ethnic distinctiveness. According to Greenfeld and Chirot (1994), nationalism can be defined as a collection of concepts and sentiments that establish the cognitive structure of national identity, which is viewed as the primary identity within contemporary society. Conversi (1995) emphasises that nationalism is a process of creating and maintaining borders, in which borders play a vital role in distinguishing and defining ethnic communities. Smith (2013) argues that nationalism is a collective ideology based on identification with a shared history, culture and language. Viewing nationalism as a political sociological theory, he explores how nationalism influences state formation, national identity and international relations, and that nationalism has manifested itself in different forms and characteristics in different historical periods and regions, but that the core idea is the emphasis on national identity and national interest. In summary, the above researches show that nationalism is a dynamically developing ideology that encompasses ideas and feelings that shape national identity, involves establishing and

maintaining borders of the nation, and can manifest in various forms and functions in society.

In order to explore nationalism in the square-dancing phenomenon in contemporary China, it is necessary to identify the dynamic development of nationalism in the Chinese context. The unique Chinese nationalism produced in the context of China's unique historical environment is distinct from the Western concept of nationalism. Liang Qichao was the first to develop and propagate modern nationalism in China. In 1901, he published 'The change theory of the similarities and differences of rational thought (*Guojia sixiang bianqian yi tong lun*)', first introducing nationalism to China, and clearly stated that, if we want to save China today, there is no other way but to build a nationalist country first' (Tang, 1996). Since then, nationalism has become an ideology and social trend of thought in modern China and is the "driving force" of the Chinese revolution (Townsend, 1992), and nationalism has been used to unite the Chinese people, inspire their patriotism to defend the motherland, and rally citizens against external enemies and internal feudalism (Weishi, 2007). Together, these findings support the notion that nationalism was the driving force of the Chinese revolution, uniting individuals, inspiring civic consciousness, and mobilising them to confront external and internal challenges.

Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Mao Zedong and the Communist Party of China (CPC) instituted a 'revolutionary, militaristic, and anti-imperialist form of nationalism' (Ma, 2015), centred around safeguarding communist political authority and territorial sovereignty. The nation was no longer defined ethnically but in terms of class. Only those with the correct proletarian class background could be members of the nation (Zhang, 2012). The fourth generation of Chinese leadership believes that nationalism can be divided into two forms: state-centred and public-centred. Both forms are seen as ideologies shared by the Party and every Chinese, as well as important tools for maintaining power (Seckington, 2005). Under the influence of Maoism, nationalism can be broadly defined

as an egalitarian society achieving Utopian societal goals by means of class struggle and societal cleansing.

Since the late 1970s, Deng Xiaoping and the CPC have launched Reform and Open-Door policies. Western capitalist culture entered China and challenged communism and Maoism in the process (Zheng, 1999). From late 1989 to early 1992, nationalism was predominantly an official ideology in China, especially in the aftermath of the June 4 massacre in Tiananmen Square, where it was used to consolidate the legitimacy of its crumbling regime (Xu, 2001). The CPC subsequently utilised an entire nationalist educational training plan to implant nationalist values into individuals' minds in everyday daily routines. Nationalist propaganda likewise took on a more inconspicuous and less antagonistic guise while controlling information and general mass opinion.

Today, the ideology of nationalism under the leadership of Xi Jinping is entering a new phase of development. Bhattacharya (2019) highlights the coexistence of nationalism and globalization in China under Xi Jinping's leadership, with nationalism primarily aimed at addressing internal threats to party legitimacy and stability. Wang (2017) analysed the relationship between Xi Jinping's discourse on the "Chinese Dream"⁶ and nationalism, arguing that the "Chinese Dream" is a hybrid form of nationalism and patriotism, which incorporates elements such as the state and culture, and embodies a common identity, thus further reflecting political goals and the purpose of political communication. Zhao (2016) examines Xi Jinping's

⁶ The Chinese Dream, one of Xi Jinping's slogans for governing the country at the first session of the 12th National People's Congress, not only embodies the ideals of today's Chinese people, but also profoundly reflects the honourable traditions of our ancestors' relentless pursuit of progress. As the political spirit and vision for China's future, the Chinese Dream emphasises the uniqueness of the Chinese nation and establishes a narrative based on collective future aspirations.

ideological campaign, which combines communism, nationalism, and Leninism to strengthen the CPC's grip on power and achieve national rejuvenation. Lastly, Xi Jinping's China has seen a shift from affirmative to assertive patriotism, as evidenced by the "Chinese Dream" discourse (Wang, 2017). This shift is characterised by a strong emphasis on national dignity and interests, as well as a rejection of external pressure (Whiting, 1983). The Chinese Communist Party's promotion of patriotism as a tool for consolidating its rule has further shaped this assertive nationalism (Yu-Sun, 1996). These developments reflect a complex and multifaceted form of nationalism in contemporary China, with implications for both domestic and foreign policy, and aims to consolidate its dominance. Emphasis was placed on the close connection of patriotism with the proletariat, internationalism and socialism. Thus, the patriotism promoted by the CPC has become an instrument in the service of the communist cause (Zhao, 2021). In summary, these papers suggest that Xi Jinping's nationalism encompasses a range of elements and strategies, including addressing internal threats, promoting a common identity, and pursuing national rejuvenation.

In the context of square dancing, the state has introduced relevant and important guidelines and policies, which not only importantly influence the development of square dancing, but have also provided guidance for square dancing activities in terms of nationalist ideology. For example, the National Fitness Plan is an important link linking square dancing and nationalism. The National Fitness Plan policy is part of the ideology of nationalism in contemporary China and is revised every five years. To date, the State Council of China and the GASC have issued national fitness policies covering 2009, 2011-2015, 2016-2020 and 2021-2025. Guided by Xi Jinping's 'Thought of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics' and aiming to realise core socialist values, the latest policy of the National Fitness Plan aims to implement in-depth the 'Healthy China Strategy' and the 'National Fitness Strategy', to accelerate the building of a 'sports power country' and 'to promote the great rejuvenation of the nation'. Implementing and

promulgating the National Fitness Plan has greatly improved the conditions for people to engage in physical exercise and injected a more diversified and modern element into sports. The programme calls for regular public education on health literacy so that people can understand and master scientific exercise methods, thereby reducing safety risks and increasing exercise efficiency. Such measures ultimately promote the integration of physical activity into people's lifestyles and daily behaviour (Zhang, 2014). It will provide physical exercise for the masses and train them to become national defenders and builders of nationalism (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

Based on the above theoretical interpretation, this research finds that Chinese patriotism is an emotional or thought discourse inspired by the love of the country that is integral to nationalism and reflects the national ideology. Chinese thinkers define patriotism as the thought, feeling and behaviour of loving and being loyal to one's motherland. People love their homeland, and the spiritual drive towards national survival and development enhances popular dependence on and a sense of identity with their nation. In summary, therefore, patriotism refers to the emotional and psychological connection to a country, while nationalism not only includes emotional patriotism but also reflects the influence of official political forces, thus emphasising the political territorial integrity of the country. In other words, patriotism in China is continuously emphasised in the heart and mind of every Chinese person and is one of the most powerful forces driving collective action.

In light of the foregoing discussion, and in order to fill an existing gap in research on this topic, it will be worthwhile to explore the phenomenon of square dancing from the twin perspectives of patriotism and nationalism. Although the original intention or purpose of popular involvement in square dancing was not necessarily to participate in patriotic action, square-dancing activities as represented in contemporary Chinese urban spaces have unequivocally

incorporated political, patriotic and national characteristics. In other words, the nation is using—or is attempting to use – the phenomenon of square dancing as a mechanism to shape the contemporary patriotic body, which in turn contributes to shaping and promulgating the ideology of nationalism. The next two sections will analyse in depth the shaping of the patriotic body of square dancing and its response to contemporary nationalist ideology from two perspectives: internally (i.e., the exercise and fitness of the dancing body), and externally (i.e. the visual presentation of the body).

3.2 Training the Body

This section aims to interpret the phenomenon of square dancing from the perspective of internal fitness while also attempting to place the body in square dancing in a broader and timely national context, illustrating how – by training the body – the square-dancing phenomenon has shaped and is shaping the ideology of Chinese nationalism. Many scholars have recognised and confirmed that square dancing, a form of fitness activity with a bias towards aerobic exercise, has physical health and well-being benefits that can help the body by improving balance, mood, thoughts and cognition (Wang et al., 2020; Zhang and Petrini, 2019; Ou et al., 2022; Gao et al., 2016)). Moreover, some scholars have celebrated Chinese square dancing as a mass sport, whose greatest advantage is that it can improve the quality of life and mental and physical health of participants (Liu and Guo, 2013; Sun et al., 2022; Qin et al. 2018; Yu et al., 2020). It can be seen that in daily square dance settings, fitness orientation is an obvious feature of square dancing, which not only benefits the physical health of dancers, but also promotes the mental health of dance groups (Fig. 3.2).

However, the current study of the literature review can provide a context for data collection for this study. Most of the above articles on the phenomenon of square dancing from the perspective of physical fitness have explored the superficial benefits of square dancing on

physical and mental health, and very few studies have explored the deeper connections between square dancing fitness and national or patriotic spirit. Therefore, the next data collection process will focus on the connection between square dancing fitness activities and the national ideological or political development.



Fig. 3.2 Daily square-dancing exercise in urban open spaces in Qingdao Cangkou Park.
Photography by author, Cangkou Park, Qingdao, 2019

However, alongside the political relationships between square-dancing activity and other societal authorities discussed in the previous chapter, the routine daily exercise of square dancing has also been constantly interfered with by the cultural sector, the sports department, and the government at all levels. As reflected in the daily square dance phenomenon itself, dance groups show a broadly hierarchical pattern. Some leading dancers in the front of the group have received official training by national or local organisations, while core members of the dance team stand in front and other participants practise behind. This hierarchical pattern in the square-dancing team illustrates that the daily square-dance exercise follows not only a specific official training direction but also a degree of discipline implicit in the dance group (Fig. 3.3).



Fig. 3.3 Daily square-dancing exercise in urban open spaces in Qingdao Cangkou Park.
Photography by author, 2021, Cangkou Park, Qingdao, 2019

In this instance, the daily square dancing exercise is considerably removed from mere physical fitness; instead it reflects the training of the body in a hierarchical setting in line with specific directions given by official certificated dance leaders. Brownell (1995) was the first scholar to research training of the body in China and defined ‘bodily training as a process of habituation by which everyday practice trains a world-orientation into the body, to connect everyday practices of physical activities in general [...] with the dynamic political, economic and cultural structure of Chinese society’ (Brownell, 1995, p. 12). Brownell’s (1995) research focused mainly on the relationship between the body, sports and the state, including Olympic politics, national games, etc. She affirmed the connection between body training and nationalism in the Chinese context from three perspectives: spiritual civilisation, discipline and social order. For example, Brownell (1995, p.155) state the discourse that justifies the disciplinary program is equally concerned with their ‘thoughts’ and their bodies,

‘Both bodily and mental discipline are to serve the needs of the state – in the words of the official discourse, they are to serve the construction of socialist spiritual civilisation. Thus, the most minute disciplines of the body are

conceived of as having civilising effects with very general consequences for the fate of the nation.’

Here, the training of the body is not only strongly shaped by national power relationships but also has an extraordinary impact on the nationalistic development of the country. On the one hand, she believes that the daily practice of body activity is closely related to the dynamic politics of Chinese society. On the other hand, she believes that body training should first be carried out by a particular discipline or followed by a particular policy, and then it can contribute to the construction of socialist spiritual civilisation and nationalism.

However, focusing on the square-dancing phenomenon, the National Fitness Plan in the national political policy serves as a mechanism to link square dancing with nationalism and, more specifically, to transform this style of dancing body exercise into body training. Unlike the previous chapter on political relationships, this policy is the national development strategy, and although it does not explicitly mention the specific development direction and content of square-dance activities, it provides a more macro, comprehensive, and in-depth perspective on the nationalistic understanding of the square-dancing phenomenon. According to Min Zhang (2019), official discourses in the *People's Daily* between 2016 and 2018 showed that square dancing was seen as a positive manifestation of the National Fitness Plan. The official discourse describes square dancing as a healthy lifestyle that is consistent with the goals of the government's National Fitness Plan. Square dancing is seen as helping to promote national fitness and serving to maintain social order (Zhang and Min, 2019).

Square dancing has been highly valued by the CPC, and it was included for the first time in the competitive events of the 14th National Games of the PRC in 2021, which attracted 766 teams and more than 6,800 participants from across the country. The *People's Daily* reported that the 14th National Games set up square dances for the first time to encourage people to participate

in mass events and performances, aiming to vigorously promote the National Fitness Plan by hailing China as a ‘sport power country’ (China News, 2021).

In accordance with the directives of the above mentioned Chinese national policy, since the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, 8 August every year is National Fitness Day, and municipal governments at all levels have organised square-dancing activities as public participation events in line with this national policy (General Administration of Sport of China, 2022). The theme of the event was displayed on a large LED screen: ‘Healthy China, You and me together’ and ‘National Fitness’ (Fig. 3.4). Under the guidance of these national policies, people participating in square dancing have changed from daily fitness dance bodies to political bodies that promote political propaganda and respond to national ideologies.



Fig. 3.4 Square dancing on the 14th National Fitness Day is a response to the policy of the National Fitness Plan. Source: People’s Government of Henan (2022)

In addition, the Henan Provincial Sports Bureau (*henan sheng tiyuju*) released a government

affairs news in 2020, which reported on the square-dancing event organised on 8 August to show its development direction. Henan Provincial Sports Bureau called on the authorities to organise square-dancing activities in response to the National Fitness Plan and moderately prosperous society (*xiaokang shehui*), as the slogan of the event theme to ‘Promote national fitness and contribute to a well-off society in all respects (*tuidong quanmin jianshen, zhuli quanmian xiaokang*)’ (Fig. 3.5). It can be seen that the square-dancing fitness activities are guided by the official policies of the state. Meanwhile, in the setting of a stage performance, each dancer's dancing for the purpose of the policy is more clearly represented. The initial instinct for physical body exercise was transferred to body training to contribute to enhanced nation building and has become an important part of the strategy of national ideology. In this way, the action of training the body for square dances was skilfully transferred to patriotic behaviour, which cultivates their patriotic sentiment. The square dance is like a patriotic education to educate these *dama* to love their country. Each of the square dancers has embraced politics beyond the original purpose of physical fitness, and this is seen as an expression of their own body politics.



Fig. 3.5 Square Dancing for the 12th National Fitness Day on 8 August 2020. Source:

Zhengzhou Daily (2020)

Studies of square-dancing daily exercise and stage performance clearly demonstrate that the principle of body training is embodied in both settings. Daily square dancing is not only physical fitness, but has also become a collective body training activity, promoted by the national strategic guidance. Square dancing in the stage performance setting more clearly reflects that the square-dancing activity is dancing for the national ideology.

The link between training the body and national ideology seems to have its origins in China. On 8 August 2020, CCTV news reported that the National Fitness Plan was the historical memory of ‘*Zengqiang Renmin Tizhi, Fazhan, Tiyu Yundong* (Develop physical culture and sports, strengthen the people's physique)’ (Fig. 3.6). The national political strategy for promoting the training of the body advocated by Mao was ‘*Zengqiang Renmin Tizhi, Fazhan, Tiyu Yundong* (Develop physical culture and sports, strengthen the people's physique)’. The phrase first appeared in June 1952 in an inscription by Mao Zedong for the founding ceremony of the All-China Sports Federation (Wang, 2010). Chairman Mao's inscription highlighted the important idea of ‘developing sports and enhancing people's physique’ to serve the construction of production and national defence (Zhang and Saunder, 2019). This ubiquitous inscription, which remains familiar today, is evocative of the strong desire of a nation: the body is the capital of revolution, and physical exercise is to defend and build the motherland.



Fig. 3.6 The poster from CCTV News Web shows images from China's historical National Fitness Plan. Source: Bin (2020)

Square-dancing activities reflect a continuation of the political inscriptions from earlier times, even linking the policy of the National Fitness Plan in the Xi Jinping era with the slogan 'Develop physical culture and sports, strengthen the people's physique' in the Mao Zedong era. In particular, in 2021, which was the centenary of the founding of the Communist Party of

China and a milestone year for China, square-dancing performances were held across China. For example, Hunan Province commemorated the 69th anniversary of Comrade Mao Zedong's inscription, and tens of thousands of people danced together in the square, aiming to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and simultaneously promote extensive, widespread and comprehensive development of the National Fitness Plan. During the event, dancers from all over the city wore gorgeous dance costumes, and enthusiastically performed programmes aimed at glorifying the history of the party, such as 'Without the Communist Party, there would be no new China (*meiyou gongchandang jiu meiyou xin zhongguo*)', 'Dancing the Chinese Dream (*wudong zhongguoomeng*)', and 'I Love Your Motherland (*wo ai ni zuguo*)'. This major event emphasises that square dancing as a form of training the body is a contemporary phenomenon, while simultaneously reflecting the political discourse of the Mao era (Fig. 3.7) (Yiyang City People's Government Portal, 2021). The following discussion of the traceable origins of square dancing as a body training activity to reflect the patriotic spirit of body politics in China will uncover its historical roots, which date back to Mao's promotion of body training in China in the 1950s and 1960s.



Fig. 3.7 Ten thousand people danced the square dancing in Yiyang City to commemorate the 69th anniversary of Comrade Mao Zedong's inscription. Source: Yiyang City People's Government Portal (2021)

Through the above research, this study concludes that linking square dance activities in today's era with physical training activities during Mao Zedong's time can help square dancing activities find a deeper meaning down the line. One form of physical training in Mao's era that was very similar to square dancing was radio gymnastics – a typical representative case of training the body activity in Chinese history, especially under the political discourse of '*Zengqiang Renmin Tizhi, Fazhan, Tiyu Yundong*'. Radio gymnastics, also known as "morning exercises" or "broadcast gymnastics," has a long and significant history in China. Radio gymnastics in China traces its origins back to the early 20th century. In November 1951, the All-China Sports Federation announced the implementation of the first set of radio gymnastics (Sapatsinskaya and Alexandrov, 2021; Zhang and Saunders, 2019), and about 6 months later, in 1952, the People's Daily published an article, which is pointing out that at that time, the unified national arrangement of daily radio gymnastics programmes marked a significant new phenomenon in China's history (Zhang and Saunders, 2019).

In addition, Premier Zhou Enlai delivered a speech entitled 'Training the Body for Our Country' in the Government Administration Council, in which he emphasized the importance of implementing mass broadcast gymnastics. He defined the sporting policy as 'a political mission for national defence and the construction of a socialist country' (Fan and Lu, 2012). People participating in radio gymnastics were organised by institutions; they gathered to form a grid of standing lines, with a large speaker broadcasting instructions in front of them (Fig. 3.8). At Maoist, radio gymnastics sparked an upsurge in the training of the physical body, as schools, factories, streets, and entire villages resounded to the melody of radio gymnastics, and people

could be seen engaging in radio gymnastics in every possible location (Zhang and Saunders, 2019). Radio gymnastics is suitable for China's backward economic and cultural background at that time. China was once labeled as the sick man of East Asia (*dong ya bing fu*) and a decrepit empire (*fu xiu di guo*) (Yang, 2020). As a result, radio gymnastics has become a popular tool to promote physical health and ideological unity.

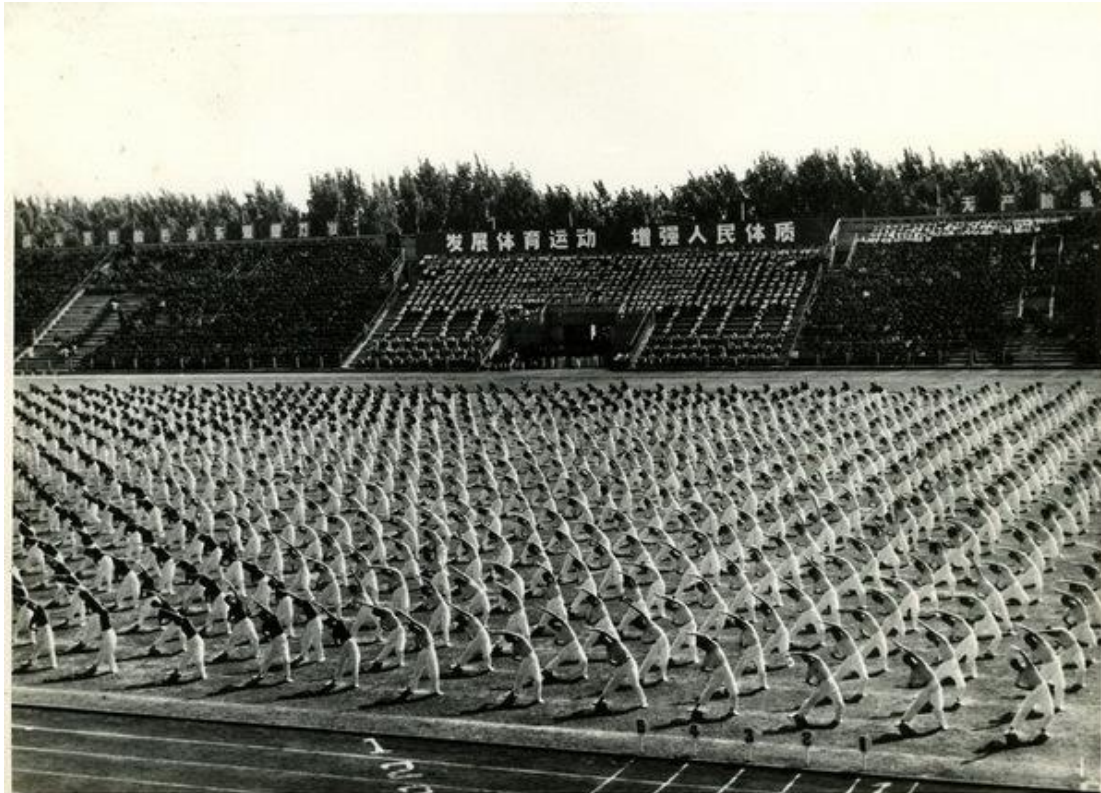


Fig. 3.8 Middle school students practised radio gymnastics in Beijing, China. Source: ifeng News (2014)

The end of the Mao era was followed by economic reforms in China. Although the emphasis on ideological unity has diminished, the focus on physical fitness and public health has continued. To this day, radio gymnastics has become a daily activity for the entire country and, along with eye exercises, is a mandatory part of the curriculum in Chinese elementary, middle and high schools. As such, radio gymnastics was once widely regarded as a fundamental way to ensure the prosperity of the nation, with the goal of promoting the physical health of the

Chinese people, increasing productivity and aiding national defence. At the same time, by encouraging participation in radio gymnastics, the Chinese Government emphasised the values of discipline, diligence and patriotism, thus helping to foster a strong sense of national identity and nationalism.

However, the emphasis on physical training of the body had deep roots. In addition to gymnastics, many other physical training methods were advocated by Mao Zedong – particularly swimming, which was one of Mao's favourite activities. Poon (2019) traces Mao Zedong's emphasis on physical training, particularly activities such as swimming, radio gymnastics, and the Loyalty Dance, through which the physical training of the people was exercised in order to counter or change the stereotype of China as the "sick man of East Asia." Poon also writes that Mao had a real love for swimming, Mao swam in freezing cold rivers in the winter as a way of body training and passed on this passion for physical training to every Chinese person (Poon, 2019). In 1966, Chairman Mao led and rallied 5,000 swimmers to participate in the 11th Yangtze River Crossing Race in Wuhan. The race honoured and promoted the idea put forward by Chairman Mao, who believed that 'swimming is a kind of sport to fight against nature. You should go to the big rivers and the sea to train'. With this, both the People's Daily and the Liberation Army Daily of 25 July 1966 prominently featured the event and news of this grand 'Chairman Mao's swim in the Yangtze River' (Figure 3.9) on their front pages (David, 2016). This event further consolidated Mao's tendency to link the bodies of the people to the construction and development of the country, and the bodies of the rulers to the legitimacy of their power.

我们敬爱的领袖毛主席这样健康，
这是全中国人民的最大幸福！
是全世界革命人民的最大幸福！

毛主席畅游长江



我们伟大的领袖毛主席，于一九六六年七月十六日，畅游长江。这是毛主席在畅游长江中，向全国人民展示他强健体魄的一个缩影。毛主席在畅游长江中，向全国人民展示他强健体魄的一个缩影。毛主席在畅游长江中，向全国人民展示他强健体魄的一个缩影。



毛主席在快艇上畅游长江，正在与江水搏斗的游泳大军。



畅游长江的游泳大军，在江中奋力拼搏。

毛主席在畅游长江中，向全国人民展示他强健体魄的一个缩影。毛主席在畅游长江中，向全国人民展示他强健体魄的一个缩影。毛主席在畅游长江中，向全国人民展示他强健体魄的一个缩影。

Fig. 3.9 The 25 July 1966 edition of the Liberation Army Daily reports Mao Zedong's swimming in the Yangtze River. Courtesy of the Liberation Army Daily, 25 July 1966. Source: David (2016)

Continuing Mao Zedong's tradition, commemorative activities related to physical training, such as swimming and armed swimming, have been held all over the country every year since 1966. Chinese citizens, regardless of class, gender and age, are involved in the physical training agenda, especially the focal group of physical training in Mao's era – namely, the youth - who are the same group of dancers who participate in square dancing today. For example, in the swimming event held in Shichahai, Beijing in 1970 to commemorate the fourth anniversary of

Chairman Mao's swimming in the Yangtze River, teenagers swam with red tassels in their hands (Fig. 3.10) (Weng, 2017, p.111).

By analysing these particular examples of China's development, it can be seen that physical training can be closely linked to national nationalism and seen as a carefully orchestrated political activity to influence the construction of Chinese nationalism in the long term. In both physical body training and patriotic spiritual cultivation, the purpose is to nurture patriotism and to foster an indoctrinated political national identity. Consequently, under the leadership of Mao Zedong and the CPC, the key aims for the development of fitness training in China included enhancing people's physical health, increasing socialist productivity and preparing for national defence.



Fig. 3.10 Weng N. (2017) On the occasion of the 4th anniversary of Chairman Mao's swim in the Yangtze River, a commemorative event was held in Shichahai, and young people carried red-tasselled spears as they swam across. [The Colourful China: Photography spanning 30 years

of history]. [Photograph] Copyright © Naiqiang Weng. Photo: courtesy Citic Publishing House, Beijing.

This section has explored the development from mass swimming and radio gymnastics of Mao's era to square dancing in the contemporary era as evidence that the purpose of body training is to form a patriotic spirit and prepare for national rejuvenation (*minzu fuxing*). In the era of Mao Zedong, national prosperity meant strengthening militarism, consolidating the revolution, defending the country and developing national rejuvenation and unity. Improvement of people's physiques and national defence are emblematic of the nationalist aspects of fitness training in China. First of all, participating in square dancing is a kind of patriotic behaviour, and the purpose of training one's body is to form a patriotic spirit and contribute to the construction of national rejuvenation. Secondly, square dancing is seen as a vehicle for cultivating social unity, national identity, cultural awareness and social discipline among socialist citizens. In other words, exercise-oriented square dancing, in fact, aims to train the patriotic body that is so significant to the shaping of national ideology. Undertaking training in the patriotic body is one of the shared values of the people and is symbolic of the nation. Continuing into Chapter 5, square dancing in the car parks and in the mobile cabin hospital also from the characteristics for exercise purposes, and supports the view of national ideology.

3.3 We are China

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the expression of patriotism in square dancing can be explored from two aspects: the internal exercise of the body and the external visual expression of the body. Section 3.2 discussed the emergence of patriotism and national ideology in square dancing from the perspective of internal training of the body. This section sets out to explore the external way of presenting Chinese characters or patterns using the body in square dancing to demonstrate that the visual body in the square dancing is the body of

patriotism and can promote or propagate the ideology of contemporary Chinese nationalism.

In this section, typical cases are presented in which the visual expression of the patriotic body involves a number of events in the political milestone years in China: for example, the annual National Day (*guoqing jie*) military parade; the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing; and square-dancing performances staged in the recent landmark years of 2015, 2019 and 2021. 2015 marked ‘the seventieth anniversary of the victory of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression’ (Mao, 2020); 2019 commemorated the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the PRC; and 2021 celebrated the centenary of the founding of the CPC. National square-dancing performances involving the middle-aged and elderly mainly revolve around national themes, such as ‘Always follow the party’, ‘Thanksgiving party, the celebration of one hundred’ and ‘A Century of Chinese Dream, A New Era of Dancing’. The government at all levels integrates the mass activities of square dancing in the milestone year to promote the Chinese national spirit and signal patriotism to the people. For example, China Sports Daily (2019) reports that the official image of the square-dancing competition should be to vigorously promote the great national spirit with patriotism as the core (Ash, 2005), showing the new style of nationalism in the new era. Square dancing shows the vitality and style of the people in contemporary society and expresses the people's love for the Party and pursuit of a better life.

The body visualisation of square dancing is closely tied to political ideology, both in the everyday square-dancing exercise and in the stage performance. In the development of contemporary square dancing, the competition is a mode of performance which is more official than the daily square dancing discussed in section 3.2. A review of some of the influential visualisations of the body presented in square dancing reveals some crucial ideological and discursive drivers behind its pattern arrangements. Some visual interpretations of the use of the body in square dancing will be considered as indicative of the dominant image of the patriotic

body, which supports the propaganda of the nationalist ideology, 'We are China'. This section will consider how the body visually becomes a pattern for nationalist propaganda.

3.3.1 Becoming One with the Red Flag

Square-dancing competitions seem to focus on which group's patriotic sentiment is deepest and most intense. For example, a square-dancing competition for the National Day holiday was organised by the Qingdao Sports Bureau (*Qingdao shi tiyuju*) and Qingdao Culture and Tourism Bureau (*Qingdao shi wenhua lvyou ju*) to celebrate the centenary of the founding of the CPC. A group of 200 dancers selected by their neighbourhood's residents' committees participated in the competition. The dance theme was 'Dancing China (*Wudong Zhongguo*)' with choreography by the Qingdao Dance Sports Association (*Qingdao shi wudao tiyu xiehui*).

According to the survey data, one of the props that almost every dance troupe has is the Chinese national flag or the Party flag. For example, during the competition, Y team obtained the highest score. They presented a typical patriotic body combining the Communist Party of China or the Chinese national flag with the body, a technique that is very common in group performances. One of the men in the group who participated in the square-dancing performance stood in the middle, wearing a military uniform and waving the CPC flag, which danced and merged with his body. Each dancer's eyes were facing the direction of the Party flag, and their arms were raised in the air in a gesture of holding it aloft (Fig. 3.11). In the square dance performance the red flag is used throughout the context of the performance, it symbolises the power of the Communist Party and is a guide in people's lives. In addition, the red flag gives the event an official colour and aims to convey a sense of nationalism. This chimes with a familiar proverb from revolutionary times: '*yiqie xingdong ting zhihui* (All the actions must follow the command)'. With full spirit and skilful movements, the dancers showed passionate emotion in worshipping the Communist Party of China, fully expressing the motherland's love for and

loyalty to the Party, as well as their confidence and determination to follow the Party forever.

The above arguments are further echoed in Zhou Hongxiang's 'The Red Flag Flies (*hongqi piao*)', in which the red flag is the leitmotif running through the entire creative context, with most of the slogans featured being selected from Mao Zedong's words. This work reinforces the idea of the concentration – as well as the centralisation – of political power. More than one hundred actors appearing only once in the film embody the drowning of individuality in a collective identity (Jiang, 2007). As the film-maker states: 'There is no protagonist in the story, and everyone is equal in the performance' (Zhou, 2004). With reference to square dancing, the visual representation of the body integrated with the red flag can be specifically regarded as the visual expression of the patriotic collective as it carries the ambitious visions of nationalism.



Fig. 3.11 Square dancers with the CPC flag in Qingdao Cangkou Park. Photography by author, Cangkou Park, Qingdao, 2021

3.3.2 Body with Pattern

At the same 'Dancing China' square-dancing competition, Liu's team won praise from both the

judges and the audience. The team consisted of 20 dancers, each wearing traditional Chinese costumes and holding fans as props with the song choice, ‘Love my China (*ai wo zhonghua*)’. Red Revolutionary songs are upbeat and rhythmic, rendering dance scenes and content mixed with nationalism and patriotic consciousness. Participants danced in unison, and the audience sang along, ensuring everyone’s involvement in the celebration of the centenary of the founding of the CPC. At the end of the dance, the dancers used fans to form the pattern incorporating three Chinese characters spelling ‘Chinese Beauty (*Zhongguo mei*)’, which excited the audience (Fig. 3.12). Liu, the team’s choreographer, was interviewed after the competition and said: ‘We spent a lot of energy on the final visual presentation of ‘Chinese Beauty’. Our team’s message is to celebrate the prosperity of our country today. We are delighted to be recognised by the judges and audience.’



Fig. 3.12 The dancers used fans to form three Chinese characters spelling ‘Chinese beauty (*Zhongguo mei*)’ in Qingdao Cangkou Park. Photography by author author, Cangkou Park, Qingdao, 2021

This research comes now to another example showing that the visualisation of characters by the body in square dancing to reinforce the expression of patriotism is not unique but typical.

In 2015, on the seventieth anniversary of China's victory in the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression (Mamlok, 2018), an online news sensation reported that nearly 1,000 square dancers from Hunan province had gathered in front of the statue of Mao Zedong in Changsha for the square-dancing event (China news, 2015). They used physical body formations to spell the Chinese characters for 'Chinese people should strive to become stronger (*Zhongguo ren dang ziqiang*)' and '70' to promote patriotism and commemorate the anniversary (Fig. 3.13). Chen Guanghui, president of the company that sponsored the event, asserted: It is the sacred mission of every citizen to love our motherland. We hope that by paying people for their patriotic behaviour, we encourage everyone to love their country and remember history (Siteng, 2015).



Fig. 3.13 Thousands of people in Changsha took part in a square dance spelling '70' and 'Chinese people should strive to become stronger'. Source: Siteng (2015)

The details contained within the artificial characters 'Chinese beauty' or 'Chinese people should strive to become stronger (*Zhongguo ren dang ziqiang*)' and '70' require careful reading. The word image is composed of the bodies of the square-dancing participants: forming the

basic framework of the scene, they are tightly connected and not relaxed at all. The physical scene spelt out in Chinese characters is associated with the patriotic sentiments of citizens. Firstly, hidden behind these words is the people's love for their motherland, exemplified by 'beauty' which indicates praise for the motherland and the established ideology, the desire and dream of a happy life. Secondly, it illustrates the people's recognition of and pride in Chinese identity, respect for the country and the Communist Party, and the embodiment of national and collective interests above self. For example, the dancers do not care whether their faces appear in front of the camera but rather cover themselves by combining their fans and props to form Chinese characters – an action that emphasises the sentiment of the national image above self-image.

In square-dancing activities, the dancing bodies are usually conformed bodies arranged and combined in a certain order, visually presenting an overall pattern. For example, on 28 October 2019, in Binzhou City, Shandong Province, 1,600 square dancers performed during the Double Ninth Festival to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. At the local civic fitness square, they posed with their bodies to form the characters of the word 'Chinese (*zhongguo*)' (Fig. 3.14). Thousands of square dancers pronounced blessing on the motherland with this meaningful body pattern, which portrayed their patriotic sentiments of reverence and love for China. Each participant was uniformly dressed in a red top and white trousers, and the dance moves were also required to be uniformly aligned, with kicks and hands at the same angle. The dancers visualise their bodies as a 'Chinese' pattern. At the command of the team leader, the crowd danced in unison, shouting slogans such as 'China, I love you' and 'China, fighting', their voices echoing over the square.



Fig. 3.14 1,600 dancers performed a square dance in which they posed to form the characters for 'Chinese'. Source: China Daily (2017)

It is evident that the characters for '*zhongguo*' comprised many individual bodies of square dancers; hence, the body can be seen as a visual expression of patriotism. This majestic spectacle imprinted itself on the audience to become part of the national physical expression. The image manifests not only a relationship between the physical body and national patriotic sentiment but also a corporeal – and indeed a corporate – response to the significance of nationalism in contemporary China. Any single individual out of alignment will destroy the overall visual effect, while the visual presentation of the characters for '*zhongguo*' formed by the dancers' bodies provides easy access to the associated patriotic sentiment as a nationalistic symbol.

The detailed images in this case – and all other examples cited – clearly show the use of the colour red as an essential element of patriotic body visual expression (e.g., red flag, red dress,

and red props). In traditional Chinese values, red is usually associated with politics and has a certain symbolic significance in national ideology, for example, the red flag and Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong (The Little Red Book or *hongbaoshu*). Jiang (2005), who is an art critic and curator of contemporary Chinese art, describes the visual memory of red,

‘Nothing could replace the colour red. It was so red all the time. Red flags suffused everywhere as a slogan says, ‘*quanguo shangxia yipian hong* (the whole country awash in red)’. It was virtually a red sea. I felt it came as a huge red tide. I was extremely excited and could not help following it.’

Therefore, the colour red interspersed in the visual expression of square dancing is the key feature that cannot be ignored. It connects immediately with Chinese citizens: firstly, it arouses people's patriotic sentiment and expresses awe of and admiration for the national leader; secondly, it propagates the nationalist ideology to all people nationwide.

Further in-depth discussion suggests that the conformity (*Zheng qi hua yi*) of square dancing is implied in the ‘training of the body’ and the body visualisation of ‘We are China’: it is a symbol of patriotism and effectively reflects the nationalism ideology. Conformity is an apparent visual aspect and beauty standard of square-dancing body performance. Under the conformity body visual aspect of square dancing, the individuals, regardless of their age, profession or gender, each perform identically. It can be argued that conformity enables individuals in a group to effectively or inadvertently integrate their thoughts and behaviours into the group. At this point, individual differences are blurred, obscured and hidden, and the power of the collective and the team is reflected. In this case, the form of conformity in China will decide who belongs to the collective group and who does not - at the same time, unifying the mind and thus propagating a sense of nationalism.

In the Chinese context, the conformed bodies create a uniform visual effect and are always

themed around the norms of the party and the state. In addition, the central axis of China's conformed body visual image is consistent with the national identity and nationalism of the Chinese Party and state. Therefore, in Chinese society, this visual feature of conformity bodies is not only a way to express nationalism, but a kind of nationalistic value that reflects the consistency of the national CPC Central Committee and the citizens' thoughts.

The conformity does not require individual independence; in such conformity, a person can be recognised and valued and has a legitimate status. Especially in the daily collective life of the In the Mao Zedong era, they move as a team, and all dressed in uniform; they form a conformity visual representation of collective effervescence to arouse nationalism.

‘The visual environment of the cult of Mao did not build a solemn religious atmosphere. Instead, it presented a liveliness and boisterousness consistent with Chinese traditional celebrations, or in other words, carnivals with nationalistic excitement liberation or transformation from conformity but, at the same time, within conformity.’ (Jiang, 2005, p. 61)

Overall, the nationalist propaganda contained in the conformity body was clearly reflected in all the above-mentioned visual examples, such as radio gymnastics, mass swimming, square dancing in daily training, and visual presentation in square dancing stage performances, which all imply a conformity body. In addition, there are some typical visual examples that reflect people's daily life and national celebrations, which further sublimate the argument of this chapter: conformity as a manifestation mechanism sublimes the patriotic body in square dancing to reflect the nationalist ideology. For example, one of the most representative visual representations of conformity bodies is Weng Naiqiang's photographic works, showing children performing at the opening ceremony of the Fourth National Games held by the General Administration of Sports of China. The performing children celebrated the national-level event

by holding up different patterns on the book to form different background pictures (Fig. 3.15). There was a shared enthusiasm amongst individual children, who were unconcerned about the individual yet nevertheless must have felt proud to be part of a gigantic entity. Therefore, conformity is ubiquitous in everyday life that is inculcated into every Chinese person in childhood, and becomes a vivid memory as they grow into adulthood. These large patterns are usually related to patriotism and nationalism, so they not only strengthen the transition of patriotism to nationalism but also confirm that the visual representation of the body is indispensable in the construction of nationalism.

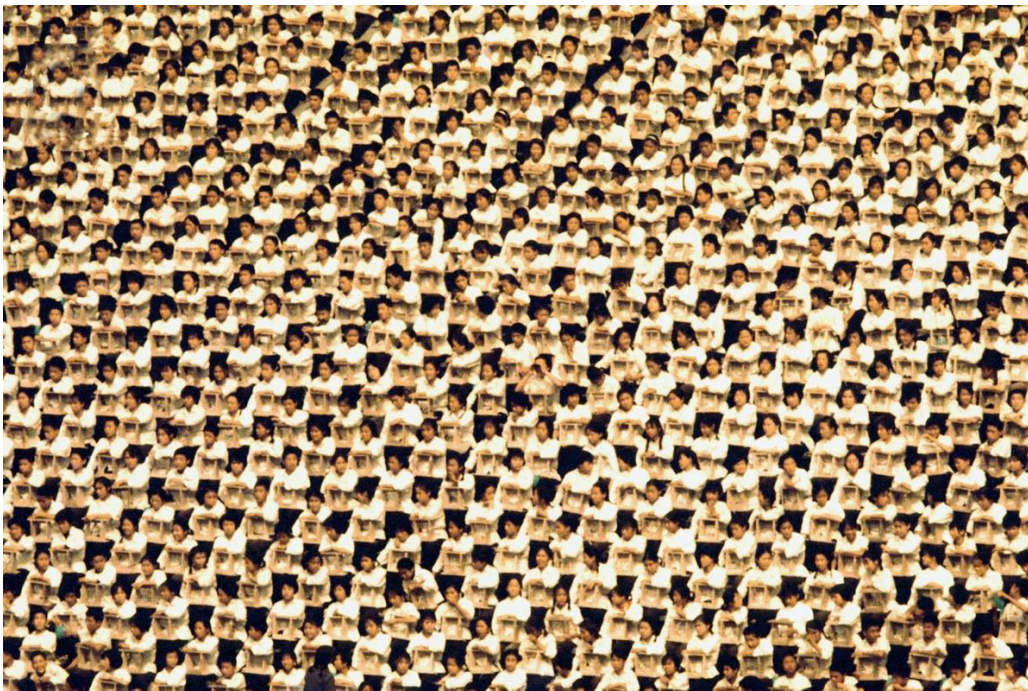


Fig 3.15 Weng N. (2017) Children perform at the opening ceremony of the 4th National Games held by the General Administration Sport of China in 1979. [The Colouful China: Photography spanning 30 years of history]. [Photograph] Copyright © Naiqiang Weng. Photo: courtesy Citic Publishing House, Beijing.

The Olympic performance is a quintessential manifestation of patriotic sentiment, projecting China's power and nationalistic ideology to the world (Shen, 2020; Jinxia, 2010). For example,

in 2008, Chinese soldiers performed ‘fou’ at the opening ceremony of the Beijing Summer Olympics at the National Stadium. More than two thousand men performed in conformity and appeared to have a hidden power to control their minds and their bodily movements. Nationalism and patriotism were central as they conformed together and ensured that their collective actions composed a human-digital geometric landscape (Fig. 3.16) (Jinxia, 2010). The excited geometry was then extended through an audience of some 100,000 people who shouted each number and clapped on each beat, and furthermore through the billions of spectators beyond the venue.



Fig. 3.16 2008 Chinese soldiers performing ‘fou’ at the opening ceremony of Beijing Summer Olympics at the National Stadium, Beijing, 2008. Source: BBC Chinese (2008)

An additional example of a conformity body closely associated with the Chinese nation is mass parades, which are organised to celebrate political occasions at the national level, such as the National Day on 1 October each year, or a range of Communist Party celebrations and military parades. The parades involve hundreds of thousands of people, and after countless practices and rehearsals, they are presented in a simple matrix, arranged in straight lines and columns.

Participants are encouraged to line up as perfectly as possible, head-to-head and shoulder-to-shoulder while marching in unison. With each step, all arms must be bent at a specific angle and swung to an absolutely precise height. Any deviations in the body movements of all individuals involved are eliminated altogether. The conformity body in the context of the military parade, with its greater emphasis on visual presentation, is seen as a strict discipline reflecting centralised political power in the one-party state (Fig. 3.17).



Fig. 3.17 A military honour guard march. Source: Ng Han Guan (2019)

Chapter Summary

The above discussion on physical dancing bodies in the everyday activity and stage performances of square dancing indicates such dancing is the mechanism for disseminating patriotic sentiment and visualised propaganda consistent with national ideology. This detailed reading of the body in square dancing investigates how the Chinese Central Government has evoked nationalistic ideology by utilising and appropriating various elements of square dancing

in a targeted manner.

Firstly, people's participation in square dancing is a process of physical body training and a patriotic act that is inextricably linked to nationalist ideology. According to above findings, a strong link is established between square dancing activities and the mass swimming and radio gymnastics of the Mao era, leading to the conclusion that the Chinese government usually uses mass physical body training to promote people's physical fitness, form a patriotic spirit, and enhance the people's reliance on and identification with the state. Hence, square dancing activity can actually be seen as a means for the Chinese government to achieve the training of the patriotic body, which is a preparation for national renaissance and the shaping of the national ideology.

Secondly, the body in square dancing is used visually in urban public spaces every day, and this activity shapes the people's patriotic sentiment, edifies their nationalist spirit, and consolidates the national identity of the Party, land, culture, and blood race. 'We are China' demonstrates that the dancing bodies present themselves as a pattern to promote patriotism and the propaganda of the national ideology, including the formation of the Chinese characters for 'China', '70' and 'Chinese people should strive to become stronger (*Zhongguo ren dang Ziqiang*)', as well as traditional cultural patterns and national and party flags, and interspersed with features of the key red colour which can be overlooked in the visual expression of square dancing. Therefore, the new rhetoric of nationalist ideology is integrated into square-dancing performances as mass propaganda to reinforce national ideology and party rule and to preach outright patriotism to the Chinese people. Square dancing is the visual expression of the patriotic body, and the spirit of patriotism is actuated and propagated by the particular characters or patterns formed by the visualised dancing bodies, thus cultivating patriotic sentiment.

These important finding echoes previous interpretations of the concept of patriotism, for example, Bitschnau and Mußotter (2022) posited that patriotism can be understood as a profound sentiment encompassing love and dedication towards one's country, its values, culture, and traditions. Zhao (1998) Wang (2008) The communist government launched a campaign to evoke nationalism and ensure loyalty to the Patriotism education campaign, history education, thus evoking national identity. In addition, some scholars in the previous section have argued that Chinese patriotism is a tool for the CPC to consolidate its rule (Yu-Sun, 1996). Wang and Jia (2015) argued that patriotism is a significant force in maintaining national unity and realising the great national rejuvenation of the Chinese Dream, as well as coping with the challenges of the complex international environment. Thus, there is a connection between the previous interpretations of the concepts of patriotism and nationalism and the results after analysing the primary and secondary data on square dancing, reinforcing the thesis of this chapter that square dancing is a mechanism for cultivating patriotic sentiment and propagating national ideology. At the same time, the skilful manoeuvring of square-dancing rooted symbols indicates a interpretation of Chinese nationalism in which the national ideology of a sports power country and a culture-power country, with patriotism as its core and foundation, is dexterously woven into a nationalistic propaganda appeal.

CHAPTER FOUR: DAMA BODY AESTHETICS IN SQUARE DANCING

Chapter Four: *Dama* Body Aesthetics in Square Dancing

The role of the dancing body in square dancing inspires and informs the definition of the square-dancing phenomenon in contemporary China. As examined in Chapter Three, square dancing has become closely linked with the collective form of body expression in contemporary Chinese political discourse. The visual representation of the body in a collective context reflects the significance of nationalism ideology as expressed through square dancing. I have examined the meaning of nationalism and the patriotic inspiration behind the visual representation of the collective dancing body in the everyday exercise and stage performance context. To explore the role of the body in square dancing further, I investigate the expression and transformation of the individual's corporeal aesthetic value based on the main group of women in square dancing activities.

Many scholars believe that the exploration of female body aesthetics should consider its subject experience and related social context and historical background (Man, 2019). Therefore, exploring the aesthetics of the physical body in China should be discussed within the context of a particular historical and cultural period. This chapter focuses on the same group of dancing *damas* who experienced different historical contexts during Mao's revolutionary period and the contemporary period. I adopt a comparative approach to demonstrate the transformation between revolutionary aesthetics and contemporary presentations of the body in *dama* dancing. To explore the recreation of the *damas'* bodily aesthetic in square dancing, I first evaluate the corporeal expression of the dancer in normal life. In the second section, I elucidate meaningful revelations by comparing female representations in China these *damas* have experienced, such as women in the Red Guard, women in loyalty dance activities, and women working in factories.

These first two sections demonstrate the two extreme changes in daily *dama* body aesthetics between today's contemporary society and Mao's revolutionary period in China. Specifically,

the body aesthetic of this group of *dama* portrays two extremes along the visual spectrum, from the notions of ‘be gorgeously dressed (*hua zhi zhao zhan*)’ to ‘femininity erasure’. Specifically, the presentation of *dama* body image in contemporary square dancing not only represents a new visual expression, but also marks a complete breakthrough and extreme transformation of traditional body image. The extreme transformation of the aesthetic face of middle-aged and older women for more than 70 years, with little trace of the past, provided this research with an opportunity to reflect and tell stories.

The final section discusses the recreation of the body aesthetics of *dama* in square-dancing activities, especially in square-dancing competitions, which have enriched and extended the daily body aesthetics representation of *dama* in contemporary life. Through a series of visual cultural materials, the exaggerated body aesthetics in square dancing are discussed from two aspects: the aesthetic continuation of folk-art dress-up, props and dance movements, and the drama effect of heavy makeup. The objective of this chapter is to explore the Chinese *dama* body as a visual window for reassessing the existing research on the aesthetic value of a contemporary square-dancing *dama* body.

4.1 Dancing Dama in Everyday Aesthetics in Everyday Life

The nature of *dama* was discussed in the second chapter of *dama*’s community from the view of neighbourhoods’ life and emotional needs. However, in order to illustrate the transformation of *dama*’ body aesthetics in this chapter, it is necessary to first enrich another meaning of *dama* formed from the outside society, which is mainly the stigmatisation of the behaviour and body presentation. Through investment and social and fashion choices, they exhibit different behaviours from previous generations of women as a result of the tremendous social, economic and demographic changes that have taken place (Xu and Tian, 2017).

When a middle-aged woman is labelled as a *dama*, it is rarely a compliment, and *dama* are

often the target of ridicule on shows, in magazines and on blogs for their behaviour and dress (Huang, 2021). From April 2013 to January 2014, 80% of respondents said the image of *dama* was hostile to women. In a Newsworld study, media coverage of the topic of *dama* was 15% positive, 75% negative and 10% neutral in 2014 (Li, 2017). Li and Li (2018) published a study on media coverage of *dama* from 2007 to 2017 in *Editor's Friends* in 2018. According to the data from Newspapers actively reported images of *dama* as indefatigable, compassionate and helpful from 2007 to 2012. From 2013 to 2015, the mood went from publicising *dama's* positive characteristics to denouncing them with negative news stories about frantic gold buying (Li and Li, 2018).

At present, in the context of square dancing, the shaping of the *dama* in academic circles mainly emphasises that they are being stigmatised as the major troublemakers of social conflicts (Leung, 2021). More importantly, society has stereotypes of the *dama* in square dancing, characterising them in behaviour as women who show unruly behaviour in public, such as playing loud and intolerable music and fighting for space in public areas. In terms of appearance and image, society often associates *dama* with images such as old-fashioned clothing, plump body and ordinary appearance, which may lead to people's contempt or discrimination against this group. In terms of social prejudice, the *dama* may imply a degradation of the social status and power of this group. *Dama* may be seen as having a lower social status or less attractive than younger women (Huang, 2021; Xu and Tian, 2012, Seetoo and Zou, 2016). This stigmatized stereotype has had a negative impact on *dama's* sense of belonging, presence and worth in social life (Seetoo and Zou, 2016).

The concept of stigma has provided an understanding of the stigmatisation of *dama* from a new angle of aesthetic body value. According to Erving Goffman, stigma is a social label with negative connotations that negatively affects an individual's identity and self-identity.

Individuals or groups are stigmatized for a variety of reasons, mainly because they have certain characteristics and behaviors that are not considered to conform to social expectations or norms in a given setting and situation (Goffman, 2009). Therefore, the contrast between the appearance of square-dancing *dama* and the social expectations of a *dama* shaped by traditional body aesthetic values is the critical factor that leads to stigmatisation.

Under the traditional Chinese value system, the expression of the female body in public places has certain ideals. For example, women displaying and writhing their bodies, wildly dancing by swivelling the rear end, and rotating and swinging their hips in public were considered inappropriate, very ugly, and immoral by mainstream society. Especially the ageing of older women's bodies and the loss of some physiological functions (such as menopause) suggest to society that it is a violation of ethics for middle-aged and elderly women to display their bodies in dance. The physical body display of women is shaped by the expectation that all married women should be quiet and conservative and even play the role of the caregiver within the family (Zhan, 1996).

However, this is a group of *dama* with eccentric behaviour and colourful costumes who do not mind attracting the attention of strangers or passers-by, and displaying their bodies in public. Every day at sunset, there is a colourful visual feast in contemporary Chinese urban spaces embodied by dancing *dama*, some *dama* have white hair and some have extra weight. They are not sexually attractive anymore, but they still wear provocative clothes with bright colours such as red, or shiny beaded or silk blouses, even high-heel dancing shoes. They go on stage and dance with their waists moving. The physical body presentation of square-dancing *dama* in China interacts with social and cultural changes, which may tell a different story from the past from the view of the body aesthetics of the *dama*.

With the rising popularity of square dancing, the daily presentation of the *dama's* body as an

aesthetic force in urban public spaces is the most important point of discussion, because it has invisibly influenced the value of the aesthetic form of middle-aged and old women's bodies. The theory of women's body aesthetics has provided a strong link between women's bodies and aesthetics in everyday life. Saito (2007) takes aesthetic experience out of the realm of pure art and points out that aesthetics can be combined with everyday life, which is full of aesthetic experiences, but which are often taken for granted and hard to penetrate. Rhode (2010) states that women's bodies are a rich object of aesthetic exploration; body features play an important role in many daily aesthetic experiences; they are available to us and used for aesthetic assessment. Bartky (2015) suggests that in the context of patriarchal modernisation, the aesthetics of the female body is not only the result of the subjective feelings of the individual, but also the socio-cultural construction and shaping of the female body. The aesthetic standards of the female body are usually dictated by socio-cultural power structures and ideologies that often reflect male-dominated perspectives and interests. Women are expected to conform to specific aesthetic standards in order to satisfy male visual needs and desires. This concept of aesthetics not only restricts women's personal freedom and space for development, but also reinforces men's control and oppression of women. Yang(2017) mainly focuses on China's beauty and health industry in her understanding of female body aesthetics. She believes that the aesthetic expression of female body is influenced by the development process and commercialization of China's beauty and health industry. These industries have a significant impact on the standardization and normalization of the female body, as well as on women's self-identity and value.

Some relevant studies have shown that *dama* who participate in group activities pay more attention to the aesthetic expression of their bodies, especially in social activities led by square dancers. Yang (2011) uses two words from *nennu* and *shunu* to show that older, mature women become younger and gentler by consuming fashion, cosmetic surgery techniques, and beauty

and health products and services, because gentler women represent the active consumption of ideals that glorify beauty, sex, and individuality. Similarly, Yin and Zhou (2017) and Luo and Hu (2020) believe that middle-aged and elderly women gradually begin to pay attention to the external image as a whole, with the goals of beauty and comfort representing personal style, appropriate timing, and matching with identity. In the Chinese context, in Huang's (2016) study in 2016, the dress and appearance of the *dama* participating in square dancing are no longer traditional cloth shoes and loose clothes. *Dama* usually perm and dye their hair and wear light makeup or lipstick to increase confidence and brightness. In addition, they may wear simple accessories such as earrings, necklaces or bracelets to add a personal touch. *dama* dresses her body with personal style and charm. These body costumes not only meet the needs of dancing, but also reflect the active participation and self-expression of the *dama* in dance activities. Li (2021) observed the ageing aesthetics of middle-aged and elderly women in square dancing. She also believed that under the influence of the beauty economy after the reform and China's opening, *dama* began to pay more attention to the expression of their body aesthetics by using beauty products and new technologies.

Therefore, through the review of the above secondary literature, this study finds that in the contemporary square-dancing phenomenon, *dama* are becoming more and more focused on the external appearance of their bodies. And the dancing *dama's* body feature plays a significant role in the aesthetic experience in everyday life and has the value of body aesthetics in urban public spaces. It can be argued that dancing *dama* have become crucial for the aesthetic formation of Chinese *dama's* bodies. However, it is noteworthy that very few scholars elaborate on the visual presentation of the *dama's* body appears and the reconstruction of the body aesthetic of middle-aged and elderly women under the context of square-dancing body visual images. Therefore, this research further collects primary data resources such as interviews and visual pictures to deeply and richly discover the body aesthetics of contemporary square dance

dama, including richly coloured and patterned, and flowers.

4.1.1 Colourful and Patterned

The appearance of the *dama*'s body is a good visual indicator of contemporary body aesthetics in China. The following section will present the fieldwork data and claims that the aesthetic body presentation of dancing *dama* includes both richly coloured and patterned aspects. And the richly coloured and patterned aesthetic has gradually become a fixed mode for *dama* to frame their appearance through clothing and accessories. No matter how diverse their dressing style is, 'urban', 'classical', 'national', etc., it is always presented with visual effects of richly coloured fabrics. Patterns such as national flowers also make for this kind of aesthetic value. And the aesthetic appearance can be discussed on the basis of records of several group photos of square-dancing *dama*.

The stereotype of a *dama* who appears to be in her fifties has the stereotyped with a catchphrase circulating on the internet, namely 'dama's three treasures for photo-taking: silk scarves, sunglasses and colourful sun hats' (Fig 4.1) (Sohu News, 2023). In this photo, the four women passionately hold up a richly coloured silk scarf and make various strange poses. In addition, they wear suits or dresses with colourful patterns and with sunglasses under their bright sun hats. The most noticeable aspect is the silk scarves, which the *dama* wave and hold high. They do not care whether the silk scarves hide the scenery of the spot; in their mind, the richly coloured silk scarves may be the most beautiful background. Every *dama's* body, from head to toe, from clothes to accessories, must be a combination of at least three colours. With its wide range of colours, this shapes a particularly aesthetic taste in photographic imagery for the *dama's* image.



Fig. 4.1 A group of colourful tourist dama with colourful scarfs in Urumqi's scenic spots.

Source: Lufuyuan (2019)

Almost two-thirds of the *dama* that were interviewed for this study became concerned about their appearance. They found ways of richly coloured and patterned to present their body in their lifetime and everyday square-dancing activity, which mostly happened when they started to participate in square dancing. During the discussion about the *dama's* bodies with the interview participant *dama* W4, who is a typical representative of a *dama*. This picture (Fig. 4.2) was taken in Hangzhou Zhejiang province in 2019, when she travelled and socialised with the so-called 'square dancing sisters'. According to the description of interviewee W4, there are three women in the photo, who were born in the 1950s and 1960s and are from the same square-dancing team. In the detail of the image, the colourful pattern is every *dama's* common aesthetic standard on clothes. Based on this, another layer of a beautiful, coloured silk scarf, is

added. Because the silk material is transparent, the clothes with flower patterns and the silk scarf with bright colours are superimposed together to further enhance the richly coloured visual effect. There is even some visual stimulation due to the colouring being very complicated. In addition to the gorgeous costumes, bright clothes and scarves, the aesthetic form of the *dama* in richly coloured patterns also includes dyed (and perhaps permed) hair and make-up, such as carefully drawn eyebrows.



Fig. 4.2 Colourful and patterned dress of the square-dancing dama in their excursion.

Photography by Interviewee W4. Photo: courtesy interviewee W4

Interviewee W4 notes: ‘The real age of all the women in the photos is over 60. We like bright and rich colour clothes, because we want to show we are still young. Although physically we are old, mentally we still feel young. So, we can harness the colours.’ She believes the colourful outfits in the photo have the ability to disguise their real age and reflect a younger appearance. In addition, the researchers walked into an elevator with six women from the dance groups they were researching. They were surprised to see that everyone was wearing colorful clothes. In

response to the researchers' observations, some dancers explained that brightly coloured clothing brightened their skin tones.

In the group of *dama*, the richly coloured and patterned appearance hints at the diverse and distinctive consideration of contemporary *dama* for the aesthetic value of the body. During the interview with W3 who is a 57-year-old woman who is keen on square-dancing activities, she excited showed the most beautiful photo, in her opinion, which is a group photo of members of her square-dancing team in May 2022 in Mochou Lake Park, Nanjing city, China. Sun hats and sunglasses seem to have become their standard attire. Everyone wears at least one bright item, either shoes, t-shirts, hats or scarves. They look up at the sky at a 45-degree angle, holding child-friendly toys, blowing bubbles with their lips poked.

Interviewee W3 indicated that she pursues to highlight herself in this dress; she is different from others, and does not like to match other people's clothes. Wearing brightly and richly coloured clothes can help being noticed in group photos and reflect herself. It is worth noting that many women wear shorts and are not shy about showing off their sexy figure lines. The individual is free to decorate herself in ways that are constrained by the market, by individual consumer capacity, and personal tastes that have nothing to do with ideological fiat (Fig. 4.3). This is in sharp contrast to Xiao Zhuang's photographs in the next section showing visual images of women's bodies performing Loyalty in Nanjing dance during the revolutionary period (Fig. 4.7).



Fig. 4.3 Dancing dama in Nanjing Mochou Lake Park. Photography by Interviewee W3. Photo: courtesy interviewee W3

The aesthetic body form of richly coloured and patterned are a way to counter the body aesthetic formed under the traditional cultural values of the body age grade. The theory of Woodward (1991) proposes that the adornment of the *dama*'s body can be understood through the concept of masquerade, which involves practices of dressing up, embellishing, and modifying the aging body in order to conceal its true age and appear younger. Woodward (1991) argues that older women engage in displaying youthful femininity as a means of safeguarding their sense of self within a patriarchal social structure where youth is highly valued. Furthermore, in a society focused on bodily appearance, age categories are simplified to youth and old age, creating a hierarchical distinction between them. I evaluate that kind of background of age-grade categorisation will be suitable to the group of dancing *dama* in the square in contemporary urban China. The interviewee X3 recalls:

‘My impression of my mother in her old age was that she was grey, black and army green with short hair. In the traditional Chinese context, bright reds, green and yellow and shiny, tinselly adornments were reserved for young people and small children.’

Square dancing *dama* express a traditional resistance to age-grade through colourful and patterned body dressing up. They decorated as younger versions of themselves in order to cope with social threats to middle-aged and older women, escape ageism, and protect their social status. In other words, through richly coloured and patterned, a contemporary *dama* realises the idea of youth. Therefore, the *dama*’s pursuit of youthful appearance and anti-aging appearance reflect the close connection between the contemporary Chinese *dama*’s aesthetic concept of the body and the appearance of looking young, in the way of colourful and patterned fabrics. In addition, as interviewee X3 mentioned, among this generation of *dama* born in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, their aesthetic values for the old and the young come from their parents who lived in the revolutionary period. It is necessary to explain how this generation of *dama* view the aesthetics of middle-aged and elderly women under the influence of Chinese revolutionary values, which will be discussed in detail in Section 4.2.

4.1.2 The Flower

After discussing the aesthetic value of rich colours and patterns, we found that flowers are the key factor for the formation of the aesthetic value of contemporary *dama*’s body expression. The three photos in Fig. 4.4 show a square dancer selecting the most satisfied representatives in the movement on WeChat,⁷ a social media platform, which is an accurate portrayal of daily

⁷ Wechat is a social networking and communication software in China, which is also of great significance to the *dama*

life. With careful observation, one can discern repetitive details in these three photos: all the *dama*'s shooting backgrounds are flowers, and even the decorations on hats, clothes and scarves all have flower patterns. In another example, the researcher collected the member list of three square dancing WeChat groups, because WeChat is the main social platform for *dama*, and they can use virtual WeChat proxies such as avatars to infer personality information and aesthetic information about others accurately (Chen, Mao and Liu, 2018) It can be clearly seen in the WeChat profile pictures of each *dama* in Fig. 4.5 that the headshots of many *dama* are also very conspicuous, and the image of flowers is used. Each WeChat profile picture in a group seems to represent the aesthetic taste of *dama*, and their combination is a scene of fighting for wonders and splendour. Colourful individuals are combined into more colourful groups.



Fig. 4.4 Dama with flower. Photography by Interviewee Y3. Photo: courtesy interviewee Y3, edited by author (2021)

society. The number of members of a square-dancing WeChat group ranges from 10 to 300, usually 30 to 60. In such a WeChat group, members can exchange daily square dances, greetings, notifications and so on.

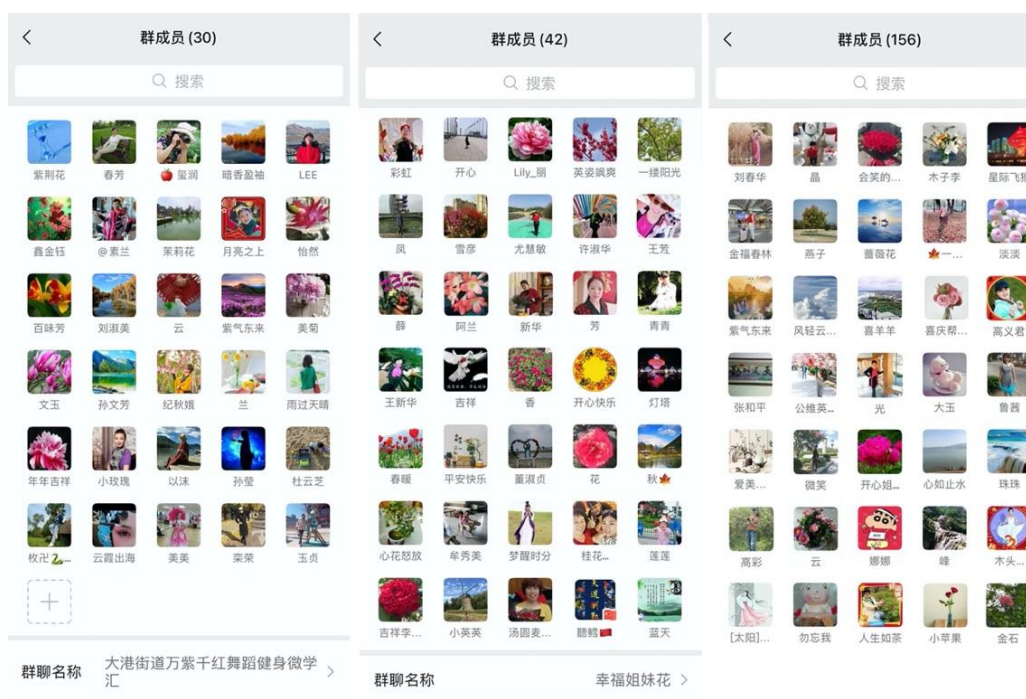


Fig. 4.5 The profile picture in the WeChat group of three square-dancing groups. Photography edited by author

All respondents agreed that flowers and painted patterns are symbols of beauty, which is also a generational phenomenon, not just a family or individual choice. Such as the interviewee, Y4 said:

‘To give an exaggerated example, the name that has accompanied me all my life is also related to ‘flower’, in Chinese is *hua*, which features the same surname. I have four sisters by blood. We are called the ‘four flowers’ in our family. After Yu's surname, they are Jing Hua (flower), Xiu Hua, Shun Hua and Lan Hua.’

Interviewees Y4 and X4 also mentioned the same interesting fact: ‘I have four sisters, their names are *Shumei* (plum blossom), *Yulan* (yulan magnolia), *Cuizhu* (bamboo) and *Wenju* (daisy).’ Interviewee D3 said:

‘Every season, we go back and take photos with flowers: oleander, cherry blossom, peach blossom, crab apple and rape. The meaning of flowers to us old ladies is very rich. Flowers represent spring, the revival of all things, the atmosphere of youth, the joy of the mood, to follow the mood of childhood. The colour of the flower is bright, symbolising youth, beauty, elegance and happiness. When the camera shutter is pressed, it feels as if it is as beautiful as a flower and will never fade.’

Through the above interview analysis, it is not difficult to conclude that flowers and the aesthetic taste represented by flowers have influenced this generation. The aesthetic concept of flowers has a subtle influence on the aesthetic taste of *dama*, from body dressing and clothes to their names.

The body decoration of some Chinese *dama*, as well as their yearning and aesthetic preference for their own body aesthetics, is subject to the requirements and expectations of today's social standards of beauty. The result of this body aesthetic is strongly influenced by the social and cultural development after the reform and opening up. For example, Sheng (2021) argues that the use of cosmetics and the booming beauty economy following the Reform and Opening Up further reinforced Chinese women's standards of beauty and reflected changes in age hierarchies and the emergence of new social norms. The influence of mass media and sociocultural change on these perceptions of beauty is also highlighted, with women facing significant pressure to pursue physical beauty (Zhang, 2012). Despite these pressures, there is a growing focus on self-care and self-compassion among older women, reflecting a shift towards individualisation and personal enjoyment in post-Mao China (Shea, 2014). Liebelt (2016) argues that Maoist thinking and conditions in Pre-reform China left women with no choice but to create moral selves. Wang (2015, p.52) pointed out ‘the body culture of females

reflects normative womanhood in a given culture, and are subordinate to historical transformation'. To sum up, all scholars have noticed that women's body aesthetics is influenced by a certain economic, political and cultural background, and contemporary women's body aesthetics are different from the reform and opening up, especially in different Mao era.

Furthermore, in the cases investigated, almost all the *dama* mentioned the colourless life they experienced in the Mao era when they were young and recalled many of their life experiences to prove this contrast. It is undeniable that this generation of square dance women used to live during the Maoist era, when the guiding principle was "women can hold up half the sky". The Mao era had a distinctly female aesthetic system that was colourless. The dancing *dama* themselves also recognised these two extreme changes in their body, especially compared with the period when they were young in Mao's era. Y5, who worked as a cadre in a *danwei* factory, describes this change:

‘In my youth, I paid little attention to my appearance, simply wearing uniforms for work. Presently, I frequently apply makeup, preferring a lighter touch for everyday wear but opting for heavier makeup when performing in square dancing competitions in front of an audience. My fellow dancers and I regularly exchange ideas and tips on makeup and styling. The standard of living for my generation has significantly improved, prompting me to become more mindful of my appearance. Unlike previous generations, we place greater emphasis on our physical appearance and grooming.’

There is no doubt that interviewee W4 and Y4, or any other ostentatiously dressed mid-age and older women in urban China, have been able to shatter the stereotypes of body aesthetics left over from the revolutionary period and reshape an aesthetic orientation that challenges fresh

femininity. In order to discuss the extreme contrast of the dancing *dama's* body aesthetics proposed between contemporary China and the revolution period in this chapter, and thus to demonstrate the re-creation of body aesthetics of *dama*, it is necessary for us to understand the body aesthetics under traditional aesthetic values, especially after the People's Republic of China was declared in 1949. This can lay a foundation for understanding the challenges and exaggeration of aesthetics of contemporary square-dancing *dama*.

4.2 Erasure of Women's Body Aesthetic from the Mass Movement of the People's Republic of China

Since the founding of the new China in 1949, and especially in the process of building a socialist state during the Maoist era, the CCP has placed great emphasis on political and ideological unity. During this period, China experienced many landmark events, such as the Great Leap Forward movement of 1958-1962, the Great Famine of 1959-1961, and the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976. These movements influenced how people looked at women and how they understood body aesthetics and formed the embodiment of aesthetics formed in typical revolutionary aesthetics. Especially, during the Cultural Revolution, the promotion by the Chinese Communist Party of an ideology of 'Smash' (*posijiu*) had a definite impact on Chinese women's body aesthetics. Specifically, it was a complete rejection and overthrow of traditional culture, ideology, living customs and old institutions under the leadership of the Communist Party. This movement emphasised the goal of achieving socialist transformation and revolution. The 'Smash' included old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits (Anderson, 2006), with the aim of promoting a radical change in society and establishing a new socialist order. (Mao, 2012).

Under the influence of the most organised and repressive political hierarchy established by the Chinese revolutionary regime, associating self-decoration of women's bodies with the

bourgeoisie and counterrevolutionary, showing such feminine behaviour may lead to a person being condemned as politically incorrect, seriously hindering a person's normal life and career prospects (Evans, 1997). Mao's China sought to challenge traditional gender roles, with women being encouraged to rebel against patriarchy, body discipline, and femininity. Women have an important mission to rebel against: against the constraints used to regulate the female body, against the stubborn notions of femininity that are confined to traditional frames (Huang 2010). With this, the concept of fashion was subsequently redefined, and relevant scholars explored the mainstream evaluation of fashion in Maoist society. Zhao (1997, p.43-59) states,

‘Fashion regarded as bourgeois in origin and surplus to authentic human needs, was for many years more or less abolished, which turned China into a country of people dressed in grey, black, white, army green, and navy blue—the colour scheme of Chinese communism’.

As a result, a set of presentations and guidelines regarding the aesthetic value of the Chinese women (*Zhongguo funv*) body gradually developed during the Maoist period in China. This aesthetic presentation is defined in this study as the revolutionary aesthetics of femininity erasures, and it has a powerful influence on the women body aesthetic orientation until the 21st.

The women's body aesthetic orientation of femininity erasures can be discussed from a number of representative visual images, including photographs of women performing the loyalty dance in unisexual and frugality dress, accompanied by the dance movements of Mao worship; Female Red Guards gathered together in public spaces with militant military femininity; And be called ‘blue ants’ of factory labour women (Kunz, 1996; Schwartz, 1960). The image of the Red Guards conforms to the Communist Party of China's setting of the aesthetic of the female body and conveys new gender patterns and norms. This image usually presents military clothing, simple hairstyles and no make-up, emphasising the ambiguity of gender identities and

the practical, combative nature of the role (North, 2021). They were assigned the meaning of femininity and erasures of body aesthetics that have to be taken into consideration. Therefore, this section will examine the aesthetic orientation of femininity erasures by propaganda paintings, real photo portrayals and other visual cultural pictures.

Femininity Erasure During the Revolutionary Period

The aesthetic of women is femininity erasures can be valued in the specific context of the revolutionary period of the Republic of New China, which can revolve around the discourse of women's emancipation put forward by the state. The famous political discourse of Mao is 'Women can hold up half the sky (*funv neng ding banbian tian*)'. This is a famous slogan coined by Mao Zedong, which means that women have an equally significant status and position in the social, economic and political spheres. This slogan emphasised the significance of women in the construction of society and advocated gender equality and women's liberation (Chang, 2003). The Communist Party put forward this manifesto to encourage women to actively participate in various social activities and believed that women should be given equal rights and opportunities and be able to utilise their talents (Brownell and Wasserstrom, 2002).

The elimination of femininity in Maoist China was a complex process, as seen in the experiences of the sent-down (*xia xiang*) youth during the Cultural Revolution (Yang, 2017). While state rhetoric emphasised gender equality, it depoliticised gender and silenced women, with class struggle taking precedence (Yang, 2017). The erasure of gender and sexuality from public space was a key feature of this period (Roberts, 2006). Therefore, the thesis of this section is focused on the argument of women's body aesthetic of femininity, and analysis of what is really aesthetic under the influence of these formal discourses, thus forming the two extreme changes between women's daily body aesthetics between the time of contemporary society and the revolution period.

Firstly, the analysis of asexual style and 'unisex' image of women's body decoration and clothing in visualisation can show the femininity erasures of body aesthetics. During the Cultural Revolution, the Zhongshan suit was widely revered and popularised as a political symbol and a social trend. The popularity of this garment reflected the suppression and elimination of femininity at that time. It can be shown in Figure 4.6 that the Zhongshan suit was simply tailored, the top would have had two pockets, and the trousers might have been a straight style or loose-fitting straight-legged trousers. The fabric is usually cotton or other durable material. Colours are usually dark or neutral, such as grey, green or blue. It is also apparent from Figure 4.6 that the clothing described as plain, well-fitting, and practical for women wearing Zhongshan suits emphasises the plebeian and revolutionary styles. The design and accessories of the garments reflect simplicity and masculinity. Therefore, under the ideology of the Cultural Revolution, the emphasis on one's individualised appearance was seen as a trace of the bourgeoisie and considered incompatible with the revolutionary spirit. Consequently, The Communists restricted the expressions associated with femininity, believing that asexual appearance was beauty and should be celebrated. Women were encouraged to dress in a male-like Zhongshan suit in order to eliminate gender differences and to pursue an image of uniformity, simplicity and masculinity (Fig. 4.6).



Fig. 4.6 Young girls during the Cultural Revolution fell in love with the Zhongshan suit. Source: China Daily (2015)

Xiaozhuang's photographic work (Fig. 4.7) of 'Female members of Hongjing Brigade, Fangshan Commune, Jiangning County, Nanjing, performed Loyalty Dance in 1966'. The women who participate in loyalty dance are the same group of middle-aged and older women who participate in modern square dance, and both take place in the context of a gathering of dance activities in urban public spaces. This photo is an obvious contrast with the female image in Fig. 4.3 (Dancing *dama* in Nanjing Mochou Lake Park). Although the women in both pictures are ordinary people living in Nanjing, they are in the same pose, looking up at the sky at 45 degrees and bending their knees slightly. Therefore, by comparing and analysing both the Zhongzi Dance and the contemporary Square Dance, this study can find that they share some of the same iconic dance movements, such as raising their arms above their heads with their fingertips and palms facing the sky to represent embracing the "Red Sun", or straightening their arms and clenching their fists to represent strength. The pose of loyalty dance is not only not

sexy, but also women's clothes are androgynous and simple. The wide pants and tops completely cover the curves of women's bodies, which is in sharp contrast to the image of women showing their curves in Fig. 4.3.



Fig. 4.7 Zhuang X. (2011) Female members of Hongjing Brigade, Fangshan Commune, Jiangning County, Nanjing, performed Loyalty Dance. [The Red Album: Photographic Notes of Xiaozhuang]. [Photograph] Copyright © Xiao Zhuang. Photo: courtesy People's Publishing House, Beijing.

Secondly, another typical example is that the image of female soldiers propagated under Mao's

ideology affects the body's aesthetic tendency. It is also a quality or nature of the feminine sex to be erased down in the image of female soldiers. In 1961 Mao Zedong's poem "Female Militia Title Photograph - Seven Styles" is a classic poem describing Mao Zedong's ideal image of a woman (Mao, 2020, p.127):

How bright and brave they look, shouldering five-foot rifles

On the parade ground lit up by the first gleams of day

China's daughters have high-aspiring minds,

They love the battle array, not silks and satins.

The last line of the poem is the most classic description of femininity and becomes a metaphor for a new interpretation of the aesthetics of the female body. 'They love the battle array, not silks and satins' expresses a preference for battle and the military over glamorous dress and make-up. The phrase 'not silks and satins' in the poem can be interpreted as a subversion and challenge to the traditional feminine beauty of women's love of dress and adornment, emphasising that women's bodily aesthetics should be warlike on the battlefield, and that the spirit of perseverance, fortitude and combat is to be admired (Noth, 2021).

In addition, the costumes of the Red Guards were also classic Mao-era garments combining parts of the Zhongshan and People's Liberation Army uniforms - grass-green jackets, red star insignia floppy cloth caps, metal wide-buckle belts, and homemade red cufflinks - which were important in shaping their identities and their political-ideological pursuits (Noth, 2021). Politically, their clothing signalled the Red Guards' support for Mao and their opposition to the "capitalists". Ideologically, it symbolised the Red Guards' preference for the utopian, egalitarian and socialist ideals represented by the army; psychosocially, the quasi-uniform was a metaphor for the young rebels' desire to repress authority through imitation. Culturally, this

set of clothing symbols represents many latent desires for heroism and hedonism, hero worship and self-actualisation, collective narcissism and revolutionary romanticism at the same time. (Bailey, 2012; Chang, 2003; Chen, 2001). The Red Guards, who danced the Zhong Zi Dance, usually accompanied their attire with an anthology of Mao Zedong ('Little Red Book') and a gun or bayonet (Figure 4.8). This aesthetic orientation of femininity erasures has been implanted in every aspect of women's daily life, not only in the time of the loyalty dance and everyday life dress is the same.



Fig. 4.8 Koichi Saito (2018) Androgynous militaristic femininity of women Red Guard. [CHINA 1965-2002 Photographs by KOICHI SAITO (Japanese Edition)]. [Photograph] Copyright © Koichi Saito. Photo: courtesy PHOTO CAMP.

Finally, during China's Cultural Revolution, one of the slogans advocated by Mao Zedong was "Time is different, men and women are the same", which proclaimed that men and women were equal not only in terms of political awareness but also in terms of physical equality. The State used the slogan of women's equality to politicise the representation of women body. The femininity of the women's body is seen as a category with only political and practical

significance and is used as a means for the Communist Party to realise its politics. In turn, the CCP equated the traditional notion of femininity with bourgeois ideology, celebrating a working-class identity based on the image of masculinity (Yang and Yan, 2017; Entwisle and Henderson, 2000), but in fact, affected their body aesthetic of femininity erasure. It can be argued through fig. 4.9 is photographic work by Bruno Barbey in 1973, that recorded the working-class women known as blue ants in their normal life routine. In the photo, the revolutionary aesthetic was achieved by wearing generic blue, grey, and green clothing made, of course, from inexpensive fabrics. It can be linked to Chen's (2001) argument that governments use the colours and patterns of clothing as a propaganda tool to emphasise unity, discipline and political ideology through uniformity. In addition, the wearing of particular garments became a way of expressing loyalty to the government and participation in political campaigns, closely linked to citizenship (Chen, 2001). In Huang's (2019) article, which also supports some of the above, the more typical image of women during the Mao period was that of labouring women working in factories. Labouring women working in factories usually wore simple, durable work clothes during the Mao era to protect their safety and comfort at work. The simple cuts were paired with dark or neutral colours such as blue, grey or green (Huang, 2019). Thus, this type of clothing reflects the importance placed on labourer identity and the neglect of femininity at the time



Fig. 4.9 Workers at a factory in Datong, Shanxi Province (Bruno, 2015)

In this special revolutionary period, the body aesthetic of femininity erasures meant the imagination of women's status and dignity in the women's liberation movement but vigorously advocated the political significance of the body aesthetic. As Rofel argues (1999), during the revolution, the government emphasised women's participation and equality, encouraging women to join the labour market. At the same time, the government has also emphasised the "masculinisation" of women in an attempt to eliminate traditional gender roles and femininity. This "masculinity" is reflected in the appearance and behaviour of women, such as wearing Zhongshan suits similar to men and maintaining a simple and plain appearance, emphasising the image of perseverance and fortitude. This elimination of femininity reflected the government's understanding and control of gender and social roles, as well as the promotion of social change and revolutionary movements.

In conclusion, under the Maoist Chinese visual culture, it was unimaginable for women's

bodies to be dressed and decorated with bright coloured and patterns, and the body aesthetic orientation of femininity erasures was intended to convey political messages, women were glorified in the state media as public roles of proletarian fighters and socialist builders, visually equating revolutionary enthusiasm and loyalty with women's body aesthetic. This is in sharp contrast to the contemporary *dama's* body aesthetics discussed in the previous section. Coloured and floral patterns contrasted with colourless bodies, *dama* who showed their graceful curves in public contrasted with women who wore loose-cut wool suits. The analysis of these visual materials undoubtedly proves the two extremes of female body aesthetics, from the Mao period after the founding of New China to contemporary China.

4.3 The Exaggerated *Dama* in Square Dancing

The aesthetic representation of the *dama* in daily life is discussed in section 4.1, it is covering a large group of dancing *dama* in daily square dancing, because square dancing has been integrated into the daily life of the *dama*, many *dama* will wear ordinary clothes and daily dress, or dress up slightly to participate in this daily square dance activity.

However, in the square dance activities, there are a large number of dancers will specially dress up for the square-dancing activities, including clothes and props. Moreover, during the square-dancing stage performance process, many dancing *dama* pursue more professional performances. There is a colourful visual feast embodied in the dancing *dama* within the square-dancing activities and performance, which can attract more visual attention than the daily *dama*.

Dance activities give important meaning to the aesthetic presentation of the body, and are related to the special cultural background of China.

Dance activities give important meaning to the aesthetic presentation of the body, and are

related to the special cultural background of China. As some scholars state dance, as a form of expression, plays a significant role in shaping body aesthetics and self-identities. Thomas (2003) provides a broader perspective, integrating the sociology of the body and dance studies to emphasise the embodied nature of dance as a form of cultural knowledge. Bock (2011) further explores this, discussing how dance can be a form of self-fashioning, particularly in the context of exotic identities. In the context of modern dance, female dancers have been found to have higher body appreciation and lower drive for thinness, with identity as a dancer being correlated with body appreciation (Langdon, 2010). In addition, dancing as a kind of performance is mainly associated with and identified as an aesthetic practice in the history of China. The Chinese culture and socialist ideology have shaped the aesthetic practice of the body in dance, and its significance comes from the unique common experience of the nation (Um, 2005).

Therefore, it is necessary for this section to examine the aesthetic value of dancing *dama* in relation to dance activities in this section, among which the most obvious discussion will be from the perspective of ‘*dama* with folk aesthetics’. In addition, especially in the context of square-dancing competitions and performances on stage, the dramatic effects of exaggerated decoration and posture enriched and extended the daily body aesthetics representation of *dama* in contemporary daily life, which will be discussed from the perspective of the ‘*dama* with drama’.

4.3.1 *Dama* with Folk Aesthetics

A considerable amount of literature has been published that square dancing both in daily exercise and performed on the stage is mainly based on Chinese folk dance,⁸ and adds its own

⁸ Chinese folk dance originated from people's working life. Chinese folk dance has a long history and integrates rich

interpretation and elements to form a novel folk dance (Wu, 2020). As Seetoo and Zou (2016) observes,

‘Choreography for public dances that is based on Chinese folk and ethnic minority dances already carries with it an aesthetic familiarity that appeals to both dancers and spectators. This kind of choreography also reveals the extent to which modern Chinese folk-dance genres – their aesthetics and conventions – are deeply ingrained in popular imaginary’.

Therefore, in this section, I will explore how the folk aesthetic presented by square dancing promotes exaggerated physical aesthetic expression. This study found that in square dancing, the aesthetic of *yangge* in folk dance is like a factor, which has penetrated into every aspect of the dancing body aesthetic. Before discussing it, it is necessary to make an introduction to *yangge* dance. *Yangge* dance (rice-sprout dance), as a popular folk literature and form of folk art that originated sometime within the Song Dynasty, it is based on folk stories and legends, so it is closer to civilian life.⁹ The *yangge* dance is popular in rural areas and is usually performed by people in north China to celebrate during festivals. T. The performance emphasised the interaction between the actors and the masses, showing the phenomenon of singing and dancing to exorcise evil spirits and pray for a good harvest. It is regarded as long-term development in the folk for the sustenance of the people's feelings and will, with a wide

cultural elements to express folk life and emotions. It includes dragon dance, lion dance, dance and other diverse forms, often performed in traditional festivals, celebrations and weddings and other occasions, is an important part of the Chinese cultural tradition. The folk dance in China have a range of themes, diverse forms and rich contents, including the dance forms of the Han and other minority nationalities.

⁹ The Song dynasty was an imperial dynasty of China that began in 960 and lasted until 1279 (959 A.D.– 1278 A.D.).

range of mass participation and a profound foundation for the people's life (Gerdes, 2008). 'When the People's Republic of China was formally established in 1949, *yangge* had a new form, this new form of *yangge* became an official celebratory art' (Hung, 2005, p.84). Holm (1984) shares the same argument and discusses that rice-planting dances were greatly supported and encouraged in Yan'an because they were seen as an effective tool that could arouse the enthusiasm of the masses and convey the political slogans of the Communist Party. The government used the rice-planting dance to promote communist ideology, emphasising collectivism, labour and agricultural production. The movements, lyrics and performances in the rice-planting dances were used to convey these political messages in order to strengthen the authority of the Communist Party and the political awareness of the masses.

Overall, *yangge* is a folk-dance form of the Han nationality. There are different types of *yangge* dances in different regions, such as Northeast *yangge* dance, Shanbei *yangge* dance and Shandong *yangge* dance. Regardless of regional differences, the aesthetic value of *yangge* is similar. *Yangge* sustained as a cultural practice in various forms, the current style of the *yangge* dance has not only retained the traditional twisting, stilts, waist drum, flower sticks and land boat, but also added modern dance, ski dance, fan dance, lantern dance, and so on (Gerdes, 2008). The following will explore the folk aesthetic expression of square dancing and the specific connection between it and *yangge* from the three aspects of dance props, dress up and dance movements.

Dance Props

In the daily dancing practice, dancers decorate their bodies with props in their hands, so as to realise the visual expression effect of the folk-art aesthetics of *yangge*. In the field investigation for participatory observation of the Dagang Dance Group in 2021 in Qingdao, three to four dance forms would be included in the 1.5-hour dance activity for the same group of dancers,

namely fan dance (Fig. 4.10), handkerchief dance (Fig. 4.11) and waist drum dance (Fig. 4.12), all of which are the continuation and transformation of the traditional folk dance *yangge*. The dress of the waist drum dance in Fig. 4.12 is a category of folk *yangge* dance, it is considered to be copied from the propaganda painting of the waist drum dance in the Mao Zedong period in Fig. 4.13. Dancers attach double-sided waist drums to their waists and beat them as they dance, and pieces of coloured cloth are attached to the drumsticks or held in the dancers' hands to flutter with the dance posture (Emily, 2022). It can be argued that the use of bodies decorated with dance props is a symbol of folk aesthetics in the contemporary dancing *dama's* bodies. In square dance activities, dancers usually use dance props such as handkerchiefs, fans, ribbons, swords, which are often a natural part of Chinese folk dance. Dancers attach these props to their bodies or hold them in their hands to embellish their performances to achieve the effect and atmosphere of the dance.

Therefore, many of the decorated dancing bodies in the contemporary square dancing were derived from performance practices of China's *yangge* dance. It can add the visual aesthetics of the *yangge* performance to square dancing. The main props are folding fans, polygonal handkerchiefs and silk belts around the waist. The folding fan and handkerchief are constantly used to dance new patterns in the performance, the silk belt also with the dance movement to create a sense of folk art.



Fig. 4.10 Fan dance in square dancing. Photography by author, Dagang Street, Qingdao, 2021



Fig. 4.11 Handkerchief dance in square dancing. Photography by author, Dagang Street, Qingdao, 2021



Fig. 4.12 The dancers in the square dancing dressed up as waist dancers. Photography by author, Dagang Street, Qingdao, 2021



Fig. 4.13 Su G. (1950) Celebrating the People's Republic of China's National Day (qingzhu zhonghua renmin gongheguo guoqingjie [Photograph] Copyright © International Institute of Social History. Photo: Courtesy of the IISH/Stefan R. Landsberger Collection.

Dress up

In addition to props, it can also explore the body aesthetic of dancing *dama* in square dancing activities from the perspective of dress up, and presents the folk *yangge* aesthetic in daily dancing and stage performances. It can be clearly seen in Fig.4.14, that these 14 dancers are wearing uniform clothes, which are the typical Han folk dance and *yangge* style. The clothes are mainly composed of bright pink and green grass, which forms a sharp contrast. Even though the shoes are bright red, all the details are considered in the overall folk aesthetic effect of the body. The silk fans in their hands contribute to the overall visual aesthetic effect. Silk fans are typical props of the *yangge* dance, and they are composed of red, yellow and green, forming a strong visual impact with the combination of clothing. Fan dance movements usually include spinning, shaking, flipping and waving. Dancers may dance the fan with their hands in a variety of graceful patterns and flourishes, matching the rhythm of the music and the choreography to show off the dancer's skills and dance posture. In the new choreography of contemporary square dance creations, many of the decorated dancing bodies are from previous *yangge* performance practices. It can be traced back to the colour of the *yangge* performance, with strong and eye-catching colours as the main feature, the clothing is mainly red, green, orange and yellow, and the bodies of these colours on the stage provide an exaggerated visual impact.



Fig. 4.14 Square dancing with folk aesthetic. Photography by author, Cangkou Park, Qingdao, 2021

In the daily square-dancing activity, we can see that square dancing *dama* are usually standing in lines and wearing different clothes, but it is worth noting that the colour scheme of their clothes reflects the bright aesthetic style of folk dance (Fig. 4.15). Costumes seek bright colours, and dramatic floral embellishments. For example, in typical *yangge* clothes, green and red are matched with flower pants with peony flower patterns. This style of dancing clothes reflects a kind of folk harvest and lively festival aesthetic value.



Fig. 4.15 The dama's body curves in an urban public space. Photography by author, Cangkou Park, Qingdao, 2021

Dance Movements

In addition to exploring the aesthetic value of the folk art of square-dancing *dama* from the body decoration of dance props and dress-up, the dance movements of square-dancing *dama* are also the aesthetic legacy of folk *yangge* dance. In the past decade, with the development and continuous challenges of square dancing, the *dama* prefer dance forms with higher technical difficulty, a wider range of movements and more emphasis on the body (*xing ti*) with curves. The women in the square-dancing troupe move their waists and swing their hips, trying their best to create exaggerated body expressions from head to foot with every joint. These exaggerated dance movements and the curves of the body presented can only be valued in square dancing, which further extends the aesthetic value of *damas* in the context of folk dance and dance posture (Fig. 4.14).

These exaggerated movements can be seen in the *yangge* performances. The main action in the *yangge* is twisting, and there is the saying that dancing has two characteristics. The first is that

the performance shows each joint of the flexible body; dance as head, chest, abdomen, waist, hip, knee, hand and wrist, elbow, shoulder all want to move, it is rich in modelling. The torsion of the body, the foot of the movement of twisting formed the body curve of three bends of the motive force, quite enchanting and exaggerated beauty. The second is the performance of the action range, which is relatively large, with exaggerated forms of expression, showing a person's feeling is dynamic.

Therefore, the appearance of these bodies in the square-dancing activity can be seen in the shadow of the folk art *yangge* from costumes, props, and even dance movements. Based on the analysis of the expression of the body aesthetics of dance, the folk *yangge* dance is often considered an early precursor of square dancing in public spaces in contemporary China. square dancing offers an opportunity to continue the aesthetic value in the aesthetic system of folk dance to the body aesthetics of dancing *dama*.

4.3.2 *Dama* in Drama

In many non-daily square dances, especially in competitions, the performance was different, and at that time, many *dama* pursued a more exaggerated and theatrical or professional physical body performance. This section attempts to further promote the exaggerated body aesthetic of *dama* in the context of square-dancing competitions and stage performance, which more obviously reflects the dramatic aesthetic characteristics than the imagery of everyday square dance. It still analyses the visual information about the body appearance and costumes of contemporary dancing *dama*, based on the visual interpretation and analysis, to show how the dramatic costumes of square-dancing *dama* symbolically carry the aesthetic value of *dama*'s bodies is far beyond the recognition so far.

As discussed in the previous section 4.1, dancing *dama* in everyday aesthetics, compared to their everyday routine of using light make-up, many participants wore heavier make-up and

decoration during on-stage dance competitions. Fig. 4.16 is a photo courtesy of interviewee D5 during the interview. The photo records the moment when five dancers of the square-dance performance team took selfies with their beautiful costumes. In this photo, a dramatic aesthetic can be achieved through the staged body costumes by heavy blush and lipstick paired with a bright pink headpiece and even accessories at the wrist. The style of their costumes comes from traditional folk dance, and the peony flower pattern on the chest is an invariable presence in most costumes of folk dance. It is hard to hide the wrinkles on their made-up faces, but their bright and cheerful smiles make people feel confident and happy inside. They present a more exaggerated aesthetic image with dramatic effects compared to the original visual image of the contemporary daily *dama* and the image of the daily square-dancing *dama*.



Fig. 4.16 Square-dancing dama taking selfies. Photography by Interviewee D5. Photo: courtesy interviewee D5

The decoration is exaggerated in the *dama's* body, they did it to show off a dramatic effect during the stage performance. The researcher was a participant who observed the scene of the dance team of Dagang Dance Group participating in the square-dancing competition. The photo

clearly records the two dancers' make-up preparation before the competition. Without professional make-up artists, they usually do their make-up for each other or themselves. In the picture, a dancer carefully applies thick eyeliner, heavy green eye shadow, and false lashes to another dancer in order to make her eyes look more extensive and more vivid while performing on stage. In other words, they are not doing a make-up, they are doing facial painting art. In addition, green eyeshadow with red headwear gives the audience an exciting and dramatic visual impact through contrasting solid colours to highlight the dancer's face. This style of costume is exclusive to the square dance stage performance in the context of the competition (Fig. 4.17).



Fig. 4.17 Square dancers decorate each other's bodies before the competition. Photography by author, Dagang Dance Group Competition Stage, Qingdao, 2019

The *dama's* head-to-toe dressing is the aesthetic presentation of their bodies with a certain dramatic effect, which comes from the aesthetic tendency of the dramatic performance of

socialist national dance dramas (Fig. 4.18) in the Chinese historical. The photo is the one of the most popular *yangge* dance from the 1953 festival. Therefore, square dancing is sometimes similar to *yangge*, especially in body decoration, and the dancers usually wear traditional folk costumes or opera costumes, such as colorful robes, hair accessories, and turbans. Especially in the context of stage performance, dancers are usually dressed up more formally and solemnly, emphasizing the unity and tidiness of the group.



Fig. 4.18 Wilcox (2020) The drama on the stage of folk dance [China Perspectives]. [illustration]. Artist's collection. © Emily Wilcox.

In this light, to some extent, the body decoration of these on-stage performers shows that, by wearing heavier make-up and using exaggerated accessories, some *dama* may extend the contemporary *dama's* body aesthetic with dramatic effectiveness, and these women create contemporary folk dramatic aesthetic values through the square-dancing competition platform to influence the public.

The above discussion clearly reveals that *dama* use folk-style body decoration and heavy make-up of dramatic effectiveness in pursuit of having this professional performance influence the aesthetic choices of the *dama's* body. Therefore, this group of square-dancing *dama* have enriched the original meaning of dancing *dama* and extended the aesthetic value of *dama* in their daily life. The dramatically decorated bodies and visual folk-type display of the square-dancing *dama's* body give meaning to their bodies in relation to ideals of the exaggerated body aesthetic.

Chapter Summary

The conclusion of this chapter can be summarized from two aspects. Firstly, it is necessary to summarise the daily body aesthetic presentation of the square-dancing *dama*. Our findings provide evidence that contemporary square-dancing bodies indicate the challenged, subverted and altered traditional body aesthetic of the age-graded nature of body culture and women's aesthetic of the revolutionary period. For example, challenging previous depictions of women's bodies, which is that women's physical presentation is shaped by the traditional societal expectation that all middle-aged and older women should be quiet, reserved, and even play the role of caregiver in the family (Zhan, 1996). However, the fresh argument of this study, which was derived by some valid primary data from interviews, is that almost all of the older women mentioned the colourless life they experienced in their youth during the Mao era and recalled many life experiences to demonstrate the contrast between contemporary body aesthetics and those of the Mao era. The middle-aged and older women involved in square dancing break the stereotypes of body aesthetics inherited from the revolutionary period and reinvent an aesthetic orientation that challenges fresh femininity. These finding echoes what previous authors Liebelt (2016), Sheng (2021), Shea, (2014), and Zhang (2012) have noted, that women's body aesthetics are influenced by certain economic, political, and cultural contexts, and that

contemporary women's body aesthetics are different from the Reform and Opening Up and, in particular, different from the Mao era.

To elaborate on this extreme contrast between the *dama* body aesthetic from the Mao and contemporary periods, as well as their exaggerated body presentation during the square-dancing activity, it is crucial to mention that it is a generational phenomenon, not just a family or individual choice. The transformation of women's body aesthetic from 'femininity erasure' to 'gorgeously dressed' is considered by *dama* to be the symbol of youth and beauty. This point is worthy of in-depth analysis regarding why rich and bright colours and flower patterns of body presentation are connected with being young and full of youthful spirit. This aspect is not only interpreted as an attempt to cover the dull complexion and wrinkles accumulated by age, but, most important, it is an expression exclusive to this *dama* group in order to opposites and challenges the stereotype of traditional aesthetic of mid-age and elderly women, which can be consulted in two ways.

On the one hand, the dancing *damas* are trying to relive their youthful years. Throughout the review of the visual presentation of the female body during Mao's revolutionary period, the young women at that time were today's square-dancing *damas*. When they were young, their physical body expression, be it in school or in the factory, was completely controlled by Mao's ideology. They had little or no colourful body experience. Therefore, the 'be gorgeously dressed' aesthetic value expressed by them in contemporary life is them trying to relive their youth, but is in great contrast to their actual youthful years. On the other hand, dance *damas* want to change the stereotyped body aesthetics of middle-aged and old women, which are remnants from their parent's generation. The perception of the aesthetic value of the middle-aged and elderly female body among this generation was influenced by their parents. When their parents were middle-aged and old, they experienced Mao's rule and ideology, and their

clothes followed the ‘erasure of femininity’ described in Chapter Four. This generation of square-dancing *damas* highlights youth through colourful body decorations to present an extreme contrast to their parents, further implying that square-dancing activities give *damas* the courage to challenge, break through, and express their body display.

In addition, this chapter offers an examination of how the square dancing *dama* reproduces the aesthetic form of the square dancing with folk aesthetics and dramatic effects, through the visual analysis of the exaggerated decorations, costumes, props and exaggerated dance movements of the daily square dancing and stage performance. This finding not only further emphasises the close connection between the female body and the aesthetic concept in contemporary society (Bartky, 2015; Yang, 2017) further explicitly states that in the context of Chinese social culture, stage dance as a kind of performance is linked with an aesthetic practice. In addition, Chinese culture and socialist ideology shape the aesthetic practice of the body in dance. The significance of this aesthetic practice comes from the unique common experience and cognition of the nation (Wilcox, 2019; Um, 2005). Therefore, I make the point that this examination not only found square-dancing *dama* refashioning themselves in a new aesthetic representation approach, but also that the way they chose to present their body aesthetics will be commonly used to think about dancing *dama* body image in contemporary China.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE SQUARE

Chapter Five: The Square

In the previous chapters, I outlined the knowledge production of the dance community and dance bodies in the phenomenon of square dancing. More important, square dancing is ‘*Guangchang Wu*’ in Chinese, which combines two notions: ‘square (*guangchang*)’ and ‘dancing (*wu*)’. In this chapter, I argue that, to explain the phenomenon of square dancing, one must pay attention to the notion of the square in urban China, which hosts the dance communities and dance bodies the previous chapter focused on. With the ongoing popularity and expansion of square dancing, dancing *dama* not only dance in urban public squares, but also sometimes occupy other urban spaces, such as basketball courts, roadsides, and subway stations. If the space meets the physical requirements for dancing, including having a flat pavement, a wide area, being well lit, and generally having the potential to complement the music, then it is deemed suitable (Martin and Chen, 2020, p.12; Tian and Wise, 2022; Chen and Chen, 2018).

A large and growing body of literature has acknowledged these alternative spaces for square dancing from the urban studies’ perspective. Regarding the research context discussed in the introduction, scholars have studied the square-dancing space from the perspectives of social urbanology, urban public space, urban civic culture, spatial contradictions, and conflict dimensions. Martin and Chen (2020) researched the physical square where square dancing takes place and argues that it can be related to ‘loose space’, ‘found spaces’, or ‘designed’ spaces. In other words, the space for square dancing redefines the way public space is used. Dancers free up Spaces that would otherwise be confined to specific intended uses and give them new functions to suit their needs. These alternative spaces for public life arise from the complex demands placed on them by their users (Martin and Chen, 2020, p.15).

However, a few researchers have developed and interpreted the square in the context of square

dancing and considering its role in people's everyday life. The square, as the location of square-dance activities, is discussed in the final chapter of this study to provide an in-depth and comprehensive interpretation of the phenomenon of square dancing in contemporary Chinese cities.

This chapter is structured into three sections that illustrate two transformation processes of the square in the context of the square-dancing phenomenon. I answer the following three research questions: 1. Where does square dancing occur, and what is the role of the square in contemporary urban China? 2. How should the notion of the square be reinterpreted in the context of urban China? 3. What was the cloud square during the COVID-19 pandemic?

In the first section, I review the literature to explore the original meaning of the urban square in the Chinese context and to demonstrate the original visual presentation of the square. However, square dancing does not only happen in urban squares. In this case, there is a paradox between the name 'square' in square dancing and the original concept of squares. It is worth considering whether square dancing is redefining or changing the concept of the square in urban China. The second section is dedicated to understanding the first transformation of the concept of the square, revealing the square-dancing activities that occupy various spaces in urban China. I argue the notion of the square in the square-dancing phenomenon is 'the square where people dance'. I analysed the findings from the secondary data and the interviews with and observations of dancers in a contemporary Chinese square-dancing group to form much of the argument in this section. I argue the square has been transformed into a flowing and intangible location of the square-dancing activity, one that people engage with throughout their everyday lives and that is influenced by everyday urbanism in contemporary China. In the final section, I analyse the square during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was the second transformation of the square concept. The considerable amount of documentary research,

including interviews, enabled me to acquire a complex understanding of the concept of squares, which is explored from two aspects regarding the pandemic: the squares existing in mobile cabin hospitals for patients, and the online cloud squares for ordinary residents. I argue the square continued to engage patients and healthy people's everyday lives, even during the strict nationwide quarantines in China, and contributed to everyday urbanism in the Chinese context, moving from collective to individual perspectives and from physical to cloud spaces.

5.1 The Square is not a Square

The term 'square' has markedly different understandings in connotation between China and the West: in the general Western context, the square was originally defined in the context of urban planning and architecture, as 'any large open urban space, often linked to a prestigious building' (Davies and Jokiniemi, 2008, p.284), or 'An urban public open space, often planted or paved, surrounded on all sides by, in front of or between buildings' (Davies and Jokiniemi, 2008, p.357). Squares are often located in the center of traditional towns and are used as places for community socializing and gathering, particularly for the announcement of many political inductions and to show the political power of religion, and even a model of dissent and democratic participation (Rovisco, 2017). According to Başaslan (2022), urban squares are the most efficiently utilised elements of urban planning in areas designed as open spaces. From a sociological point of view, city squares are positioned as important public spaces, that are used by the inhabitants of these areas on special occasions for cultural, social, commercial or political purposes, in short, as places of urban life. Alves (2017) discusses the "square" as an enclosed space of a group of houses around a free space. As a result, above papers emphasizes that urban squares are important public spaces that contribute to the urban environment, cultural identity and social interaction within the urban.

To discuss the understanding of the square in the context of square dancing inevitably involves

moving on to the specific significance of the square in the Chinese context. The term square translates as '*guangchang*' in Chinese, which literally means a broad physical urban public ground and has a unique interpretation, it associated with public activity, has carried very important political, cultural, and social functions for many centuries, and has been symbolically constructed from the top down. Traced back to ancient times, the concept of the square related to the royal square set-up in urban and rural areas during the reign of Zhu Yuanzhang¹⁰, the Emperor Taizu of the Ming Dynasty. Here, central government decrees were conveyed, for such purposes as preaching the laws of the court, commending local virtue, or attacking corrupt officials (Schneewind, 2008). Under imperial power, the urban square, such as the square in the Forbidden City, was used for royal purposes that were not accessible to the citizen. During this period, citizens' social activity and public life usually took place in street spaces.

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the square has been an significant feature of the Chinese urban landscape with high cultural, social and political significance, and a profound impact on the social life of cities (Gaubatz, 2021). It is worth emphasizing that Tiananmen Square is a representative square, which has important political and cultural symbolic significance in China, which has attracted considerable scholarly attention. For example, 'The concept of a square is political in the People's Republic of China. Every city, town, or village must have a square for public gatherings on important (thus political) occasions' (Hung, 2005, p.56). For the Chinese, Tiananmen Square holds a special symbolic significance as the center of political tension and concern in China. For Chinese who do not care about China, Tiananmen Square still represents the heart of the country, a symbol of national authority and national unity (Hung, 1991). Tiananmen Square is an important physical space

¹⁰ Zhu Yuanzhang, Emperor Taizu of the Ming Dynasty (1328 -- 1398), was the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty.

for visual political expression, collective memory, identity and history (Hung, 2005, p.15; Lee, 2009). Li (1979) and Dong (2003) trace the construction history of Tiananmen Square from the 1950s in detail, making it clear that the design of the square is a monumental work influenced by the political and cultural background of the communist regime.

In contemporary urban China, Tiananmen Square is a spellbinding visual emblem of the square's political authority, which is clearly discerned in Fig. 5.1. The square is symmetrically designed on the north-south axis, with the portrait of Mao Zedong and the national emblem of the People's Republic of China hanging high in the centre. In addition, there is the Monument to the People's Heroes, which stands in the centre of the square. Numerous visual messages form the political authority of the square. Starting with Tiananmen Square as a template, not only Mao Zedong's head portrait and national emblem, but also several political elements, such as slogans, sculptures and so on, are used as decoration in the main squares of Chinese cities.

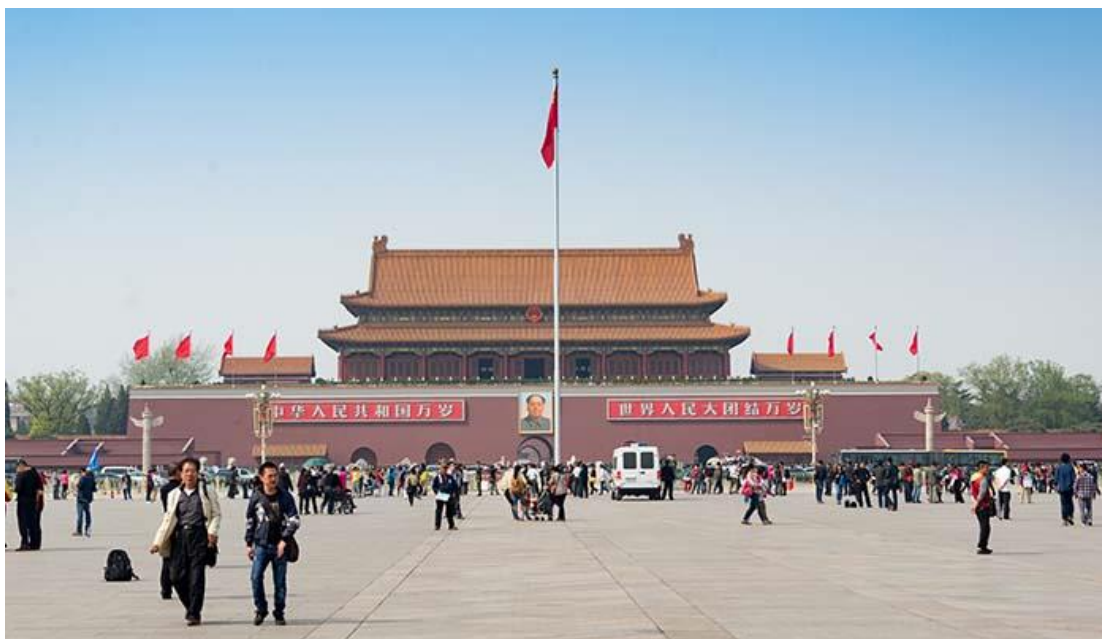


Fig. 5.1 Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China. Source: Jonathan (2013)

More importantly, in the process of the subsequent mass movement, squares became the main

places for political gatherings, which provided the visual messages of the fanaticism that characterized collectivism. Although the populace did not achieve freedom of political speech as enjoyed in the Western squares, the intense fanaticism of the peak of the collectivist period also had no equivalent in the West. For example, the informal movement of the Red Guard performed with dreamy excitement in Tiananmen for Mao's inspection during the first summer of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, and movements for the revolution were performed every single day, which kept the onlookers in a state of hysterical excitement (Jiang, 2005).

From the preserved pictures and audio-visual images of that era, we can often see people in a state of heightened ecstasy (Fig. 5.2). It is worth arguing that everything in this square has a stake in the fate of a nation with a billion inhabitants. Despite the privations and the militarised brutality of those days, in recent years there has, for some, been a growth in nostalgia for the age of collectivism, for the gatherings in the square, singing and dancing, listening to the instructions, shouting slogans. It is perhaps no accident that most of the mainstream groups of contemporary square dancers experienced the fervour of square politics in their youth.



Fig. 5.2 Red Guards hold Mao Zedong's Little Red Book aloft in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China. Source: Weng (1966)

In addition to Tiananmen Square in Beijing, there are many local landmark squares in Chinese cities, often called People's Square (*renmin guangchang*) or regionally named, which have witnessed the historical development and urbanization process of the urban space. They usually integrate political, cultural, historical, memorial and other meanings, and are generally located close to the local people's government centres, libraries, museums and other representative buildings of the city (Jiang and Nakajima, 2022). To name a few examples, People's Square in Shanghai, Tianfu Square in Sichuan, Sun Yat-sen's Mausoleum Square (*zhongshanling guang*

chang) in Nanjing, Xinghai Square in Dalian, and May Fourth Square (*wusi guangchang*) in Qingdao all demonstrate these attributes. These squares not only have distinct and specific cultural and political significance, but also on a physical scale the dimensions of area and range are wide and broad. Some scholars have noted that China's large-scale development of urban square construction is inevitably accompanied by the process of urbanization, and squares are usually large scale, from 5 to 6 hectares to 10 hectares (Su, 2010). Furthermore, a typical interpretation of the urban square in contemporary China is of a wide and broad space that is empty, monotonous, and impersonal (Cai, 2006).

For example, China has the largest urban square in the world, Xinghai Square, which is a representative urban square in that it is invested with significant political-cultural meaning and is physically huge in scale (Xiao, 2009), as can be seen in Fig.5.3. Xinghai Square, located in Dalian City, Liaoning Province, China, was built in 1993 and covers an area of about 1.76 million square meters, which is four times the size of Tiananmen Square (Xiao, 2009). In addition, the centre of the square is paved with 999 pieces of red marble. The red marble is surrounded by a large yellow five-pointed star, a replica of the emblem on the national flag of the People's Republic of China. The red and yellow colours symbolise the national flag of the PRC. The middle of the square, with the nation's largest white ornamental marble columns, is as high as 19.97 metres. The base and fust of the ornamental columns were decorated with nine dragons, which indicated that the Kyushu Huaxia (*jiuzhou huaxia*) children are descendants of the dragon (Fig. 5.4) (Xiao, 2009).



Fig. 5.3 Xinghai Plaza, Dalian, the world's Largest City Square, China. Source: Imaginechina-Tuchong (2018)



Fig. 5.4 The middle of Xinghai Square. Source: Imaginechina-Tuchong (2018)

Therefore, before square-dancing activity became popular, the original square in China already had obvious characteristics that had been ingrained in our minds. In summary, the original visual presentation of the square was understood as a huge open space in the towns and cities, which was wide, broad and empty and had a formalistic, rigidly symmetric pattern. In addition, it had the visual significance of top-down political authority and the fanaticism of collectivist mass rallies.

However, in the complex urban planning and development context of modern China, in addition to the most representative landmark square in the urban space, the next level of the square can be regarded as different scales of open spaces, plazas and squares integrated into the urban space, also functioning as squares. These comprise the main part of urban public space, including a large number of squares built in the 1990s, a phenomenon described by Chinese scholars as the ‘urban square craze’, which means that the rapid development of urbanization and urban infrastructure since the reform and opening up has resulted in the rapid development of square construction (Tang, 2004).

These can be grouped into several types: one is the commercial plazas (*shangye guangchang*), which are usually located in the commercial centre or in front of the shopping malls with their diverse patterns and modes of lighting, which signify the economic development and prosperity of recent decades (Yu, 2021). Another common type is the cultural squares, usually the result of urban planning projects led by government departments, which have specific cultural connotations and are near the cultural infrastructure, such as cultural centres in urban China (Fu et al., 2019). In addition, community open spaces are also a common type; these were integrated into residential areas, allowing people to gather together to relax, socialise and exercise. Station squares are usually located in front of a large bus station, railway station or port passenger station, which is the distribution centre of tourists and other passengers (Hu,

2013; Yang, Wang, and Li, 2020). There are also underground plazas to relieve traffic pressure, among other forms of urban plazas (Zhao et al., 2016).

The above is a general and typical classification of squares in Chinese urban spaces, one which provides the foundation for the first transformation of the square in this chapter. Considering the square in the context of the square-dancing activity, it is clear square dancing activities are not all performed in the nominal square. For example, in Beijing, as well as provincial capitals and cities with symbolic political power, the political power and supervision of urban squares are more regulated than non-provincial capitals. In particular, Tiananmen Square in Beijing and other local landmark squares are subject to regulations and monitoring, lacking the flexibility to easily facilitate spontaneous performances and square dancing by the masses.

In addition, square dance participants have no specific, fixed preference for location, which is flexible and often takes place close to their residence. Xiao and Hilton's quantitative survey confirmed that point: They argue the perception of the physical setting and visual interaction of the square dance soundscape does not affect square dancers' preferences for participating locations. No matter what aspect of square dancing of enjoyment, there is no correlation between specific urban locations (Xiao and Hilton, 2019). Square dancing in China generally has formed autonomously and spontaneously and began to appear in urban areas near the residential community more recently (Chen and Chen, 2018). The initial data of on-site observations of dance group in Qingdao also verified that square dancing has no preferred spatial location. For example, the Yewu Dance Team has changed venues three times in one month. The original site was in front of a sales office. Because the sales office was rebuilt, the ground was dusty, so the dancing group was moved to the open space in front of the commercial square, which was 500 metres away from the original site. Two weeks later, because the streetlight was broken, they were moved to the community garden. In addition to regular

dancing at night, this group sometimes dances in a large park nearby during the day and early in the morning.

Thinking about the illustration of the square-dancing activity itself, evolving and growing in an urban space, it is also important to emphasise that square dancing does not refer to activities that only take place in urban squares. However, this square-dancing activity is called a ‘square’ dancing, which has been recognised and publicised as such by the authorities and the public. In this case, there is a paradox between the naming of squares in square dancing and the original concept of squares. It is worth considering whether square dancing is redefining or changing the concept of the square in urban China.

When square dancing first became popular, it usually took place in the nominal urban squares or near the participants’ residences, such as community squares, cultural and memorial squares and commercial squares. Although square dancing takes place in the urban square, with similar semantics, the square as it is used in square dancing is different from the original square. In the dancing square, the residents of enclosed individual units of commercial homes in the distance of the picture are all gathered here. During the dancing, the square is already crowded with jumping and cheering participants and filled with collective revelry. In more detail, this square is music and visual-related, light-assisted, temporarily occupied and boundaryless — and it involves spontaneous dancing. They can freely socialise, dance and release themselves in the square, filling the otherwise empty, formalistic, monotonous, impersonal and political authority square with bottom-up, spontaneous, lively and passionate dancing activity (Fig. 5.5). It is a carnival square of visual and auditory pleasure; it is vibrant, stimulating, dynamic, cheerful, unrestrained and enthusiastic.



Fig. 5.5 Square dancing in urban public spaces in Hankou District, Wuhan, China. Source: Chinese Visual (2022)

In this sense, the square in the context of square-dancing activities is formed by bottom-up dancing activities, rather than the original understanding of the urban square, one that is top-down, officially designated, planned and politically and culturally guaranteed like Tiananmen Square and Renmin Square in China, and people usually cannot dance in those squares as a bottom-up activity. Therefore, square dancing extends, enriches or even redefines the concept of the square, because it is generated by the spontaneous gathering of dancers as a collective social activity. The existing form of this space is dominated by the will of the dancers. The related dancing activity generated by dancers' interactions fills this location, endowing the square with fresh meaning and value. Thus, in the following section, I will discuss the specific interpretation of the square to illustrate the concept of the square is being redefined by the everyday activity of square dancing.

5.2 The Square Is Where People Dance

In the previous section, I presented typical cases where square dancing took place in the nominal square, but even so, it changed the natural concept of the square. I discussed and emphasised the significance of square dancing in the production of squares, which is paradoxical with the original square concept. However, there are other cases where square dancing is now performed in urban spaces that were not in nominal squares.

With the development and expansion of square dancing, it is increasingly becoming the hegemon of the urban open space, the dancers can perform anywhere in the urban space. The square is the spontaneous choice of the dancers; the dance square has no fixed or prescribed location and can be flexibly changed (Peng et al., 2020). Whether urban open space, semi-open space or indoor space, space can be and is occupied by square dancing activities, such as parks, car parks, markets, streets, and mobile cabin hospitals.

I offer several examples of dancing location in this section that are illustrate the notion of squares: the square in streets, comprehensive parks, markets and parking lots. The reason is that, on the one hand, these examples of selected square-dancing locations are extremely relevant and typical because they creatively understand and reinterpret the concept of the square, but they are also different and distinctive and cover the various types of urban spaces and different groups of people, even linking everyday spaces and daily routines together. They will serve to form and reinforce the argument of this chapter that the square is where people dance, has integrated into the everyday space of everyday life and gradually contributes to the everyday urbanism of contemporary urban China.

On the other hand, this chapter explores the concept of the square in the context of square dancing, and location is the basic point for defining the notion of the square. Therefore, starting from the location where square dancing is the most frequent, the more common, conventional

and more popular, including commercial squares and residential open spaces which were originally called squares discussed in the previous section, as well as streets and parks in this section. Then, to discuss the lightly popular locations, including markets and car parks.

I argue that square dancing activity as an everyday spatial practice created by ordinary residents influences the creation and use of places, as well as interventions in residents' everyday lives and everyday urban spaces.¹¹ In other words, the emphasis in this section is on the 'everyday' or 'daily' of the concept of square dancing that these locations jointly create, what happens in the locations of daily dance practice, which goes beyond the original understanding of the square. Evidently, the locations of the square in the context of square dancing are reclaimed and created by ordinary residents. They exist in physically identifiable areas in the urban space, and some were not officially designated and planned. However, I am paying attention to these locations, which affects not only the participation but also the audience and the residents living in the city, which is a subject we should sufficiently examine.

To illustrate the argument of the notion of the square in the context of the everyday square-dancing activity and urban spaces of contemporary China, it is necessary to first introduce the theory of everyday urbanism. Because the square has a daily character, it is a daily presence in urban life. 'Everyday urbanism and new urbanism have stood out as two notable approaches and design principle for thinking about the future of city' (Chase, Crawford, and Kaliski, 1999, pp. 9,11,). And 'Everyday urbanism on other hand is much more relative and tied to a type of ethnographically based approach to working on small, situated forms' (Chase, Crawford, and Kaliski, 1999, pp.15,90). Instead of seeking a revolutionary space, they sought to appropriate

¹¹ Square dancing occurs in both urban and rural areas, but the focus of this study is on urban square dancing as discussed in the introduction.

space mainly based on the local needs of urban residents and everyday spaces in Los Angeles, such as public spaces like temporary markets, festivals or street fairs in abandoned parking lots and garage sales stalls (Chase, Crawford, and Kaliski, 1999, p.10). Their everyday experience with these fascinating urban landscapes is unified under the concept of everyday urbanism,

‘Everyday urbanism seeks to release the powers of creativity and imagination already present within everyday life as the means of transforming the urban experience and the city.’ (Chase, Crawford, and Kaliski, 1999, p.12)

Some scholars further put forward some related concepts on the basis of everyday urbanism theory to express the same idea. Talen et al. explained that everyday urbanism can be understood as people’s ideas for small, progressive, do-it-yourself urban spaces (Finn, 2014). Such urban interventions are resident-generated, low-budget and often designed to be temporary. This approach is characterised by direct opposition to top-down approval of the urban change (Talen, 2015; Cloutier, Papin, and Bizier, 2018). Similarly, ‘the city tolerates and assimilates this bottom-up design, including elements that remain elusive: ephemerality, auto constructed, multiplicity and simultaneity’ (Kaliski, 1999, p.102). Composed of everyday spaces, they are called ‘insurgent public spaces’ and ‘guerrilla spaces’ that challenge the conventional definition and use of urban areas, alter traditional views of the urban environment and express alternative social and spatial relationships in our ever-changing cities (Hou, 2010). Crawford, Chase and Kaliski borrow selectively from the concept of everyday life and urbanism provided by Lefebvre et al., which is the basis for understanding the rich meaning of the urban. They both see the potential of everyday life as a vibrant act of resistance and release.

De Certeau and Mayol (1998) developed the original concept of everyday life in his book, *the Practice of Everyday Life* (1998). He argues ‘everyday life was a complex series of processes that both reflect larger social relations and help produce them’ (De Certeau and Mayol, 1998).

In addition, 'urbanism' encompasses a broad field of discourse that refers to the social, cultural, economic and environmental phenomena and characteristics involved in urban life and urbanisation. The concept covers various phenomena in the city, including population density, living style, transportation system, social relations, cultural activities and so on. Louis Wirth is an American sociologist who proposed the definition and explanation of Urbanism in his book *Urbanism as a Way of Life*. Urbanism is characterised by a high concentration of population, a large population density, loose social connections and diversified social interactions and cultures (Wirth, 1938, p.1-24 and 225). Therefore, everyday urbanism is an alternative way to understand the urban, putting ordinary urban residents and their daily activity, daily experience and everyday spaces at the centre of the notion, in sharp contrast to carefully planned and often underutilised urban public spaces. From this point of view, everyday urbanism is perhaps more daily than any other form of urbanism and contains great potential; therefore, it is more urgent to understand the everyday activity of square dancing in contemporary urban China.

Therefore, through the following examples, I will explore the different characteristics of these locations, which have been redefined as squares in the context of square dancing from the perspective of the everyday lived experiences of dancers, the audience and even the ordinary residents and identify their unique potential implications for everyday urbanism. Therefore, this study will explore how the square in square dance is deeply embedded in people's Daily life, contributing to everyday urbanism, which is redefined as "the square is where people dance".

A Street Is a Square

Some square dancing takes place on the streets and can be seen everywhere in the city. During the observation, and in some existing literature, it can be affirmed the square in the street usually exists for some time each night (Xiao and Hilton, 2019). Each location generally hosts

one group with one type of dance (Tong, 2013). At that time, the streets are not nominal squares, but the occupation by the square dancers turns the streets into squares in the context of square dancing. Of course, this phenomenon inspired me to consider the square in the street is the most typical site as a square entering people's daily life and also the obvious expression of the square in the context of square dancing in the daily life.

This street square, compared to other locations, is the most reflective of the square, influencing a wide variety of people, both from the perspective of onlookers and ordinary urban residents, who are included in the square, regardless of race, age, sex or occupation. At the same time, the sound of the street square dancing is blended into the background sound as another layer of daily life, affecting everyone, such as dance participants, spectators, passers-by and children playing and so on. At this point, almost every passer-by commuting, or walking becomes a spectator, sometimes stopping to watch, eager to join in — they can join the square at any time. It seems to be a part of everyday life for all ordinary residents (Fig. 5.6).

Therefore, the most noteworthy feature is that the square in the street will influence the ordinary residents or passers-by, even those who have no clear intention to participate in the dancing, and all people, regardless of status, are affected by the square. As proposed by Lefebvre (2014), the essential element that constitutes everyday life is the ordinary human experience, which conveys complex and profound meanings. In other words, "everyday" refers to the banal and ordinary experience of daily life that city dwellers are very familiar with (Lefebvre, 2014). Thus, the squares in the streets embody the people's everyday lives and compose the everyday urbanism of contemporary Chinese cities.



Fig. 5.6 Square dancing in the pedestrian street. Photography by author, Shanghai Yvyuan subway station, Shanghai, 2019

A Park Is a Square

Many everyday square-dancing activities take place in urban parks. At nightfall, parks in different regions are filled with people dancing and exercising. It is part of the everyday spaces that contribute to everyday urbanism in contemporary China, which can be summarised into two aspects: Firstly, compared with squares in other locations, a square in the park has a high degree of integration and participation, which is reflected in a large number of participants and square dancing groups even with hundreds of participants. The square has as many as a few hundred participants a day. Such large crowds may not be seen in other locations in the square on a daily basis. The reason for this is that this square exists in the original park, and it contains target participants and audiences who have a clear purpose and motivation for fitness and leisure. Sometimes, dancers are transferred from other exercise groups, such as tai chi, walking groups and singing groups (Fig. 5.8).

Secondly, the park square reflects the diversity of the square compared to other locations, not only enriching the original understanding that square dancing squares only exist at night, but also containing a variety type of dances. The dancing activities covered more participants and included more time and dance types. It can be seen taking place throughout the day, in the morning, at night and at other times of the day. Especially during the evenings, there is a tight and thoughtful arrangement of timetables between different groups. For example, in the fieldwork, I found that on the same site in Cangkou Park and Badahu Park, Jiamusi and fitness dancing were the norm in the morning, and sometimes there were recordings of professional square dance competitions and performances. In the evening, there are usually square dances from 5:30 to 8:30, including different kinds of square dances to meet the different needs of participants, including folk dance and ghost dance, et, al. (Fig. 5.7, Fig. 5.8). Therefore, the square in the park site is a typical representative location of the square in the context of the square dancing phenomenon, reflecting that the park square integrated into everyday life, which can be summarised as high participation with huge groups of participants, all-weather timeliness of square dance activities, and diversified types of dance. The square contributes to the dancing practice is becoming a part of most people's everyday lives, and the square is becoming an everyday urban space carrying daily life.



Fig. 5.7 The morning square dancing in Cangkou park. Photography by author, Cangkou Park, Qingdao, 2021



Fig. 5.8 The various types of square dancing in the evening in Cangkou Park. Photography by author, Badahu Park, Qingdao, 2021

A Food Market is a Square

One unexpected and unconventional square-dancing phenomenon that has become popular

since 2021 is square dancing in the marketplace. This phenomenon was reported with the accompanying headline: ‘Vegetable market turns into a dance square in the afternoon, and sellers’ *dama* are dancing collectively.’ The dancing participants were initiated by the traders, as well as some nearby residents who came to buy food. The role of the participants switches between seller, buyer and dancer at any time. Some netizens joked, ‘can’t square dancing even dare not to buy food’ (Fig. 5.9) (China News, 2017). There was even a social news report about the surprising sight of hundreds of people gathering to dance in a square at a farmers’ market in Jingzhou, Hubei Province (Fig. 5.10). Catalysed by this phenomenon, the market has also become a square.

The square in the marketplace embodies the power of bottom-up unofficial, unaffiliated and grassroots, which contributes to the discussion of how the square is rooted in people’s daily lives. On the one hand, there is striking conformity in this square dancing; most participants wear uniform clothing, that is, aprons. They do not have special costumes, props or equipment for square dancing. They even wear the clothes of normal workers; they can dance anywhere. Dancers stand in aisles less than two meters wide, which is necessary for people’s daily routines (Fig. 5.10) (Wanxiang New, 2021). On the other hand, in terms of occupied time, square dancing in the food market locations usually happens after 10:00 in the morning and around 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon. As such, it expands the definition of a specific happening time for the square in the park and square, between the morning and the evening. It can be seen that the square in the market not only enriches the physical space type of the original square but also expands the time of participation and the group of participants, indicating the square has been integrated into people’s everyday lives and affects people’s everyday experiences of the urban.



Fig. 5.9 The market space becomes a dance space. Source: Huang (2017)



Fig. 5.10 Screenshot of Hundreds of people entering the aisles of the farmers market to square dance. Source: Wanxiang News (2021)

A Car Park is a Square

Following the discussion of the square in the open-space park, I continue to explore the nature of the square from the participants' perspective. One of the most typical and representative examples is squares that exist in car park (indoor spaces or outdoors). This is a widespread phenomenon in the context of square dance. In addition to the outdoor parking lot and parking spaces, there are many semi-open underground parking lots in the urban space, which are among the dancers' favourite square-dancing locations (Sina News, 2017). In this study, I interviewed the team leader X1 of the dance team to learn about why they dance here and what is feeling of the car parks location, and she said:

‘Especially when it’s so cold in winter, and when it’s raining and windy, and people still want to come out and exercise, it is impossible not to dance all winter long. It is not easy, and it’s inconvenient to dance outside in a big and heavy padded jacket. So, this is a perfect location for us.’

In this case, the car park were transformed into a square in the context of square dancing, which is warm, light and not affected by bad weather. The square in the car park reflects square dancing as an indispensable exercise activity to integrate into participants' daily lives. Two obvious changes can be attributed to the illustration. On the one hand, compared with the other types of squares, the audience and pedestrians in this square are significantly reduced or even absent. That is to say, the participation seen in the original square dance square is reduced or even eliminated.

On the other hand, we can clearly see that, without the audience, the performance nature of the square is reduced. At this time, the dancers take off their heavy coats and are still dancing in their cotton-padded jackets and cotton pants, which expresses their enthusiasm for fitness and exercise (Fig 5.11). Therefore, people still insist on square dancing, even during cold temperatures in winter. Overall, the square of the parking lot reduces participation and

performability but amplifies the nature of fitness and exercise, meeting the health and exercise needs of the dancers.



Fig 5.11 The dancers still gather in the cold winter, in the community underground parking lot in Hangzhou. Source: Sina News (2017)

The above examples of typical square-dancing locations covered the various urban spaces, different groups of participants and audiences, different seasons of the year and different times of the day. Square dancing may take place in other spaces in the future, but these are currently the most typical examples. Everyday urbanism is the process by which residents reclaim and create urban sites, temporary spaces and informal gathering places (Kaliski, 1999, p.102). I concluded the square is an everyday location integrated into all aspects of people's daily lives; is created by the people; and links people's daily, ordinary and routine schedules. In this case, the square became a noteworthy way of understanding and approaching the future of everyday urbanism in China, influencing and changing the people's experience of the urban.

5.3 Square in the Covid-19 pandemic

In the previous section, I presented typical examples of squares among various physical urban spaces to realise the exploration of the concept of physical squares, which reflects the daily nature of the square. In this section, I will discuss the second transformation of the square concept, which occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is an in-depth demonstration of the square's integration into everyday life and is supported by official propaganda. During the COVID-19 pandemic, people were divided into two groups: patients and non-patients. Square dancing is still engaging with everyday life, and this can be discussed through two different ways: One is to cover the patients and explore the physical square in the mobile cabin hospital. In addition to the mobile cabin hospital square, a more common stage is cloud square, the other is to focus on the majority of the healthy population to examine the square practice of ordinary residents in their daily lives. Specifically, daily square dancing exists in the virtual cloud square, and the interaction involved in square dancing activities has moved to exclusively online methods.

In order to explore the transformation of the square concept during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is necessary to introduce the strictest efficiently control situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in China. The coronavirus pandemic in China has affected society in many ways, such as restrictions on travel, instructions on keeping social distance, and enforced lockdowns of districts, towns and cities. Under the restrictions of China's quarantine policy, urban public spaces such as cinemas, shopping malls, squares and parks have been closed, all physical activities and gatherings in public spaces have been cancelled in China, and urban China has become an empty urban space, which is an unprecedented sight. At the same time, square dancing is originally a kind of physical and social activity that is usually based on face-to-face gatherings and engagement in urban public open spaces (Martin and Chen, 2020, p.10). An

official statement announced the cancellation of square dancing during the epidemic. In the press conference given by the National Health Commission (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo weisheng jiankang weiyuanhui*) on January 31, 2020, experts said that group square dancing during this special period may increase the incidence of cross-infection (National Health Commission of The People's Republic of China, 2020). Therefore, for about six months into a strict nationwide lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic, square dancers across the country were forced to cancel their activities, with dancers unable to get together and dance face-to-face in the urban open spaces. Even today, in 2022, China still has a partial lockdown policy. For example, from March to June 2022, Shanghai experienced a citywide lockdown for two months, from 28th March to 31 May 2022, and square dancing disappeared from the urban public spaces.

5.3.1 A Mobile Cabin Hospital Is a Square

After the COVID-19 pandemic arose in Wuhan in 2020, a news story hit the whole country, which not only encouraged Chinese people to fight against the virus but also inspired a rethinking of the square concept in this research. According to the news report, at the Wuhan mobile cabin hospital, every night after dinner, increasing numbers of patients wearing masks performed square dancing (ECNS.CN, 2020; China News, 2020). In April 2022, COVID-19 broke out in Shanghai, China. Medical team members and patients performed a square dance at a mobile cabin hospital in Shanghai. The head of the medical team called this phenomenon *Fangcang Guangchang Wu* (square dancing of mobile cabin hospital) (Xinhua News, 2022). In addition, Walker (2013) writes, that hard times require furious dancing, and relevant literature has confirmed that square dancing meets social needs, allows people to overcome feelings of fear and despair, encourages them to actively fight the virus, and is improved for patients' physical, mental and social health. In the original mobile cabin hospital, patients faced

the torture of illness and even the threat of death. However, the atmosphere seemed to change when the square dancing took place; the mobile cabin hospital was transformed from an infirmary for the sick and the dead into a place of positivity, joy and revelry led by the dancing activity (Fig 5.12 and Fig 5.13).

In my argument, the square that exists in the mobile cabin hospital is the result of government intervention and support, which undoubtedly adds another layer of significance to the everyday urbanism of square dancing. Chase, Crawford and Kaliski (1999, p.30) also mention the political ideology aspect in their theory of everyday urbanism,

‘the ultimate purpose of operating under everyday urbanism is to bring about social change. This social change must be born out of the ‘specific concerns that arise from the lived experience’ of the people, as opposed to forced abstract political ideologies.’

Kaplan and Ross (2002) point out that political elements are present in people's daily lives, especially hidden in life experiences. As a result, most scholars in Western countries now believe that social change results spontaneously from the everyday practice of urbanisation rather than from the imposition of external political ideologies. Such change is entirely bottom-up, with specific concerns derived through the lived experiences of different individuals and groups in the city.

However, the discussion of everyday urbanism in the political context of one-party China, especially in the mass gathering square, seems to contradict this view. This is especially true when people infected with COVID-19 in China were completely deprived of their liberty, and their every move was monitored in real time. Without state support, they cannot have intimate face-to-face contact or even dance together. At this time, the Chinese government encouraged

patients by emphasising the importance of square dancing for their recovery and even basic survival. Medics in white protective suits, known as *Dabai* in China, it can be seen leading the dance in front. *Dabai* has become ubiquitous in Chinese cities amid the coronavirus pandemic, their every move a symbol of the state's ideology and imperatives (Fig. 5.12). This argument also coincides with the nationalistic body of square dancing discussed in Chapter 3, which reveals that square dance is used as a political propaganda mechanism in China to help promote political ideology. In this chapter, I further identified the square embodies the ideology of nationalism in people's daily life is obvious and ubiquitous, it is constantly closely intertwined with daily life, physical environment, public suffering, memory, ambition, and a series of how we understand and live our urban other feelings and the quality of the concrete.



Fig. 5.12 Chinese patients infected with the new coronavirus and pneumonia square dancing at a mobile cabin hospital in Wuhan City, Hubei Province on February 17th. Source: Xiong (2020)



Fig. 5.13 Medical team members and patients performing a square dance at a mobile cabin hospital in Shanghai. Source: Xinhua News (2022)

5.3.2 The Cloud Square Dancing

After discussing the square of patients in mobile cabin hospitals, I next turn my attention to the square of healthy people who stay at home in isolation, which will promote an unprecedented and noteworthy transformation of the square. Since virus-related quarantines were put in place, daily physical square-dancing activity has been transformed into online participation, which is the new revolution of the square-dancing phenomenon-dancing on the cloud also known as online square dancing or contactless square dancing. For example, according to *China Daily*, a community in the *Dongcheng* district of Beijing has 10 online WeChat dance teams with a total of about 300 people. In the WeChat group, the players kept sending a variety of videos, including expressions of care and greetings, as well as their own talent shows (Shi et al., 2022). This phenomenon has been named cloud square dancing by various Chinese media. As Kourlas

(2020) writes, ‘if this pandemic is teaching us anything, it is that we need to return to our bodies’, noting that ‘the pandemic has created something fascinating: a new way of moving, a new way of dancing’ (Kourlas, 2020, pp. 9 and 17). Therefore, cloud square dancing is necessarily quite different from square dancing’s intended experience and reflects the subversive nature of the underlying ideas. The following section attempts to provoke a discussion about the cloud form of the square in the context of cloud square dancing, especially for a timely exploration.

In order to discuss the notion of the cloud square, it is necessary to introduce the phenomenon of cloud square dancing for the ordinary residents in the urban life, which means all the square-dancing-related activities and interactions were transformed via online form during the pandemic. There are many ways to participate in cloud square dancing, such as TikTok, Kuaishou, Bilibili, and Tangdou, but the most popular is the WeChat platform (China News, 2020). This is because, before the pandemic, most dancing groups organised through an online WeChat group, to send group notifications and communications between dancers. Thus, it provided a ready-made platform for the realisation of dancing online (Li, 2017). Square dancing WeChat groups typically have between 10 and 500 members and offer a variety of additional functions, such as text messaging, voice messaging, video conferencing, video games, photo and video sharing, friend circles, and location sharing (Meikle, 2016). Therefore, online WeChat was the most convenient way for dancers to participate in square dancing during the pandemic, WeChat groups are not only about posting notices and sharing content with each other but also inheriting all the normally offline square-dancing activities, such as dancing, communication, teaching, learning, and competitions.

Compared with offline participation, this online participation mode makes the communications of square dancers more convenient, breaks the restrictions of physical geographical and

temporal differences, and expands the communication dimension more widely. *China Sports Daily* (2020) reported on November 4, 2020, mentioned,

‘That the pandemic has made people pay more attention to their health, and it has also triggered an upsurge in home-based fitness, which cannot be separated from the help of the Internet. Square dancing groups have started to live-exercise and hold competitions online, which can break regional restrictions and allow more people to participate in real-time.’

Another news item featured a woman who choreographed and directed a square dance about the fight against Covid-19, named the ‘Contactless Square Dance’ (Xinmin Evening News, 2020). Therefore, under the penetration and influence of the Internet and social media, the appearance and development of cloud square dancing during the pandemic in China have far-reaching and extensive significance.

There are three practical cloud square dancing models: online live-streaming, uploaded videos, and square-dancing apps. Firstly, online live streaming is mainly organised by the group leader and takes the WeChat group as the dancing space: the leader sets up a time and makes an appointment for members to gather together to dance and communicate. Secondly, after the lead dancers usually learn a new dance online, they teach the new dance to other members of the Wechat group. The members repeatedly practice at home and record the dance video. The members select their favourites and share them with the group members. Some dancers also post their videos on public social media, such as TikTok and Kuaishou. Thirdly, the dancer will follow and join online social media apps, such as the popular Tangdou and 99 Square Dancing apps. In these social apps, dancers can participate and learn online lessons for free, whatever their location.

5.3.3 Shifting From Physical to Cloud

As discussed in the previous sections, the square in the context of square dancing is the location normally based on open, semi-open and indoor public physical spaces. However, under the phenomenon of cloud square dancing activity during the pandemic, the dancing locations have been transformed into private spaces such as living rooms, balconies, and dining rooms (Shi et al., 2022). Some scholars have found the screen has a significant mediation that replaced the audience's eyes and became the new necessary medium for recording and online streaming the creators' movement (Zhen, Jiang and Chang, 2021). In the daily square dancing activity, the physical square-dancing activities are recorded by the dancers through the mobile phone camera lens and spread to the virtual online social media. Screens, as the new form of a square, is the key intermediary to intervene in the square's reproduction, realising the square's transformation from the entity to the cloud.

The cloud square is not a physical space, nor is it completely virtual space, and in the between. Because the cloud square and cloud square dancing difference between previous virtual activities and virtual spaces. For example, there are many virtual spaces such as online game communities and platforms, in which groups of people will usually establish virtual identities, and may not meet face to face, but they exchange words and ideas through the intermediary of the digital network (Wang, 2002). However, the cloud platform of square dancing is based on real information, and the identity of members is real and transparent. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, members of the dance team had established familiar relationships face-to-face, and when the pandemic occurred, dancers participate in the online group with real identity information and a continuation of every other detail of real life. Therefore, the square of the cloud square phenomenon under the pandemic cannot be regarded as a purely virtual space, while this section uses 'cloud' instead of 'virtual', which implies a middle ground between

physical and virtual worlds.

In order to grasp the notion of the cloud square concept, my investigation identified some of those strands clinging to the actual creation of the cloud square, that is, the cloud square dancing was changing the role position of the participants and fullness the notion of the square. In the original physical squares, the audience tends to consist of passers-by, who may stay only temporarily, and the group members usually dance in lines, each unaware that the other is looking at them, views from behind notwithstanding. However, when dancers dance in the cloud square, the audience comprises other members of the dance group, their husbands, children, and even themselves. In this case, the role of dancers has changed, to become participants and audience simultaneously (Fig. 5.14). During an interview online, an interviewee said, ‘We were recording and uploading the video to the Wechat group, we would repeatedly perform the same dance, again and again, choose a video that we were satisfied with and send it to the group, we call on everyone to watch it, and talk about their feelings and critical attention. We have heated discussions in the group every day’. Arguably, the dancers are both performers and audiences, this transformation has facilitated a fuller everyday experience of square and square dancing from different aspects.



Fig. 5.14 The dancer instructs her husband to help her take a video of square dancing. Source: Dongcheng District Party Committee publicity Department (2020)

It is worth emphasising how the square became the cloud way to exist in people's everyday lives to connect individual physical spaces, further promoting the everyday nature of the square and the breakthrough of the current academic consideration of everyday urbanism. In the current academic field, the topic of everyday urbanism is not put online to discuss; however, the cloud square in the context of square dancing will fill this gap. As a screen, the square not only enhances daily online dancing activities but also changes people's experience of the square and further promotes and increases online everyday urbanism in the context of square dancing.

Thus, in the next section, I will talk about the definition of transformation in an everyday cloud square.

5.3.4 Cloud Collective in Everyday Life

After discussing how the cloud square shifted from the physical to the cloud world and engaged in people's everyday lives, we will now explore how the cloud square can also challenge the collective experience of the original square. Since the emergence of square dancing activities in urban space has been based on the collective form, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, our physical bodies became 'sheltered-in-place', completely cut off from the outside world. Dancers could only dance by themselves in isolation in their homes; they could not feel the physical collective relationship with other dancers. Physical isolation also makes us feel increasingly disconnected from the collective – our digital avatars stuck on the screen, abandoning the original collective experience of the dancing square. Joining the online square dancing, the intensified sense of fullness and division of the collective exist at the same time, as well as the more ambiguous boundaries between the virtual collective square on the screen and the physical individual square off the screen. The cloud square leads us to consider how different modes of video streaming and recording reshape the collective concept of the square. An interviewee D4 said,

The feeling is different between posting a video and dancing in the physical square. When we dance online in front of the camera, we can see our own dance, and usually, we pay the most attention to our individual dance. At the same time, it feels that everyone can be the protagonist or a star in the centre of the stage.

In this online movement, dancers see themselves as protagonists rather than members of the collective group, which is in distinct contrast with how they view themselves during casual

exercise in the physical square (Fig. 5.15). By connecting dancers to video-communication software and online streaming services, in this way, the online screens reshape the binary relationship between audiences and dancers. In this way, the collective form seems to have re-emerged and been re-energized; it can connect and gather physical individual performances in the virtual collective. The cloud square is usually a combination of many independent WeChat video windows, which form a collective square. By carefully observing every detail, we can see that every dancer is dancing along with the music, following each other dancers as precisely as possible (Fig. 5.16). As the section title suggests, on the one hand, the square comprised by the modified mode reflects the transformation of the notion of the square, that is, from the physical collective form into the virtual collective form based on physical individual performance; on the other hand, for the participants, it fulfils the desire to dance collectively, integrating the virtual collectively square into daily life.



Fig. 5.15 In the process of cloud square dancing. Photography by Interviewee D4. Photo: courtesy interviewee D4

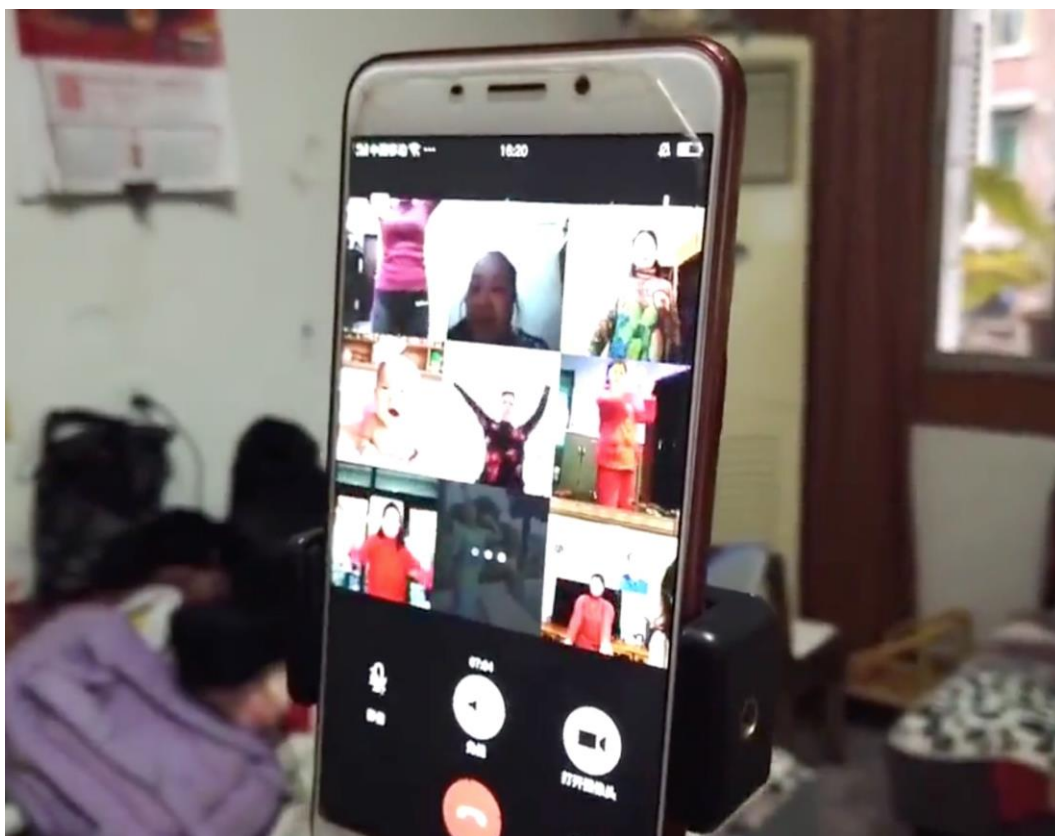


Fig. 5.16 Online live streaming dancing, the transformation between collective and individual.
Photography by Interviewee D4. Photo: courtesy interviewee D4

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I investigated the square in the context of square dancing and revealed the notion of the square. Square dancing does not always occur in the named urban square; it occupies a variety of urban spaces, bringing visual performance to them. Therefore, I analysed the square as the host of the square-dancing phenomenon. I conclude the concept of the square in this context is a semantic expression of the location of square-dance activities, one that is floating and intangible. This intangibility endows the square with a new layer that expands upon and enriches the original notion.

First, the discussion of the paradox of the original square and dancing square suggested square dancing is redefining and enriching the original concept of the urban square. The new findings

in this study's understanding of the concept of the square expand previous interpretations of the concept of the square. Previous scholars have argued that squares are sites of high political, cultural, historical, and commemorative significance (Jiang and Nakajima, 2022; Gaubatz, 2021), and places for face-to-face interactions from civilians to the nation's top leaders (Hung, 1991). In particular, the iconic Tiananmen Square is an important physical space for visual political expression, collective memory, identity and history (Hung, 2005, Li, 2009). The design of the square is a monumental work influenced by the political and cultural context of the communist regime Li (1979) and Dong (2003). However, dancers freely socialise, dance, and relax in the square, filling the otherwise empty, formalistic, monotonous, impersonal, and political authority of the square with bottom-up, spontaneous, lively, and passionate dancing activities (Su, 2010; Cai, 2006). Thus, square dancing inspires researchers to rethink the profound interpretation of the square concept in contemporary urban China.

Second, in this chapter, I summarised typical square-dance locations, which are found in all urban spaces. By analysing images and the interview data, I demonstrated how the square can engage with everyday urbanism in profound ways to deepen our understanding of the square as a location that influences people's experiences and daily lives in the urban sphere. Therefore, the square is a noteworthy aspect of understanding and approaching the future of everyday urbanism in China. Thus, the square is of great value for scholars of everyday urbanism in China regarding the square concept and examining how square-dancing's meaning-making practices and engagements with everyday urbanism mediate each other.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic radically altered the concept of the square. I proposed the concept of the cloud square and uncovered the reason for its emergence. Face-to-face activities cannot be conducted in an environment of isolation. Once the pandemic and quarantine ended, people returned to their favoured original physical squares. Therefore, the cloud square is a

temporary and timely phenomenon. The cloud square challenges the existence of the physical square and makes the square a state of the cloud. The cloud square is a virtual collective online gathering based on individual physical performances. This form challenges the original collective nature of the square and influences a new collective experience of the everyday cloud square.

Squares in different locations have different meanings and play different roles in people's daily life, especially for the *dama* participants. The street square acts like a guerrilla; it is an act of aggression against people's daily life and daily urban space. The park square is a stage or a theatre where people have a clear purpose to participate in a square dance. Diversified dances make this place like a big stage for a square-dancing performance. Car-park squares are a gym; dancing in this location is not for the audience, only for health and a comfortable environment in bad weather. The market square is the eating table, because buying food is already a daily ritual for some families. The cabin hospital square is like a propagandist or loudspeaker. The propaganda is the determination to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic and the wisdom of the dynamic zero clearance policy of the Chinese Government.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

To analyse this complex and interdisciplinary phenomenon in contemporary urban China, it is necessary to restate the aims of this research, which are to provide new insights into understanding the square-dancing phenomenon and to define and foresee the role of square-dancing activity in contemporary urban spaces and people's everyday life. For the first time, this study comprehensively interpreted the square-dancing phenomenon from the perspective of the dancing community, the dancing body, and the dancing square. The findings of this study have crucial implications for understanding the relationships between the flourishing grassroots square-dancing phenomenon and the national political and cultural power of the Chinese context.

I defined two research categories of square-dancing activities and three comprehensive modes of the square-dancing phenomenon. The two research categories – exercise-oriented square dancing and performance-oriented square dancing – were identified based on their visual characteristics. Exercise-oriented square dancing appears more in everyday situations: the discussion regarding the dancing body contributes to body training in line with the nationalistic ideology inherent in the square-dancing phenomenon (Chapter 3), and the analysis of flexible and intangible everyday dancing locations adds to the notion of the square (Chapter 5). Performance-oriented square dancing appears more in stage performance situations, analysed in the 'We are China' section to identify the presentation of the patriotic body, and discussed in terms of the *damas'* aesthetic transformation and the dramatic significance of their dancing performance (Chapter 4). The reason for classifying these two categories is to emphasise that participant self-assessment and physical expression differ in the two obviously different situations of daily square-dancing activities and group performances. Square dancing in both settings is integrated and interspersed through the themes of each chapter, covering all the

phenomenon's visual presentation features. My purpose was not to label square dancing as a category, but to understand comprehensively the phenomenon in contemporary urban China through the different visual experiences it presents in different situations.

To articulate my conclusions, all the findings from this research are summarised with reference to three modes that together frame the understanding of the square-dancing phenomenon. The summary is divided into three alternatives but possibly simultaneous processes in square dancing in contemporary urban China: bottom-up, top-down, and parallel development. Some scholars have also proposed this development process for knowledge contribution in the Chinese context. Gao proposed 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' as two types of dwelling development processes in Yunnan, China, to clarify the reasons external support mechanisms may not always achieve the expected results and to identify the role of architects and designers in these processes. In the article, 'top-down' refers to the process by which policies, plans and projects are formulated by the government or other centralised agencies and then implemented at the grassroots level through, for example, administrative guidance or resource allocation. Bottom-up, on the other hand, refers to a process initiated and driven by grassroots communities, farmers or local organisations that progressively moves upwards from the bottom of the society. At the same time, the authors discuss the roles and responsibilities of architects in these two processes, exploring how they can collaborate with local communities and governments to promote rural development (Gao, 2016). Therefore, in the political and cultural context of China, it is feasible to assess new knowledge with these development modes.

For this research, it is appropriate to begin by discussing the bottom-up mode, in which square dancing was originally a spontaneous, grassroots mass activity for self-entertainment. With the continuous development of square dancing in contemporary cities, the phenomenon has gradually changed from a purely bottom-up activity to a top-down activity with national

participation. Therefore, this concluding chapter next considers the top-down mode, which sums up the close relationship between the square-dancing phenomenon in contemporary urban China and the national political and cultural ideology. Finally, the parallel development mode is used to summarise and sublimate discussions concerning the interdependence and dependence of square-dancing activities in contemporary urban daily life. The following sections of this chapter summarise the original findings that contribute significantly to research on the square-dancing phenomenon, representing a dynamic interweaving of the bottom-up, top-down, and parallel modes.

The Spontaneity of Square Dancing

A substantial proportion of the results from this research clearly demonstrate bottom-up relationships in response to the key question of how to understand the square-dancing phenomenon in contemporary urban China. The spontaneity of square dancing has been mentioned by some scholars. Martin and Chen stated that square-dancing teaching methods are spontaneous self-guidance and self-study (Martin and Chen, 2020), whereas others have highlighted that square-dancing activities promote the construction of self-identity because of the spontaneity of square dancing (Qian and Lu, 2019). Although square dancing was originally a spontaneous, grassroots behaviour mentioned in passing by numerous researchers, there are research gaps that require deeper exploration. The nature of spontaneity breeds a diverse understanding of the square-dancing activity. This section summarises the discussions about square dancing in the previous chapters and forms a bottom-up framework for understanding the phenomenon.

Significant findings emerged from Chapter One regarding ‘the community of square dancing’, demonstrating that the understanding of the *dama* community is based on the spontaneous gathering behaviour of individuals and groups, which promotes the bottom-up development

model. The bottom-up development model of this community is presented, through the cold, alienated, and superficial neighbourhoods of China's urbanisation of, the 'first generation of lonely mothers', and the rapid weakening of kinship and intergenerational relationships in nuclear families. This spontaneous community belongs to that generation of *damas* and represents a bottom-up development mode based on the spontaneous social needs of the *damas*' neighbourhood relationships and the emotional needs of those relationships.

The discussion about the body aesthetics of the *dama* in daily square dancing and daily life dialectically addresses a bottom-up understanding of the square-dancing phenomenon. As discussed in Chapter Four, the bottom-up development model can be attributed to the powerful, infectious, and colourful visual feast in contemporary Chinese cities spontaneously created by groups of brightly dressed middle-aged and elderly women willing to attract the attention of strangers or display their bodies in public. The analysis of the survey data revealed a contrast between the visual representation of the *dama* body in contemporary square dancing and the image of the *dama* shaped by traditional aesthetic values, especially given the revolutionary period experienced by this generation. The contrast displays aesthetics at two extremes along the visual spectrum, from the notion of 'be gorgeously dressed (*hua zhi zhao zhan*)', as reflected in brightly coloured patterns and flowers in contemporary everyday aesthetics, to the 'femininity erasure' of the military, asexual, and androgynous appearance characteristic of the revolutionary period. These comparative findings indicate an extreme shift in female body aesthetics during Mao Zedong's revolution and in contemporary society. This transformation stems from square-dance participants' spontaneous desire for youth and beauty, challenging traditional taboos and constraints.

An important finding in this study is that the redefinition of the term 'square' in the context of square dancing can be summarised as the bottom-up development mode. As mentioned in

Chapter Five, the result of this redefinition is that square dancing expands and enriches the original concept of the city square, presenting the paradox of squares in the original context and in the square-dancing context. Regarding square dancing, the square is not a 'square'; its concept has undergone a double transformation. First, the square has been transformed from a political, cultural, and memorial physical space into a synonym for the location of square-dancing activities. Second, the concept of the square changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, when it was transformed into a cloud square on the Internet, which offered an opportunity to rethink the phenomenon, participation in it, and even its location. These two transformations not only reveal the square is flexible and intangible, but also further demonstrate that square-dancing activities flow in the urban space, playing an important role in shaping the bottom-up nature of square dancing. No matter what form square dancing takes, be it performance, exercise, or social activities, its relationship with urban space can be explained as the continuous flow of guerrillas in the city, with residents spontaneously joining and carrying out guerrilla warfare in the urban space at any time and any location.

Square Dancing is a Propaganda Instrument

Taking an overview of the square-dancing boom in contemporary urban China, one significant finding is that the definition of square dancing is related to the external political background and historical development in China. With the development of square dancing over nearly two decades, much square-dancing activity has transformed from the original, spontaneous, bottom-up grassroots initiative into a top-down, regulated activity characterised by government intervention and institutional organisation, in which trajectories often cross and intertwine and then diverge or reunite. Intervention and regulation by government and local institutions have immeasurably affected the definition, development, presentation, and meaning of square dancing. At the same time, an increasing number of characteristics of the square-dancing

phenomenon have been consciously or unconsciously internalised in response to the political agenda of the government in today's political environment. I conclude that square dancing is imprinted with the brand of state power and has the characteristics of compulsory promotion, collectivist patriotism education, and power discipline. The phenomenon has become a top-down carrier and instrument for the state to promote ideology and political propaganda.

First, the examination of the square-dancing organisation, as discussed in Chapter Two, revealed it is a politicised community. The continuous expansion of square dancing has attracted increasing attention from national and local authorities, such as the General Administration of Sport of China (GASC), the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China, the administration departments of local government, and the subdistricts. These interventions are directed at promoting authorised routines, training certified instructors, formulating policies, and holding square-dancing competitions. For example, 12 sets of authorised square-dancing routines were announced by GASC, with dance subjects linked to the national ideology of core socialist values (*shehui zhuyi hexin jiazhi guan*). Several national policies have also been introduced to regulate the spread of square dancing nationwide. A deeper analysis of the evidence for state intervention in square-dancing communities revealed similarities to the instrument of 'offer amnesty and enlistment to rebels' (*zhao an*) to standardise the content of national mass culture communication and to control and maintain the stability of social order. Overall, the community political relationship of square dancing can be understood as a top-down mode.

Second, following a discussion of the square-dancing community, this research focused on a more in-depth perspective, namely a discussion of the dancing body in square dancing, which also proves the top-down model. From the internal perspective of square-dancing activities, part of the emphasis is on physical body exercise and health benefits. The intervention by the

state subtly transforms physical body exercise into training the body, which is linked to cultivating a patriotic spirit, strengthening the body to protect the country, and contributing to the ideology of nationalism. The influential policy of the National Fitness Plan guides the development direction of square dancing, which echoes Mao Zedong's important political thought of 'developing sports and strengthening physical fitness'. The same thing between the two policies is that both emphasise the important position of physical training in the development of China's socialist country. The difference is that physical training such as radio gymnastics and national mass swimming in the Mao period emphasised the importance of building national cohesion and unity in the new China and defending the motherland, while square dancing under the National Fitness Plan emphasised building a sports power country and national prosperity to strengthen its place in the world.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the external visual representation of the dancing body is employed to represent nationalism and political ideology, with an obvious embodiment of top-down mode. Square-dancing competitions have become important and representative manifestations of the square-dancing phenomenon in recent years. The theme of square-dancing competitions is usually announced and organised by the official department, which limits the content, with the movements, music, and props conforming to the national ideology. Especially in recent years, the competitions and performances of square-dancing activities have been timed to coincide with milestone events: in 2019, the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China; in 2021, the centenary of the founding of the Communist Party of China; and, in 2022, the Winter Olympic Games. In such settings, the body presentation in square dancing competitions is sometimes by incorporating into national flags, patterns, and words. The most obvious finding to emerge from this research is that internal physical body training and external body visualisation can combine in a carefully staged political performance.

Third, the main results of the top-down mode of the square-dancing phenomenon are evident in the discussion of dancing body aesthetics in square-dancing competitions and stage performances. Chapter Four considered the dancing body in the context of the stage performance of square dancing, an activity that enriches and extends the daily aesthetic representation of the body of the dancing *dama* in contemporary life. The exaggerated body aesthetics in this dancing activity and competition are founded on two aspects: the aesthetic continuation of folk-art costumes, props, and dancing movements, and the dramatic aesthetic effect of heavy makeup. Square-dancing competitions with exaggerated body aesthetics are a conventional inflection of folk art, with stylised movements embodying the traditional folk stage drama effect of the Chinese nation. These competitions are in line with the political ideology of the People's Republic of China concerning the development of literature and art as a response to the cultural power country (*wenhua qiangguo*) of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (*zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi*) emphasised by Xi Jinping.

The concept of culture power country was also mentioned in Chapter Three, regarding the nationalistic bodies of square dancing, and in Chapter Two, regarding the political relationship of the square-dancing community. This concept is one of the many ideologies of national political development and the relationship 'cultural confidence' slogan, emphasises the citizens' full approval of and firm belief in their own culture, and giving the country cultural power to let people firmly believe in the treasure house and historical accumulation of China's excellent traditional culture (Yang, 2018). It is abundantly clear that attaching importance to the inheritance and innovation of traditional Chinese culture and literary aesthetics is a key feature of the Party Central Committee's cultural confidence in the culture power country ideology, with Xi Jinping at its core. The exaggerated and gorgeously dressed (*hua zhi zhao zhan*) body aesthetics of contemporary square dancing are both a legacy and a continuation of the aesthetics of traditional Chinese folk art, reflecting the ideology of Chinese cultural self-confidence

(*wenhua zixin*), which intensifies the top-down development of the square-dancing phenomenon.

To some extent, whether it is from the internal training or the external visual presentation of the dancing body, whether it is from daily exercise or stage performance, every single aspect reflects the strict pursuit of conformity (*Zheng qi hua yi*) in body movements, attire, and even facial expressions. Conformity, as defined by Song (2012), is the act of an individual adopting the behaviour or attitude of a group or individual. This can be either irrational, as in herd behaviour, or rational, as in abidance, compliance, and obedience. Efferson (2008) further emphasises that conformity involves an exaggerated tendency to follow the majority, leading to behaviourally homogeneous social groups. Tang (2013) expands on this by identifying different types of conformity at individual, peer, and group levels, and proposing a model, Confluence, to quantify the effects of social conformity. Similarly, Levitan and Verhulst (2016) argue that conformity is the matching of individual behaviours and attitudes to group norms, and that conformity is shared by a group of individuals and guides their interactions with others. In the context of China, according to Sundararajan (2021), conformity means a system that contains parts under the whole, thus forming a single system.

Importantly, conformity seems to be a typical characteristic of mass collective activities in China, and it can be applied to many masses' collective activities, such as parades, national celebrations, radio gymnastics, and eye exercises, and even square dancing activities. Conformity in Chinese square dancing has the deeper purpose of unifying people's thoughts to promote the sense of the nation as a cohesive whole. This point has always been the vision of Chinese nationalism, and nationalism can only be successfully ensured if it can establish and maintain a collective identity based on the unanimous thinking of the people. Taking this argument further, conformity with Chinese characteristics reflects top-down political

relationships. In these conformed activities, individual feelings and thoughts are suppressed into a collective mind, which is conducive to the rule and identity of the nation. The collective is more important than the individual, reflecting a political ideology of obedience and conformity that reduces otherness.

To provide a more comprehensive understanding, it is essential to relate to the political context of square dancing activities in China today. The contemporary political situation in China is an authoritarian one-party regime led by the Communist Party of China. As discussed in Chapter 2, since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the political ideology of the Maoist era was characterised by Maoist ideology, an emphasis on class struggle and mass movements, collectivism and extreme left-leaning policies. Over time, the Deng Xiaoping era was one of reform, opening up and modernisation, advocating economic development and market-oriented reforms, but still maintaining absolute leadership and political control over the Party. After years of struggle for relative freedom, the protests and massacre in Tiananmen Square in 1989 marked another turning point, reflecting the people's quest for political freedom and democracy and the government's suppression of dissenting voices and continuation of authoritarian rule, highlighting the antagonism and conflict between political power and civil rights. These developments in political power served as a reminder of the state's ultimate authority, displaying its readiness to intervene if threatened. In other words, the top-down development of square dancing conforms to post-totalitarian Chinese politics and is consistent with CPC norms and the political ideology of one-party China.

The above conclusions form a novel interpretation of the uniquely Chinese activity of square dancing, which is a reflection and elaboration of its relationship with national political power. In a non-democratic hybrid country such as China (Mirra, 2022), I suggest that the square-dancing phenomenon embodies national ideological content and political power. Themes of

national unity, culture power country, sports power country, with patriotism at the core, are dexterously woven into a political, nationalistic ideology propaganda appeal.

Viewed as a political propaganda instrument, the essence of the top-down mode of square dancing can be distilled into the domination of this current generation of *damas*: the school can educate the students, the work unit can regulate the workers and staff, and and square dancing can manage this group of *dama*, to ensure unwavering conformity to the leadership of the ruling CPC. The purpose of square dancing is not only to be a valuable new propaganda instrument to cultivate political ideology, but also to reflect the shape and indoctrination of the top-down modes.

Square Dancing as Everyday Revolution

In addition to the bottom-up and top-down modes, there is also a parallel mode, which reflects how square-dancing impacts people's everyday urban life, of which it is becoming an indispensable element. Whether it is performed in the online cloud square during the nationwide quarantine period or in the physical urban space, square dancing and daily life are correlative dependent variables.

From the perspective of square-dancing locations, a deeper consideration of the role of square dancing in the urban cityscape and in people's lives revealed the everyday abundance of the activity, as argued in Chapter Five. The locations where square dancing is most common range from streets, commercial plazas, residential open spaces, and parks, to less popular locations, such as car parks, food markets, and mobile cabin hospitals. However, different square locations have different connotations and profound meanings in people's everyday life. For example, squares in parks, streets, and commercial areas are part of everyday life. Squares in parks are for people who wish to exercise with a clear purpose. Squares in the street are incisive and vivid representations of daily life because this is where people go to and from work, so

dancing in that location affects people's experience of life both visually and audibly.

Squares in car parks and food markets reflect that the square is not only a part of everyday life, but also integrates with and affects everyday life. For example, square dancing in both outdoor and indoor car parks often causes social conflicts regarding 'space grabbing', affecting vehicle access and parking and impacting safety. Squares in food markets have also been integrated into people's daily life routine, affecting those who buy and sell goods. Even if some people are in favour and others not regarding dancing in such places, the daily routine shopping trip is affected. Square dancing brings together people of different ages and professions in the urban setting, connecting the lives of the rich and poor, workers and intellectuals, and children and adults. Square dancing affects different people, all types of spaces, and various lifestyles.

The discussion about the location of square dancing not only corresponds to the above conclusion that square dancing is a bottom-up occupation in physical urban spaces, but also indicates that square dancing and people's everyday life constitute a type of parallel interaction. Square dancing has become increasingly prevalent and significant as a constituent feature of China's everyday urban life. 'Everyday life' refers to how people typically act, think, and feel. Heller (2015) may have viewed everyday life as an important part of an individual's daily experience, emphasising the variety of challenges, emotional experiences, and lifestyle shaping that individuals face in their daily lives. She may have emphasised everyday life's everyday and mundane nature, whilst exploring its meanings and values. In contrast, Bennett (2005) is more concerned with the relationship between everyday life and power, politics and social structures. He may see everyday life as an object of study that can shed light on social issues and power relations, emphasising the role of socialisation processes, identity construction, and social control in everyday life. Lefebvre (2014) Everyday life is not just a simple state of being, but a social phenomenon full of symbols, meanings and practices. He views everyday life as a

cultural phenomenon, a product of the intertwining of social practices and personal experiences. In this understanding, everyday life encompasses both daily living behaviours and habits, as well as the construction of meaning and social relations in everyday life. Lefebvre (2014) further argues that everyday life is an important part of social life and a reflection of social structure and social change. We can no longer view 'everyday life' and its operations as the 'backdrop' of society; instead, it is a complex series of processes that both reflect larger social relationships and help to produce them (De Certeau and Mayol, 1998).

Square dancing ultimately enters the knowable realm, not only in terms of its interesting qualities and how it impacts urban spaces, but also as a pervasive factor in people's everyday life, in which it becomes a type of experiment for contemporary urban images in China. Although many elements influence and impact daily life in contemporary cities, square dancing is a distinctly Chinese phenomenon uniquely shaping contemporary urban life in China. An absence of square dancing would dim contemporary urban life with Chinese characteristics. In other words, if there is no square dance, it will not be the contemporary urban life with Chinese characteristics.

The discussion regarding the square-dancing phenomenon summarised the top-down and bottom-up modes, offering clear conclusions about square dancing and explaining the national political ideology embedded in it. These two modes are constantly and dynamically intertwined. The resulting understanding of square dancing with Chinese characteristics and the conclusion that these shape the urban life experience and people's everyday life indicate a parallel mode of the square-dancing phenomenon. These three modes coexist in a pattern of mutual influence and develop in a staggered manner, which can be summarised as a framework for understanding the phenomenon of square dancing in contemporary China. No single mode can be considered in isolation; all must be considered simultaneously.

Contributions and Future Plans

Since this is the first study on the evolution of the unique square-dancing phenomenon in contemporary urban China, this research contributes new knowledge on multiple levels. First, because square dancing is a cross-disciplinary phenomenon, this research comprehensively investigated the essence of the phenomenon through the fields of visual studies, body culture, urban culture studies, and other disciplines, rather than seeking to categorise square dancing into any single discipline.

Second, there are insufficient data on the phenomenon of square dancing and how to view it in the context of contemporary urban life, political policy, and cultural ideology. The phenomenon merits in-depth study because of its unique participation groups, activity patterns, and power to influence society and the city. Informative data obtained from observational methods, interviews with participants, and documentary research were combined to interpret the phenomenon. The analysis and discussion of the findings identified three themes: the square-dancing community, the dancing body, and how the phenomenon impacts urban life. The results were summarised and analysed in terms of three development modes: bottom-up, top-down, and parallel. Instead of merely discussing individual directions, these three modes interconnect and sublimate our full understanding of the square-dancing phenomenon. The results are of major significance for understanding the square-dancing phenomenon and the relationship between square-dancing activities and politics and culture.

Finally, from a practical viewpoint, since the conclusions from this research are based on literature studies of cultural ideology and policies, and from interviews conducted with local square-dancing participants and audiences, they can serve as a starting point to enable policymakers, cultural researchers, or government departments with an interest in square dancing to evaluate the phenomenon with a greater understanding. The current policy on square

dancing is flawed. The only policy on square dancing – issued in 2015 – is the Circular on Further Regulating Square-Dancing Fitness Activities, jointly issued by the Ministry of Culture, the GASC, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development. The policy mainly aims at standardising the conduct of square dancing and resolving the conflicts generated by its activities. However, since square dancing is a spontaneous phenomenon, the current government departments have not coordinated the dynamic development of its participants, local organisations, government departments, or cultural departments. Based on the new understanding that emerged from this research, it is hoped the findings of this thesis will provide inspiration and stimulus for policymakers, cultural researchers, urban planners, landscape designers, and other groups.

This study focused on the phenomenon of square dancing in urban Han areas, so the limitation of this study is that it does not comprehensively cover square-dancing activities in ethnic minority areas and rural areas of China. The country is vast, and each city or village has its own unique local culture reflected in different representations of square dancing. In future research, I will pay more attention to square dancing in rural areas, especially the minority ethnic groups in southwest China, such as Yunnan and Guizhou provinces. I will continue with the qualitative research methods of this study, such as interviewing, photographing, and observation, and select minority square-dancing participants for data collection, investigating three aspects: the rural daily culture, the aesthetic expression of the female body, and the artistic practice of square dancing. This approach will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of square dancing in contemporary China.

GLOSSARY

List Of Chinese Terms

all the actions must follow the command	<i>yiqie xingdong ting zhihui</i>	一起行动听指挥
alleyways	<i>hutong</i>	胡同
Announcement on Further Regulating on Square Dancing Activities	<i>guanyu jinyibu guangchang wu huodong de tongzhi</i>	关于进一步规范广场舞健身活动的通知
be gorgeously dressed	<i>hua zhi zhao zhan</i>	花枝招展
Beautiful China Village Square Dance Series competition	<i>meili zhongguo xiangcun guangchang wu dasai</i>	美丽中国乡村广场舞大赛
Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei city	<i>jing jin yi</i>	京津冀
Bohai Bay	<i>bo hai wan</i>	渤海湾
China beauty	<i>Zhongguo mei</i>	中国美
China dream	<i>Zhongguo meng</i>	中国梦
China Square Dance series competition	<i>zhongguo guangcahng wu xilie dasai</i>	中国广场舞系列大赛
Chinese women	<i>Zhongguo funv</i>	中国妇女
Circular for Guiding the Healthy Development of Public Square Dancing	<i>guanyu yindao guangcahngwu jiankang fazhan de tongzhi</i>	关于引导广场舞健康发展的通知
Commercial plaza	<i>shangye guangcahng</i>	商业广场
Conformity	<i>Zheng qi hua yi</i>	整齐划一

core socialist values	<i>shehui zhuyi hexin jiazhi guan</i>	社会主义核心价值观
COVID-19 epidemic prevention personnel	<i>Dabai</i>	大白
cultural power country	<i>wenhua qiangguo</i>	文化强国
Cultural Self-Confidence	<i>wenhua zixin</i>	文化自信
Cultural square	<i>wenhua guangcahng</i>	文化广场
Culture of the People's Republic of China	<i>zhonghua renmin gongheguo wenhua bu</i>	中华人民共和国文化部
Dancing	<i>Wu</i>	舞
Dancing China	<i>wudong zhongguo</i>	舞动中国
Dancing the Chinese Dream	<i>wudong zhongguoomeng</i>	舞动中国梦
decrepit empire	<i>fu xiu di guo</i>	腐朽帝国
Develop physical culture and sports, strengthen the people's physique	<i>Zengqiang Renmin Fazhan, Tiyu Yundong</i>	<i>Tizhi,</i> 增强人民体质，发展体育运动
gated communities	<i>fengbixiaoqu</i>	封闭小区
General Administration of Sport of China	<i>guojia tiyu zongju</i>	国家体育总局
harmonious society	<i>hexie shehui</i>	和谐社会
Healthy China 2030	<i>jiankang zhongguo 2030</i>	健康中国 2030
Healthy China, You and me together	<i>jiankang zhongguo, niwo tongxing</i>	健康中国，你我同行

Henan Provincial Sports Bureau	<i>henan sheng tiyuju</i>	河南省体育局
I Love Your Motherland	<i>wo ai ni zuguo</i>	我爱你祖国
Kyushu Huaxia	<i>jiuzhou huaxai</i>	九州华夏
Little apple	<i>xiao pingguo</i>	小苹果
Love my China	<i>ai wo zhonghua</i>	爱我中华
Loyalty dance	<i>zhongzi wu</i>	忠字舞
May Fourth Square	<i>wusi guangchang</i>	五四广场
Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China	<i>zhonghua renmin gongheguo minzheng bu</i>	中华人民共和国民政部
Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development	<i>zhonghua renmin gongheguo zhufang he chengxiang jianshe bu</i>	中华人民共和国住房和城乡建设部
Mobile Cabin Hospital Square Dancing	<i>Fangcang Guangchang wu</i>	方舱广场舞
nation rejuvenation	<i>minzu zhenxing</i>	民族复兴
National Day	<i>guoqingjie</i>	国庆节
National Fitness Day	<i>quanmin jianshen ri</i>	全民健身日
National Fitness Plan	<i>quanmin jianshen jihua</i>	全民健身计划
National Health Commission	<i>Zhonghua renmin gongheguo weisheng jiankang weiyuanhui</i>	中华人民共和国卫生健康委员会
National Square Dance Competition	<i>Quanguo guangcahng wu dasai</i>	全国广场舞大赛
National Square Dancing Fitness	<i>Quanguo guangchang wu</i>	全国广场舞健身活动推广委员

Promotion Committee	<i>jianshen huodong tuiguang weiyuan hui</i>	会
National Square Dancer Training Program	<i>Quanguo guangchang wu rencai peixun kaoping</i>	全国广场舞人才考评
offer amnesty and enlistment to rebels	<i>Zhaoan</i>	招安
Pearl River Delta	<i>zhu san jiao</i>	珠三角
People's communes	<i>remin gongshe</i>	人民公社
People's Square	<i>renmin guangchang</i>	人民广场
Promote national fitness and contribute to a well-off society in all respects	<i>tuidong quanmin jianshen, zhuli quanmian xiaokang</i>	推动全民健身，助力全面小康
Qingdao Culture and Tourism Bureau	<i>Qingdao shi wenhua lvyou ju</i>	青岛市文化旅游局
Qingdao Dance Sports Association	<i>Qingdao shi wudao tiyu xiehui</i>	青岛市舞蹈体育协会
Qingdao Sports Bureau	<i>Qingdao shi tiyu ju</i>	青岛市体育局
Red Flag Flies	<i>hongqi piao</i>	红旗飘
Red Guard	<i>hong weibing</i>	红卫兵
Reform and Opening-up Policy	<i>gaige kaifang</i>	改革开放 (1978)
Residents' Committee	<i>jumin weiyuanhui</i>	居民委员会
sent-down	<i>xia xiang</i>	下乡
Shanghai's alleys	<i>longtang or lilong</i>	弄堂

short video-sharing mobile app	<i>Kuaishou</i>	快手
Sick man of East Asia	<i>dong ya bing fu</i>	东亚病夫
Smash	<i>posijiu</i>	破四旧
socialism with Chinese characteristics	<i>zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi</i>	中国特色社会主义
socialism with Chinese characteristics	<i>zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi daolu</i>	中国特色社会主义道路
Square	<i>guangchang</i>	广场
Square dancing	<i>guangcahngwu</i>	广场舞
Station Square	<i>Zhanqian guangchang</i>	站前广场
subdistrict	<i>jiedao</i>	街道
subdistrict offices	<i>jiedao banshi chu</i>	街道办事处
Sun Yat-sen's Mausoleum Square	<i>Zhongshanling guangchang</i>	中山陵广场
The Coolest Ethnic Style	<i>zuixuan minzu feng</i>	最炫民族风
The Little Red Book	<i>hongbaoshu</i>	红宝书
TikTok	<i>Douyin</i>	抖音
Underground Square	Square <i>dixia guangchang</i>	地下广场
urban villages	<i>cheng zhong cun</i>	城中村
Wechat	<i>weixin</i>	微信

Without the Communist Party, there would be no new China	<i>meiyou gongchandang meiyou xin zhongguo</i>	<i>jiu</i> 没有共产党就没有新中国
---	--	------------------------

Women can hold up half the sky	<i>funv neng ding banbian tian</i>	妇女能顶半边天
--------------------------------	------------------------------------	---------

Work unit	<i>danwei</i>	单位
-----------	---------------	----

Yangtze River	<i>Yangzi jiang</i>	扬子江
---------------	---------------------	-----

Yangtze River Delta	<i>chang san jiao</i>	长三角
---------------------	-----------------------	-----

List Of Chinese Names

Beijing	北京
---------	----

<i>Bilibili</i>	哔哩哔哩
-----------------	------

Dagang Street Dance Team	大港街道舞蹈队
--------------------------	---------

Dalian	大连
--------	----

Dama	大妈
------	----

Deng Xiaoping	邓小平 (1904-1997)
---------------	-----------------

Hunan Province	湖南省
----------------	-----

Jimo District	即墨市
---------------	-----

Mao Zedong	毛泽东 (1893-1976)
------------	-----------------

Nanjing	南京
---------	----

Nennu	嫩女
Qingdao	青岛
Shanbei yangge	陕北秧歌
Shanghai	上海
Shichahai	什刹海
Shunu	淑女
Tianfu square	天府广场
Weng Naiqiang	翁乃强 (b.1936)
Wudong Qingchun Team	舞动青春舞蹈队
Wuhan	武汉
Xi Jinping	习近平 (b.1953)
Xiao Zhuang	晓庄(b.1933)
Xinghai Square	星海广场
Xinghua Dance Team	兴华舞蹈队
Yangge	秧歌
Yewu Dance Team	曳舞团
Zhangjiakou	张家口
Zhou Hongxiang	周弘湘 (b. 1969)

Zhu Yuanzhang

朱元璋(1328-1398)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alidoust, S., Bosman, C. and Holden, G., (2015) December. Socially healthy ageing: the importance of third places, soft edges and walkable neighbourhoods. 7th State of Australian Cities Conference, 9-11 December 2015, Gold Coast, Australia.

Ash, R., (2005) Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation (July-September 2005). *The China Quarterly*, (184), pp.1000-1025.

Alves, F. B. (2017) The traditional urban square—a vital organ in the city or a “thing” of the past?. In *The Pre-Fabrication of Building Facades* (pp. 37-46). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Anderson, P.S., (2006) *Communicating the Good News in China today: Realistic expectations for foreign believers*. Doctoral dissertation, South African Theological Seminary.

Bailey, P. J. (2012) *Women and gender in twentieth-century China*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Bartky, S. L. (2015) *Femininity and domination: Studies in the phenomenology of oppression*. Routledge.

Başaslan, Z. (2022) The Square As A Tool Of Social Communication And Socialization. *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies*, 7(4).

Basten, S., & Jiang, Q. (2014) China's family planning policies: recent reforms and future prospects. *Studies in Family Planning*, 45(4), pp.493-509.

BBC Chinese (2008) 2008 Chinese soldiers performing ‘*fou*’ at the opening ceremony of Beijing Summer Olympics at the National Stadium, Beijing, 2008. Available at:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/chinese/simp/hi/newsid_7540000/newsid_7549500/7549510.stm

[Accessed 21 December 2021]

- BBC News (2013) China Blog: Dancing Grannies Raise a Ruckus. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-china-blog-25330651>. [Accessed 18 January 2019].
- Bender, T. (1978) *Community and social change in America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Bennett, A. (2005) Culture and everyday life. *Culture and Everyday Life*, pp.1-216.
- Bessant, K. C. (2018) *The relational fabric of community*. New York: Springer.
- Bhattacharya, A. (2019) Chinese nationalism under Xi Jinping revisited. *India Quarterly*, 75(2), pp.245-252.
- Bin L. (2020) Memories of the times of China's National Fitness Plan. Available at: <http://m.news.cctv.com/2020/08/08/ARTITICxllUr2HJ44aNiQiHp200808.shtml>. [Accessed 19 December 2021]
- Bitschnau, M., & Mußotter, M. (2022) (National) pride and (conceptual) prejudice: critical remarks on the distinction between patriotism and nationalism. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, pp.1-15.
- Bjorklund, E. M. (1986) The Danwei: socio-spatial characteristics of work units in China's urban society. *Economic geography*, 62(1), pp.19-29.
- Blanchette, J. (2019) *China's new Red Guards: the return of radicalism and the rebirth of Mao Zedong*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bloomberg, L.D. & Volpe, M. (2018) *Completing your Qualitative Dissertation: A Road Map from Beginning to End*. Sage Publications.
- Bock, S., & Borland, K. (2011) *Exotic identities: Dance, difference, and self-*

fashioning. *Journal of Folklore Research: An International Journal of Folklore and Ethnomusicology*, 48(1), pp.1-36.

Bradshaw, T. K. (2008) The post-place community: Contributions to the debate about the definition of community. *Community Development*, 39(1), pp.5-16.

Bray, D. (2005) *Social space and governance in urban China: The danwei system from origins to reform*. Redwood City, California: Stanford University Press.

Breaking Latest News. (2021) During the 31st collective study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, Xi Jinping emphasised the use of red resources to continue the red blood, and strive to create new achievements worthy of history and the people.

Available at: <https://www.breakinglatest.news/news/during-the-31st-collective-study-session-of-the-political-bureau-of-the-cpc-central-committee-xi-jinping-emphasized-the-use-of-red-resources-to-continue-the-red-blood-and-strive-to-create-new-achiev/> [Accessed December 2022]

Breaking Latest News. (2022) Square dancing to welcome the Winter Olympics – side notes on the warm-up session of the Beijing Winter Olympics. Available at:

https://www.breakinglatest.news/news/square-dancing-to-welcome-the-winter-olympics-side-notes-on-the-warm-up-session-of-the-beijing-winter-olympics_news-center_china-net/ [Accessed December 2022]

Brownell, S. (1995) *Training the body for China: Sports in the moral order of the People's Republic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Brownell, S., & Wasserstrom, J. (Eds.). (2002) *Chinese femininities/Chinese masculinities: A reader* (Vol. 4). Chicago: University of California Press.

- Bruno B. (2015) Workers at a factory in Datong, Shanxi Province. [photograph] people.cn. Available at: <http://pic.people.com.cn/n1/2018/1208/c1016-30451280-37.html> [Accessed 12 May 2020]
- Busetto, L., Wick, W. & Gumbinger, C. (2020). How to Use and Assess Qualitative Research Methods. *Neurological Research and Practice*, 2(1), p.14.
- Cai Y. (2006) Urban Square: Historical Context, Development Dynamics, Spatial Quality (*Chengshi Guangchang: Lishi Manluo, Fazhan Dongli, Kongjian Pinzhi*). Nanjing: Southeast University Press.
- Calhoun, C. J. (1980) Community: Toward a variable conceptualisation for comparative research. *Social History*, 5(1), pp.105-129.
- Cartier, C. (2004) City-space: scale relations and China's spatial administrative hierarchy. In *Restructuring the Chinese city* (pp. 19-33). Routledge.
- Chang, J. (2003) *Wild swans: Three daughters of China*. Simon and Schuster.
- Chase, J., Crawford, M., & Kaliski, J. (1999) *Everyday urbanism*. New York: Monacelli Press.
- Chaskin, R. J. (2008) Resilience, community, and resilient communities: Conditioning contexts and collective action. *Child care in practice*, 14(1), pp.65-74.
- Chen, C. (2010) Dancing in the Streets of Beijing. *Insurgent Public Space: Guerrilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities*, p.21.
- Chen, C. (2018) Designing the danceable city: how residents in Beijing cultivate health and community ties through urban dance. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 84(3-4),

pp.237-249.

Chen, J. and Gong, L. (2022) Loneliness in urbanising China. *Health & social care in the community*, 30(3), pp.e812-e822.

Chen, J., & Chen, N. (2018) Everyday knowledge on the move: dynamic process and micro politics of the transfer of Guangchang wu. *Mobilities*, 13(6), pp.921-936.

Chen, M. (2021). Birds of a feather flock together: a case study of Chinese Guangchangwu dama in a super-diverse city.

Chen, T. M. (2001) Dressing for the Party: clothing, citizenship, and gender-formation in Mao's China. *Fashion Theory*, 5(2), pp.143-171.

Chen, Y., Mao, Z., & Qiu, J. L. (2018) *Super-sticky WeChat and Chinese society*. Emerald Publishing Limited.

China Daily (2015) Young girls during the Cultural Revolution fell in love with the Zhongshan suit. Source: China Daily. Available at: https://pic.chinadaily.com.cn/2015-12/11/content_22693459_16.htm [Accessed 9 December 2021]

China Daily (2017) Binzhou, Shandong province: 1,600 elderly people put on a 'China' show by dancing in a square. Available at: http://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/2017-10/30/content_33810117_7.htm. [Accessed 17 December 2021]

China Daily (2022) Square dancing to feature ahead of Beijing 2022 opening ceremony. Available at: https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202201/23/WS61ec8cb9a310cdd39bc82a2f_1.html. [Accessed 16 December 2022].

China News (2015) Thousands of people in Changsha took part in a square dance spelling ‘70’ and ‘Chinese people should become stronger’. Available at:

<http://www.chinanews.com.cn//>. [Accessed 21 December 2020]

China News (2016) 50,000 set a new Guinness World Record for square dancing. Available at: <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/m/sh/2016/11-07/8055541.shtml>. [Accessed 23 December 2020].

China News (2020) New Highlights in the Promotion of Home Scientific Fitness Methods. Available at: <http://www.chinanews.com/ty/2020/02-27/9106202.html> [Accessed 26 September 2021]

China News (2021) Special report of the 14th National Games: Blow the horn of a powerful nation in sports (Di Shisi Jie Quanyunhui Tebie Baodao: Chuixiang Tiyu Qiangguo Haojiao). Available at: <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/gn/2021/09-22/9570857.shtml>. [Accessed 17 December 2021]

China Sports Daily (2019) "Celebrate the birthday, Dance Jiangsu" square dance activity was held (Qingzhu Huadan, Wudong Jiangsu, Guangchangwu Huodong Juxing). Available at: <https://www.sport.gov.cn/n20001280/n20745751/n20767239/c21563691/content.html>. [Accessed 22 December 2019]

China Sports Daily (2020) Xintong Liu. ‘Dapo Diyu Xianzhi “Hulianwang Jia” Lai Zhuli (breaking regional restrictions "Internet +" to help’. p.7.

Chinese Visual (2022) *Square Dancing*. [photograph] © Chinese visual. Available at: <https://www.vcg.com/creative/1348645997>. [Accessed 9 July 2022]

Chistyakov, D. (2015) Nationalism in the Contemporary World: Theoretical Approaches and Empirical Implementations. In *2016 International Conference on Contemporary Education, Social Sciences and Humanities* (pp. 627-631). Atlantis Press.

Cloutier, G., Papin, M., & Bizier, C. (2018) Do-it-yourself (DIY) adaptation: Civic initiatives as drivers to address climate change at the urban scale. *Cities*, 74, pp.284-291.

Cong, D. (2019, August) Motivation and physical fitness in old people participating in a square dance. In *2019 4th International Social Sciences and Education Conference*, pp. 23-25.

Conversi, D. (1995) Reassessing current theories of nationalism: nationalism as boundary maintenance and creation. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 1(1), pp.73-85.

Creswell, J.W. (2014) Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach (4th Ed.). Los Angeles: Sage publications.

Dalsgaard, S., Haarløv, R. T., & Bille, M. (2021) Data witnessing: Making sense of urban air in Copenhagen, Denmark. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 11(2), pp.521-536.

David B. (2016) The Jury is Out: Mao Zedong Swam Faster Than Today's Olympic Champions. Available at: <https://medium.com/china-media-project/the-jury-is-out-mao-zedong-swam-faster-than-todays-olympic-champions-d01a38bee2f3>. [Accessed 23 March 2020]

Davies, N., & Jokiniemi, E. (2008) *Dictionary of architecture and building construction*. Routledge.

Davis, J. P., Du, J., Tang, J. H., Qiao, L., Liu, Y. Q., & Chiang, F. K. (2020) Uniformity, diversity, harmony, and emotional energy in a Chinese STEM classroom. *International*

Journal of STEM Education, 7, pp.1-15.

De Certeau, M., & Mayol, P. (1998) *The Practice of Everyday Life: Living and Cooking. Volume 2* (Vol. 2). University of Minnesota Press.

Delanty, G. (1998) Reinventing community and citizenship in the global era: A critique of the communitarian concept of community. *Communitarianism and citizenship*, p.33, 39.

Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005) *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.

Dong, M. Y. (2003) *Republican Beijing: The city and its histories* (Vol. 8). University of California Press.

Dongcheng District Party Committee publicity Department (2020) A member of the Tongxin Dance team in Dongcheng District, Beijing, instructs her husband to help her take a video of square dancing. Available at: <http://bj.people.com.cn/GB/n2/2020/0211/c14540-33785126.html>. [Accessed 22 August 2022].

Drilling, M., & Schnur, O. (2019) Neighbourhood research from a geographical perspective. *DIE ERDE–Journal of the Geographical Society of Berlin*, 150(2), pp.48-60.

ECNS.CN (2020) Video Conquer the Disease Must Have Confidence! Square Dance in Wuhan Fangcang Hospital. Available at: <http://www.ecns.cn/video/2020-02-12/detail-ifzmtcih6523003.shtml>; [Accessed 25 August 22, 2022]

Efferson, C., Lalive, R., Richerson, P. J., McElreath, R., & Lubell, M. (2008) Conformists and mavericks: the empirics of frequency-dependent cultural transmission. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 29(1), pp.56-64.

Emily W. (2022) Dance Props | Mao Era In Objects. *Maoeraobjects.Ac. Uk*. Available at: <https://maoeraobjects.ac.uk/object-biographies/dance-props/>. [Accessed December 2022]

Entwisle, B., & Henderson, G. (Eds.) (2000) *Re-drawing boundaries: work, households, and gender in China* (Vol. 25). Univ of California Press.

Evans, H. (1997) Women and sexuality in China: Dominant discourses of female sexuality and gender since 1949. Oxford: Polity Press.

Fan, H. & Lu, Z. (2012). Representing the New China and the Sovietisation of Chinese sport (1949–1962). *The international journal of the history of sport*, 29(1), pp.1-29.

Fewsmith, J. (2001) *China since Tiananmen: The politics of transition*. Cambridge University Press.

Finn, D. (2014) DIY urbanism: implications for cities. *Journal of Urbanism: International research on placemaking and urban sustainability*, 7(4), pp.381-398.

Flora, C. B. (2018) *Rural communities: Legacy+ change*. London: Routledge.

Flora, C. B., Flora, J. L., Spears, J. D., & Swanson, L. E. (1992) *Rural communities: Legacy and change*. Westview Press.

Fong, V. L. (2002) China's one-child policy and the empowerment of urban daughters. *American anthropologist*, 104(4), pp.1098-1109.

Forman, J., & Damschroder, L. (2007) Qualitative content analysis. In *Empirical methods for bioethics: A primer* (pp. 39-62). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Forrest, R., & Kearns, A. (2001) Social cohesion, social capital and the neighbourhood. *Urban studies*, 38(12), pp.2125-2143.

Forrest, R., La Grange, A. and Ngai-Ming, Y., (2002) Neighbourhood in a high rise, high density city: some observations on contemporary Hong Kong. *The Sociological Review*, 50(2), pp.215-240.

Fu, C., Cao, W., Fu, C., & Cao, W. (2019) An Exploration of the Vigorous Growth of Urban Squares. *An Urban History of China*, pp.243-272.

Gao, J. (2015) The Sociological Research on Square Dancing in China. In *1st International Conference on Arts, Design and Contemporary Education (ICADCE 2015)*. Atlantis Press, pp. 168-171.

Gao, L., Zhang, L., Qi, H., & Petridis, L. (2016) Middle-aged female depression in perimenopausal period and square dance intervention. *Psychiatria Danubina*, 28(4), pp.372-378.

Gao, Y. (2016) Top-down and bottom-up processes for rural development and the role of architects in Yunnan, China. *Buildings*, 6(4), p.47.

Gaubatz, P. (2021) New China square: Chinese public space in developmental, environmental and social contexts. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 43(9), pp.1235-1262.

General Administration of Sport of China (2015) 12 authorised square-dancing routines.

Available at:

<https://www.sport.gov.cn/n20001280/n20745751/n20767239/c21824298/content.html>

[Accessed 20 December 2020]

General Administration of Sport of China (2015) Circular for Guiding the Healthy Development of Public Square Dancing (*guanyu yindao guangcahngwu jiankang fazhan de tongzhi*). Available from:

<https://www.sport.gov.cn/gdnps/html/zhengce/content.jsp?id=25530621> [Accessed 12 May 2021]

General Administration of Sport of China (2017) Announcement on Further Regulating on Square Dancing Activities. Available at:

<https://www.sport.gov.cn/n315/n20001395/c20030994/content.html>. [Accessed 20 December 2020]

General Administration of Sport of China (2019) Management Measures of National Square Dancing Competition Event (Trial). Available at:

<https://www.sport.gov.cn/n315/n20001395/c20019985/content.html> [Accessed 12 May 2021]

General Administration of Sport of China (2022) The launch of the "National Fitness Day" in 2022 is imminent. Available at:

<https://www.sport.gov.cn/n315/n20067006/c24544701/content.html> [Accessed 30 November 2022]

Gerdes, E. V. (2008) Contemporary "yangge": The moving history of a Chinese folk dance form. *Asian Theatre Journal*, pp.138-147.

Gettyimages (2019) Square Dancing in Qingdao Technology Street. Available at:

<https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/photo/square-dancing-in-qingdao-royalty-free-image/485753907?adppopup=true>. [Accessed 7 July 2019].

Goffman, E. (2009) *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Simon and schuster.

Goundar, S. (2012) Chapter 3-Research methodology and research method. *Cloud Computing. Research Gate Publications*.

Greenfeld, L., & Chirot, D. (1994) Nationalism and aggression. *Theory and society*, pp.79-130.

Gusfield, J. R. (1975) *Community: A critical response*. New York: Harper & Row.

Hahn Fox, B., & Jennings, W. G. (2014). How to write a methodology and results section for empirical research. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 25(2), pp.137-156.

Halbwachs, M. (2020). *On collective memory*. University of Chicago Press.

Hancock, B., Ockleford, E., & Windridge, K. (2001) *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: Trent focus group.

He, W., Jiang, L., Ge, X., Ye, J., Yang, N., Li, M., ... & Han, X. (2020) Quality of life of empty-nest elderly in China: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychology, health & medicine*, 25(2), pp.131-147.

Heller, A. (2015) *Everyday life*. London: Routledge.

Henning, C., & Lieberg, M. (1996) Strong ties or weak ties? Neighbourhood networks in a new perspective. *Scandinavian Housing and planning research*, 13(1), pp.3-26.

Hobsbawm, E. J. (1992) *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality*. Cambridge university press.

Holm, D. (1984) Folk art as propaganda: the Yangge movement in Yan'an. *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts*, pp.3-35.

Hong, J. (1994) Mao Zedong's Cultural Theory and China's Three mass-culture Debates: A Tentative Study of Culture, Society and Politics. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 4(2), pp.87-104.

Hou S., Song L. (2015) Social Problems Reflected in Square Dancing Incidences. *Journal of NSI*, 29(2), pp.44–55.

Hou, J. (Ed.). (2010) *Insurgent public space: guerrilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*. London: Routledge.

Hu, J. (2013). Thinking of City Public Space Landscape Design: An Example of Puyang City Train Station Square Landscape Design. *Applied Mechanics and Materials*, 438, pp.1805-1807.

Huang, D. (2017) *In the Afternoon, the Market Becomes a Dance Space, and the Sellers Collectively Dance (Wuhou Caishichang Cheng Wuchang, Maicai Dama Jiti Bengdi)*.

[photograph] © China Visual. Available

at:<https://www.chinanews.com.cn/tp/hd2011/2017/06-06/745485.shtml>. [Accessed 19 July 2019]

Huang, C. (2016) “Dancing grannies” in the modern city: consumption and group formation in urban China. *Asian Anthropology*, 15(3), pp.225-241.

Huang, C. (2019) *Self-cultivation and Sociality Among Retired Women in Urban China* (Doctoral dissertation, UCLA).

Huang, C. (2021) Becoming Dama: The new old age in urban China. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 57, p.100928.

Hung, C. T. (2005) The dance of revolution: Yangge in Beijing in the early 1950s. *The China Quarterly*, 181, pp.82-99.

Hung, W. (1991) Tiananmen Square: a political history of monuments. *Representations*, (35), pp.84-117.

Hung, W. (2005) *Remaking Beijing : Tiananmen Square and the Creation of a Political Space*. London: Reaktion Books.

Ifeng News (2014) Middle school students practised radio gymnastics in Beijing, China. Available at: https://news.ifeng.com/a/20141013/42190167_0.shtml#p=1 [Accessed 21 December 2021]

Imaginechina-Tuchong (2018) Xinghai Plaza, Dalian, the world's largest city square. [photograph] ©Alamy Stock Photo. Available at: <https://www.alamy.com/dalian-xinghai-square-image256949523.html> [Accessed July 2017]

Jessiman, W. C. (2013) 'To be honest, I haven't even thought about it'—recruitment in small-scale, qualitative research in primary care. *Nurse Researcher*, 21(2).

Jiang, J. (2005) Mao and His People in Post-Mao Art. Blok No. 4.

Jiang, J. (Ed.). (2007) *Burden or legacy: from the Chinese Cultural Revolution to contemporary art*. Hong Kong University Press.

Jiang, M., & Nakajima, N. (2022) Chongqing People's Square after 1997: Situated publicness of municipal squares in reform-era China. *Urban Research & Practice*, pp.1-29.

Jinxia, D. (2010) The Beijing games, national identity and modernization in China. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 27(16-18), 2798-2820.

Jonathan W. (2013) *Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China*. [photograph] ©Alamy Stock Photo. Available at: <https://www.alamy.com/tiananmen-square-beijing-china-and-the-gate-of-heavenly-peace-tian-an-men-tiananmen-square-is-a-famous-landmark-in-beijing-by-the-forbidden-city-image259619099.html?imageid=9506D0A9-69F3-46AC-9574-278A130D7F6D&p=827173&pn=1&searchId=cc61345d66c57799687b9a4a7d44622d&sear>

chtype= [Accessed August 2019]

Kaliski, J. (1999) The present city and the practice of city design. *Everyday Urbanism*, ed.

Margaret Crawford, John Chase and John Kaliski. New York: Monacelli Press.

Kaplan, A., & Ross, K. (2002) Introduction to everyday life: Yale French studies. *The everyday life reader*, pp.76-82.

Kara, H. (2018) *Research ethics in the real world* (pp. 109-120). Bristol: Policy Press.

Kasinitz, P., Mollenkopf, J. H., Holdaway, J., & Waters, M. C. (2009) *Inheriting the city: The children of immigrants come of age*. Harvard University Press.

Kempers, M. (2001) *Community matters: An exploration of theory and practice*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Kohn, H. (1939) The nature of nationalism. *American Political Science Review*, 33(6), pp.1001-1021.

Kourlas, G. (2020) How we use our bodies to navigate a pandemic. *New York Times*, p.31.

Kripka, R., Scheller, M., & Bonotto, D. L. (2015) Pesquisa Documental: considerações sobre conceitos e características na Pesquisa Qualitativa. *CIAIQ2015*, 2.

Kunz, J. L. (1996) From Maoism to ELLE: the impact of political ideology on fashion trends in China. *International Sociology*, 11(3), pp.317-335.

Langdon, S. W., & Petracca, G. (2010). Tiny dancer: Body image and dancer identity in female modern dancers. *Body image*, 7(4), pp.360-363.

Lee, N. K. (2009) How is a political public space made?—The birth of Tiananmen Square and the May Fourth Movement. *Political Geography*, 28(1), pp.32-43.

- Lefebvre, H. (2014) *The Critique of Everyday Life: The One-Volume Edition* (e-pub). *Londres, Nova Iorque: Verso*.
- Leung, H. H. (2021) 14 Lifestyle Sport Identity and National Identity: Thoughts on the Chinese Government's (re) Creation of the Dama Image. In *Lifestyle Sports and Identities: Subcultural Careers Through the Life Course* (pp. 196-201). London: Routledge.
- Levitan, L. C., & Verhulst, B. (2016) Conformity in groups: The effects of others' views on expressed attitudes and attitude change. *Political Behavior*, 38, pp.277-315.
- Li L., Li Q. (2018) The Evolution of the media image of "Dama" (2007–2017) – A Case study of relevant reports in People's Daily, Southern Metropolis Daily and China Women's Daily (Dama Mijie Xingxiang de Chanbian (2007–2017) – Yi Renmin Ribao Nanfang Dushibao he Zhongguo Funvbaobao Xiangguanbaodao Weili), *Bianji Zhiyou (Editorial Friend)*, 1066 (11), pp.62–68.
- Li S. (2022). Embodying ageing: middle-aged and older women's bodily fitness and aesthetics in urban China. *Ageing & Society*, 42(8), pp.1844-1862.
- Li The-Chuan, M. (2011) Women of New China. *Pakistan Horizon*, 64(4), pp.97-101.
- Li W. (1979) Tiananmen guangchang de guihua he sheji (The planning and design of Tiananmen Square). *Jianzhuxue lunwenji. (Collected works on architectural studies, No. 2)*. Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, pp.14–50.
- Li, G., & Lee, J. (2022) What Is Happening in the Squares of China? Exploring the Experience of Participating in Square Sports and Sustainability Factors. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(23), pp.15693.
- Li, J., & Zhu, X. (2018) P4-379: Effects of square dance on episodic memory and

hippocampus in Chinese older adults. *Alzheimer's & Dementia*, 14(7S_Part_31), pp.1619-1619.

Li, Q. (2017) Characteristics and social impact of the use of social media by Chinese Dama. *Telematics and Informatics*, 34(3), pp.797-810.

Li, Q. (2020) Social Media and “Chinese Dama”. *China in the Era of Social Media: An Unprecedented Force for An Unprecedented Social Change*, p.223.

Li, X. (2020) The thought on square dancing heat in China. *Frontiers in Art Research*, 2(2), pp. 28-32.

Liao, J., Yang, Y. J., & Xu, D. R. (2020) Multiyear square dancing is associated with superior mental processing capacity but not memory in middle-aged and older chinese women: a cross-sectional propensity score matching analysis. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 17(7), pp.736-743.

Liebelt, C. (2016) Manufacturing beauty, grooming selves: the creation of femininities in the global economy—an introduction. *Sociologus*, (1), pp.9-24.

Lin, G. H. (2013) Interviews vs thick description. A comparison and construct study for qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. *Selected works*.

Lin, M., Bao, J., & Dong, E. (2020) Dancing in public spaces: An exploratory study on China’s Grooving Grannies. *Leisure Studies*, 39(4), pp.545-557.

Lindgren, B. M., Lundman, B., & Graneheim, U. H. (2020) Abstraction and interpretation during the qualitative content analysis process. *International journal of nursing studies*, 108, p.103632.

Liu X., Zhao X., & Zhang B. (2018) Thinking about the contradictions of space use of Square Dance in Chinese cold cities through newspaper reports. In *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering* (Vol. 371, No. 1, p. 012040). IOP Publishing.

Liu, H., Zhang, N., Fang, H., Du, K., & Bi, J. (2020) On the Time Value of Inheriting and Promoting Chinese Red Music Culture. In *2020 2nd International Conference on Economic Management and Cultural Industry (ICEMCI 2020)* (pp. 65-68). Atlantis Press.

Liu, S. J., & Guo, X. D. (2013) Comparative research of middle-aged women fitness effects of Taiji Quan and square dance. *China Sport Sci Technol*, 49(5), pp.103-105.

Liu, Y. (2016). *Social Work Research on Neighbourhood Building in Urban Communities*.

Lockett, M. (1988) Culture and the problems of Chinese management. *Organization studies*, 9(4), pp.475-496.

Logarusic, D. (2021). Methodological principles as elements of scientific research work. *Law Theory & Prac.*, 38, p.43.

Long, Y., Shen, Y., & Jin, X. (2016) Mapping block-level urban areas for all Chinese cities. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 106(1), pp.96-113.

Lu, B. (2017) ARC Centre of Excellence in Population Ageing Research Working Paper 2017/09-Sustainable Health Care System in Ageing China: A Case Study of.'

Lu, D. (2006) *Remaking Chinese urban form: modernity, scarcity and space, 1949-2005*. Routledge.

Lu, J., & Misni, A. (2023) Determining the suitability of the outdoor environment for the elderly in Badahu Park, Qingdao, China. *Built Environment Journals*, 20(2), pp.61-69.

- Lu, X. (2004) *Rhetoric of the Chinese cultural revolution: The impact on Chinese thought, culture, and communication*. University of South Carolina Press.
- Lu, Y., Yang, J., & Qin, T. (2021) Public life as identity construction: A case study based on an SL square-dancing group in Shanghai. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 72(5), pp.1260-1283.
- Lucas, K., Van Wee, B., & Maat, K. (2016) A method to evaluate equitable accessibility: combining ethical theories and accessibility-based approaches. *Transportation*, 43, pp.473-490.
- Lufuyuan (2019) Xinjiang / China - Aug 31 2019: Chinese female tourists with colorful scarf. Available at: <https://www.shutterstock.com/zh/image-photo/xinjiang-china-aug-31-2019-chinese-1797768031> [Accessed 1 December 2021]
- Luo, L., & Hu, X. (2020) Study on chinese elderly women's clothing design based on ergonomics. In *Digital Human Modeling and Applications in Health, Safety, Ergonomics and Risk Management. Posture, Motion and Health: 11th International Conference, DHM 2020, Held as Part of the 22nd HCI International Conference, HCII 2020, Copenhagen, Denmark, July 19–24, 2020, Proceedings, Part I 22* (pp. 214-227). Springer International Publishing.
- Ma, Y. (2015) Online Chinese nationalism and its nationalist discourses. In *Routledge Handbook of Chinese Media* (pp. 203-216). Routledge.
- Ma, Y. (2017) *Square Dance Constraints and Motivations for the Elderly in Chongqing, China*. Master's thesis, Vancouver Island University.
- Macdonald, D. (1953) A theory of mass culture. *Diogenes*, 1(3), pp.1-17.

Mai, S., & Hao, X. (2020) Older women's identity reconstruction in leisure spaces: A case of Guangzhou, China. *Leisure Studies*, 39(3), pp.417-432.

Man, E. K. W. (2019) *Bodies in China: Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Politics*. The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press.

Mao, L. (2012) *Changing times and diverging lives: the 60s generation of Chinese women from little red soldier to glamorous housewife*. Doctoral dissertation. University of York.

Mao, L. (2020) The Rhetoric of Mao Zedong: Transforming China and Its People by Xing Lu. *Rhetorica*, 38(1), pp.126-129.

Marion, J. S. (2006) *Dance as self, culture, and community: The construction of personal and collective meaning and identity in competitive ballroom and salsa dancing*. California: University of California, San Diego.

Mamlok, R., (2018) *The International Medical Relief Corps in Wartime China, 1937-1945*. McFarland.

Markula, P. (2020) Dance, movement and leisure cultures. *Leisure Studies*, 39(4), 465-478.

Martin, R., & Chen, R. (2020) Step, Hop, Shuffle: Artistic Practices of Guangchang Wu. *The People's Dance: The Power and Politics of Guangchang Wu*, pp.33-47.

Martin, R., & Chen, R. (2020) *The people's dance: The power and politics of Guangchang Wu*. Springer Nature.

Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative Researching*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

McCulloch, G. (2004) *Documentary research: In education, history and the social sciences* (Vol. 22). Routledge.

- McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986) Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of community psychology*, 14(1), pp.6-23.
- Meikle, G. (2016) *Social media: Communication, sharing and visibility*. Routledge.
- Mi, L. (2016) Identification, belonging and pleasure: Women's self-regulation and constructions of the subject in dancing a street square from a generational perspective. *Collect. Women's Stud*, 134, pp.62-79.
- Miller, D. (1987) *The Blackwell encyclopaedia of political thought*. London: Blackwell Reference.
- Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China. (2019) To cultivate and practice Core Socialist Values. Available at: http://www.mod.gov.cn/jmsd/2019-12/01/content_4856014.htm. [Accessed December 2020]
- Mirra, F. (2022) *Urban Imaginaries: Contemporary art and urban transformations in China since 2001*. Doctoral dissertation, Birmingham City University.
- Mulhall, A. (2003) In the field: notes on observation in qualitative research. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 41(3), pp.306-313.
- Nathanson, S. (1989) In defense of "moderate patriotism". *Ethics*, 99(3), pp.535-552.
- National Health Commission of The People's Republic of China (2020) Square dancing with a mask is still risky. Available at: <http://www.nhc.gov.cn/>. [Accessed 6 January 2020]
- Ng Han Guan (2019) A military honour guard march. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/01/world/asia/china-national-day-parade.html> [Accessed 21 January 2021]

Noth, J. (2021) Militiawomen, Red Guards, and Images of Female Militancy in Maoist China. *Twentieth-century china*, 46(2), pp.153-180.

Ou, K. L., Wong, M. Y. C., Chung, P. K., & Chui, K. Y. K. (2022) Effect of square dance interventions on physical and mental health among Chinese older adults: A systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(10), p.6181.

Ouyang C. (2021) Investigation and analysis on the development of square dancing in Shenzhen city (Zhonglaonian Guangcahng Wu Kaizhan Xianzhuang Yu Fenxi). Master's Thesis, Central China Normal University.

Özkırmılı, U. (2019) *Nationalism*. Oxford University Press.

Parsons, T. (1951) *The social system*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2002) Two decades of developments in qualitative inquiry: A personal, experiential perspective. *Qualitative social work*, 1(3), pp.261-283.

Peng, F., Yan, H., Sharma, M., Liu, Y., Lu, Y., Zhu, S., ... & Zhao, Y. (2020). Exploring factors influencing whether residents participate in square dancing using social cognitive theory: A cross-sectional survey in Chongqing, China. *Medicine*, 99(4).

People's Daily (1952) Radio gymnastics is widely implemented throughout the country.

People's Government of Henan (2022) National Fitness Day healthy exercise. Available at: <https://www.hengyang.gov.cn/wlgtj/zwgk/gzyw/qxdt/20220808/i2767912.html> [Accessed 18 December 2022]

Poon, S. W. (2019) Embodying Maoism: The swimming craze, the Mao cult, and body politics in Communist China, 1950s–1970s. *Modern Asian Studies*, 53(5), pp.1450-1485.

Punch, K. F. (2013) *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. SAGE Publications.

Qian, J., & Lu, Y. (2019) On the trail of comparative urbanism: Square dance and public space in China. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 44(4), pp.692-706.

Qin, J., Rong, X., Zhu, G., & Jiang, Y. (2018) The effects of square dancing on bone mineral density and bone turnover markers in patients with postmenopausal osteoporosis. *Journal of Mechanics in Medicine and Biology*, 18(08), p.1840027.

Qingdao Daily. (2021) *Part of the 7th National Population Census Bulletin of Qingdao*. Available at: https://www.dailyqd.com/3g/html/2021-06/08/content_311835.htm. [Accessed May 2023].

QingDao GOV (Qingdao Government Website). (2022) *Qingdao actively cope with the ageing population to explore to accelerate the development of the silver economy*. Available at: http://www.qingdao.gov.cn/zwgk/xxgk/fgw/ywfl/shfz/202211/t20221111_6491043.shtml. [Accessed December 2022]

Qingdao Municipal Bureau of Statistics (2021) *Part of the 7th National Population Census Bulletin of Qingdao*. Available at: https://www.dailyqd.com/3g/html/2021-06/08/content_311835.htm. [Accessed 9 May 2023]

Qingdao Natural Resources and Planning Bureau (2021) *Territorial Spatial Planning Of Qingdao City (2021-2035)*. Available at: <https://www.guoturen.com/wenku-1711>. [Accessed 4 May 2023]

Rai, N., & Thapa, B. (2015) A study on purposive sampling method in research. *Kathmandu: Kathmandu School of Law*, 5.

Rapley, T. J. (2001) The art (fulness) of open-ended interviewing: some considerations on analysing interviews. *Qualitative research*, 1(3), pp.303-323.

Rhode, D. L. (2010) *The beauty bias: The injustice of appearance in life and law*. Oxford University Press.

Riger, S., & Lavrakas, P. J. (1981) Community ties: Patterns of attachment and social interaction in urban neighborhoods. *American journal of community psychology*, 9(1), p.55.

Roberts, R. (2004) Positive women characters in the revolutionary model works of the Chinese cultural revolution: An argument against the theory of erasure of gender and sexuality. *Asian Studies Review*, 28(4), pp.407-422.

Roberts, R. (2006) Gendering the revolutionary body: Theatrical costume in Cultural Revolution China. *Asian Studies Review*, 30(2), pp.141-159.

Robinson, O. C. (2014) Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: A theoretical and practical guide. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 11(1), pp.25-41.

Rofel, L. (1999) *Other modernities: Gendered yearnings in China after socialism*. University of California Press.

Rovisco, M. (2017) The indignados social movement and the image of the occupied square: The making of a global icon. *Visual Communication*, 16(3), 337-359.

Ruonavaara, H. (2022) The anatomy of neighbour relations. *Sociological Research Online*, 27(2), pp.379-395.

Saito, Y. (2007) *Everyday aesthetics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Sapatsinskaya, K. M., & Alexandrov, B. Y. (2021) The Formation System of Physical Culture And Sports, Physical Education In China. *Akimushkin RV, Gabbazova A. Ya.*, 205.
- Saunders, B., Kitzinger, J., & Kitzinger, C. (2015). Anonymising interview data: Challenges and compromise in practice. *Qualitative research*, 15(5), pp.616-632.
- Schilling, J. (2006) On the pragmatics of qualitative assessment. *European journal of psychological assessment*, 22(1), pp.28-37.
- Schneewind, S. (2008) *Long Live the Emperor! Uses of the Ming Founder across Six Centuries of East Asian History*. Minneapolis: Society for Ming Studies.
- Schwartz, B. (1960) Totalitarian consolidation and the Chinese model. *The China Quarterly*, 1, pp.18-21.
- Scott, J. (2014) *A matter of record: Documentary sources in social research*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Seckington, I. (2005) Nationalism, ideology and China's 'Fourth Generation' leadership. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 14(42), pp.23-33.
- Seetoo, C., & Zou, H. (2016) China's guangchang wu: The emergence, choreography, and management of dancing in public squares. *TDR/the drama review*, 60(4), pp.22-49.
- Shang H. (2016) Research on the Promotion and Development of Qingdao Square Dance (Qingdao Shi Guangchang Wu de Tuiguang Yu Fazhan Yanjiu). Master's Thesis, Shandong Physical Education Institute.
- Shea, J. L. (2014) Revolutionary narratives of self-compassion among older women in post-Mao Beijing. *Anthropology & Medicine*, 21(1), pp.8-26.

Shen, L. (2020). Olympic Strategy, Nationalism and Legitimacy: The Role of Ideology in the Development of Chinese Elite Sports Policy in the First Reform Decade, 1978–1988. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 37(sup1), pp.26-40.

Sheng, L. (2022) Embodying ageing: middle-aged and older women's bodily fitness and aesthetics in urban China. *Ageing & Society*, 42(8), pp.1844-1862.

Shi, J., Li, G., Zhao, Y., Nie, Q., Xue, S., Lv, Y., ... & Du, G. (2022) Communication Mechanism and Optimization Strategies of Short Fitness-Based Videos on TikTok during COVID-19 Epidemic Period in China. *Frontiers in Communication*, 7, p.778782.

Sina News (2017) The underground parking lot was transformed into a dance square. Available at: http://k.sina.com.cn/article_6306440776_p177e4a648001001f24.html#. [Accessed 8 July 2019]

Siteng F. (2015) Thousands of people in Changsha participated in a square dance to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the victory of the Anti-Japanese War. Available at: http://news.cnr.cn/native/gd/20150831/t20150831_519714142.shtml. [Accessed 6 December 2021]

Smith, A. D. (2013) *Nationalism: Theory, ideology, history*. John Wiley & Sons.

Sohu News (2020) Guangchang wu will step into the era of professional examination. Available at: https://www.sohu.com/a/245826721_680537. [Accessed 10 December 2021]

Sohu News (2023) See if these dama can find their own shadows? Photo three treasures: Silk scarf sunglasses visor hat. Available at: https://www.sohu.com/a/658977309_121469899 [Accessed 28 November 2023]

Song, G., Ma, Q., Wu, F., & Li, L. (2012) The psychological explanation of

conformity. *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal*, 40(8), pp.1365-1372.

Soutphommasane, T. (2012) *The virtuous citizen: Patriotism in a multicultural society*. Cambridge University Press.

Spielman, S. E., & Logan, J. R. (2013) Using high-resolution population data to identify neighborhoods and establish their boundaries. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 103(1), pp. 67-84.

State Council of the People's Republic of China (2021) The State Council on printing and distributing the national fitness program. Available at:
http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2021-08/03/content_5629218.htm [Accessed March 2021]

Su C. (2010) Impression of Urban Square Design. *Journal of Chinese Landscape Architecture*. Beijing: Chinese Society of Landscape Architecture, vol.1(54): 5.

Su G. (1950) Celebrating the People's Republic of China's National Day (qingzhu zhonghua renmin gongheguo guoqingjie [Photograph] Copyright © International Institute of Social History. Photo: Courtesy of the IISH/Stefan R. Landsberger Collection. Available at:
<https://maoeraobjects.ac.uk/sources/dance-props-celebrating-the-peoples-republic-of-chinas-national-day/>. [Accessed December 2022]

Sun, J., Yao, C., Wang, Z., Wu, J., Zhang, B., Zhou, Z., & Zhang, Y. (2022) The beneficial effects of square dance on musculoskeletal system in early postmenopausal Chinese women: a cross-sectional study. *BMC Women's Health*, 22(1), p.247.

Sun, Y., Ji, P., Wang, Y., & Fan, H. (2021) The Association Between the Subjective Exercise Experience of Chinese Women Participating in Square Dance and Group Cohesion: The

Mediating Effect of Income. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, p.700408.

Sundararajan, L. (2021) Spirituality in a Civil Religion: The Chinese Notions of Harmony. *Indigenous Psychology of Spirituality: In My Beginning is My End*, pp.51-69.

Talen, E. (2015) Do-it-yourself urbanism: A history. *Journal of Planning History*, 14(2), pp.135-148.

Tang, H. (2004) An analysis of contemporary urban public open space design and construction in China: progresses and problems. *Annexe Thesis Digitisation Project 2019 Block 22*.

Tang, J., Wu, S., & Sun, J. (2013, August) Confluence. In *Proceedings of the 19th ACM SIGKDD international conference on Knowledge discovery and data mining*. ACM.

Tang, X. (1996) *Global space and the nationalist discourse of modernity: the historical thinking of Liang Qichao*. Stanford University Press.

Tao C. (2020) Exploring the square-dancing phenomenon (Guangchang wu xianxiang yanjiu). Doctoral Dissertation. Hunan Normal University.

Tarr, B., Launay, J., & Dunbar, R. I. (2016) Silent disco: dancing in synchrony leads to elevated pain thresholds and social closeness. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 37(5), pp.343-349.

Thomas, H. (2017) *The body, dance and cultural theory*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Tian, E., & Wise, N. (2022). Dancing in Public Squares—Toward a Socially Synchronous Sense of Place. *Leisure Sciences*, pp.1-21.

Tight, M. (2019) Documentary research in the social sciences. *Documentary Research in the*

Social Sciences, pp.1-232.

Tong, C. (2013) *Square dancing in the streets, Xuanhua, China*. Doctoral Dissertation. The Ohio State University.

Toutiao News. (2019) More Than 100 Million People, Why Do Chinese People Love Square Dancing So Much?. Toutiao.com, 2019. Available at:

https://www.toutiao.com/article/6763924285128983053/?traffic_source=&in_ogs=&utm_source=&source=search_tab&utm_medium=wap_search&original_source=&in_tfs=&channel=&enter_keyword=%E6%8A%96%E9%9F%B3%E5%86%AF%E6%AC%A3%E6%AC%A3%E7%BD%91%E7%BA%A2&source=m_redirect. [Accessed December 2019].

Townsend, J. (1992) Chinese nationalism. *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, (27), pp.97-130.

Um, H. K. (2005) The dialectics of politics and aesthetics in the Chinese Korean dance drama, the spirit of Changbai Mountain. *Asian Ethnicity*, 6(3), pp.203-222.

Unger, J. (1993) Urban families in the eighties: An analysis of Chinese surveys. *Chinese families in the post-Mao era*, 2, pp.25-49.

Walker, A. (2013) *Hard Times Require Furious Dancing: New Poems*. New World Library.

Wang, B. (Ed.). (2010) *Words and their stories: essays on the language of the Chinese revolution* (Vol. 27). Brill.

Wang, J. (2017) Representing Chinese nationalism/patriotism through President Xi Jinping's "Chinese dream" discourse. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 16(6), pp.830-848.

Wang, J., & Jia, S. (2015) The contemporary value of patriotism. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 5(05), p.161.

Wang, Q. (2015) Guangchang Wu: An ethnographic study of dance in public spaces. *Unpublished Master's thesis*). Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Wang, X. Q., Pi, Y. L., Chen, P. J., Liu, Y., Wang, R., Li, X., & Niu, Z. B. (2016) Traditional Chinese exercise for cardiovascular diseases: systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Journal of the American Heart Association*, 5(3), p.e002562.

Wang, Y., Yu, Q., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2002) Defining the virtual tourist community: implications for tourism marketing. *Tourism management*, 23(4), pp.407-417.

Wang, Z. (2008) National humiliation, history education, and the politics of historical memory: Patriotic education campaign in China. *International Studies Quarterly*, 52(4), pp.783-806.

Wanxiang News. (2021) *Large Square Dance In The Market, All The Movements Are Neat* video (Caishichang Daxing Guangchang Wu, Quanchang Dongzuo Zhengqi). Available at: <https://tv.sohu.com/v/dXMvMzM1OTQxODIxLzMwMzcxMDYxMS5zaHRtbA==.html>. [Accessed October 2021]

Weishi, Y. (2007) Nationalism in a transforming China. *Global Asia*, 2(1), pp.21-27.

Wellman, B. (2001) The persistence and transformation of community: From neighbourhood groups to social networks. *Report to the law commission of Canada*, 45, pp.436-455.

Weng N. (1966) *Red Guards hold Mao Zedong's Little Red Book aloft in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China, in 1966*. [photograph] ©Photography of China. Available at: <https://photographyofchina.com/author/weng-naiqiang>. [Accessed October 2022]

- Weng N. (2017) *The Colouful China: Photography spanning 30 years of history (Caise de Zhonguo: Kuangyue 30nian de yingxaing lishi)*, Beijing: Citic Publishing House.
- Whiting, A. S. (1983) Assertive nationalism in Chinese foreign policy. *Asian Survey*, 23(8), 913-933.
- Whyte, M.K. and Parish, W.L. (1985) *Urban Life in Contemporary China*. University of Chicago Press.
- Wilcox, E. (2020) When folk dance was radical: cold war yangge, world youth festivals, and overseas Chinese leftist culture in the 1950s and 1960s. *China Perspectives*, 1(2020-1), 33-42.
- Wirth, L. (1938) Urbanism as a Way of Life. *American journal of sociology*, 44(1), 1-24.
- Woodward, K. (1991). Aging and its discontents: Freud and other fictions.
- Wu M. (2020) Square as a Stage: Assembly and Feminism of Chinese Women in Square Dance. Available at: <https://menghangwu.wordpress.com/2020/10/03/square-dance-and-public-space/>. [Accessed December 2021]
- Wu, F. (2022) *Creating Chinese Urbanism: Urban revolution and governance changes*. UCL Press.
- Wu, L. (2022) *Chinese square dance: an analysis of its fast growth with the constraint-effects-mitigation model*. Master's thesis, Electronic version published by Vancouver Island University.
- Xiao, G., & Wall, G. (2009) Urban tourism in Dalian, China. *Anatolia*, 20(1), 178-195.
- Xiao, J., & Hilton, A. (2019) An investigation of soundscape factors influencing perceptions

of square dancing in urban streets: a case study in a county level city in China. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 16(5).

Xing Q. (2018) Investigation on the culture of square dance in China's rural areas. *J. Lit. Art Stud*, 8, 1597-1603.

Xinhua News (2015) Xi Jinping: Vigorously promotes the great spirit of patriotism to provide spiritual support for realising the Chinese Dream. Available at:

http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-12/30/c_1117630949.htm [Accessed 20 December 2022]

Xinhua News (2017) Xi Jinping: Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. Available at: [https://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpcnc/2017-](https://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpcnc/2017-10/27/c_1121867529.htm)

[10/27/c_1121867529.htm](https://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpcnc/2017-10/27/c_1121867529.htm) [Accessed 14 December 2022]

Xinhua News (2018) Notice of the CPC Central Committee Organization Department and Propaganda Department on the In-Depth Development of the 'Promoting the Spirit of Patriotic Struggle and Building a New Era' among the Intellectuals. Available at:

https://app.peopleapp.com/Api/600/DetailApi/shareArticle?type=0&article_id=2073565.

[Accessed 5 September 2020]

Xinhua News (2022) Shanghai: Square Dance in a Fangcang Hospital. Available at:

http://m.news.cn/hb/2022-04/10/c_1128547500.htm. [Accessed 23 August 2022]

Xinhua News (2022) Square dancing to feature ahead of Beijing 2022 opening ceremony.

Available at:

<http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/20220122/3f459ba4d7b44c908b6bbf293be345aa/c.html>

[Accessed 1 December 2022]

Xinmin Evening News (2020) Xuying Wu. “Wu Jiechu Kanyi Qijian De Guangchangwu Hai Neng Wan (Square dancing during the anti-COVID-19 period without contact can still be played)”. *Xinmin Wanbao*. 01 March. Available at

<https://wap.xinmin.cn/content/31674539.html> [Accessed 8September 2021]

Xiong, Q. (2020) Chinese patients infected with the new coronavirus and pneumonia square dancing at a mobile cabin hospital in Wuhan City. Available at:

http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-02/12/c_1125561417_11.htm. [Accessed 15 August 2022]

Xinhua News (2022) Medical team members and patients performing a square dance at a Fangcang hospital in Shanghai. Available at: [http://m.news.cn/hb/2022-](http://m.news.cn/hb/2022-04/10/c_1128547500.htm)

[04/10/c_1128547500.htm](http://m.news.cn/hb/2022-04/10/c_1128547500.htm). [Accessed 26 August 2022]

Xu, B. (2001) Chinese populist nationalism: It's intellectual politics and moral dilemma. *Representations*, 76(1), 120-140.

Xu, M. & Tian, C. (2017) So Many Tuhao and Dama in China Today: The Latest Developments in China English Vocabulary Based on the China Daily Website. *English Today*, 33(2), 2-8.

Xu, X. (2021) Analysis of the Square Dance Function from the Perspective of “Liminality and Communitas”. *Frontiers in Art Research*, 3(7).

Yan S. (2015) Review of effects of “attachment” of the elderly on physical and mental health of old chronic patients. *Studies in Asian Social Science*, 2(2), 15-18.

Yan, J., & Gao, G. (1996) *Turbulent decade: A history of the cultural revolution*. University of Hawaii Press.

- Yang M. (2017) Investigation and analysis on the characteristics of square dancing participants in Weinan city (Weinan Shi Chengqu Guangchang Wu Canyu Renqun Tezheng Diaocha Fenxi), *Journal of Weinan Normal University*, 29(23), 80–83.
- Yang, G. (2016) *The red guard generation and political activism in China*. Columbia University Press.
- Yang, H. (2018) Study on the cultural self-confidence of socialism with Chinese characteristics. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(08), 235.
- Yang, J. (2011) Nennu and Shunu: Gender, body politics, and the beauty economy in China. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 36(2), 333-357.
- Yang, J. (2017) Holistic labour: gender, body and the beauty and wellness industry in China. *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism*, 117-131.
- Yang, J. (2020) From discourse of weakness to discourse of empowerment: The topos of the “Sick Man of East Asia” in Modern China. *Discourse of Weakness in Modern China: Historical Diagnoses of the “Sick Man of East Asia*, 25-78.
- Yang, J., & Du, S. (2021) Family change in China: a-70 year perspective. *China Population and Development Studies*, 4, 344-361.
- Yang, J., & Qin, T. (2022) Chinese Square-Dancing: A Description of Group Cultural Life. *Sociological Research Online*, 13607804221096687.
- Yang, L., Wang, K., & Li, Z. (2020) Traffic Organization Design of Jiaozuo Station Square Based on “Shooting Strategy”. In *CICTP 2020* (pp. 3346-3357).
- Yang, M. M. H. (1999) From gender erasure to gender difference: State feminism, consumer

sexuality, and women's public sphere in China. *Spaces of their own: Women's public sphere in transnational China*, 35-67.

Yang, W., & Yan, F. (2017) The annihilation of femininity in Mao's China: Gender inequality of sent-down youth during the Cultural Revolution. *China Information*, 31(1), 63-83.

Yao, X., Zhao, Y., Yin, M., & Li, Z. (2021) Acceptability and feasibility of public square dancing for community senior citizens with mild cognitive impairment and depressive symptoms: A pilot study. *International Journal of Nursing Sciences*, 8(4), 401-408.

Yin, J., & Zhou, D. (2017) An analysis of the dressing features of elderly women in contemporary cities of Hubei province. In *2017 2nd International Conference on Education, Sports, Arts and Management Engineering (ICESAME 2017)* (pp. 1955-1958). Atlantis Press.

Yiyang City People's Government Portal. (2021) Ten thousand people danced the square dance in Yiyang City to commemorate the 69th anniversary of Comrade Mao Zedong's inscription. Available at: http://www.yiyang.gov.cn/wlgt/4612/content_1418657.html [Accessed December 2022]

Yu-Sun, C. (1996) Nationalism and patriotism in China. *Issues & Studies*, 32(11), 67-86.

Yu, C. (2021) The Interpenetrating Relationship between Open Space of Ur-ban Commercial Complex and Urban Public Space—Taking Jingzhou Wanda Plaza in China as an Example. *市政工程*, 6(12).

Yu, C., Rau, P., & Liu, X. (2020) Development and preliminary usability evaluation of a somatosensory square dance system for older Chinese persons: mixed methods study. *JMIR Serious Games*, 8(2), e16000.

- Yu, J. and Rosenberg, M.W. (2019) Aging and the changing urban environment: the relationship between older people and the living environment in post-reform Beijing, China. *Urban Geography*, pp.1–20.
- Zhan, H. J. (1996) Chinese femininity and social control: gender-role socialization and the state. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 9(3), 269-289.
- Zhang, G. M., & Guo, Y. C. (2012) National fitness square dance on the impact of community patients with type 2 diabetes blood sugar-related indicators. *Journal of Nanjing Institute of Physical Education (Natural Science)*, 11(5), 34-37.
- Zhang, J. (2017) The Evolution of China's One-Child Policy and Its Effects on Family Outcomes. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, [online] 31(1), pp.141–160.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.1.141>.
- Zhang, J. H. (2014) Research on the status quo and the character of the development of the national fitness program. *Advanced Materials Research*, 998, 1769-1772.
- Zhang, M. (2012) A Chinese beauty story: How college women in China negotiate beauty, body image, and mass media. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 5(4), 437-454.
- Zhang, Q., & Min, G. (2019) Square dancing: A multimodal analysis of the discourse in the People's Daily. *Chinese Language and Discourse*, 10(1), 61-83.
- Zhang, X., & Saunders, J. (2019) A Historical Review of Mass Sports Policy Development in China, 1949–2009. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 36(15-16), 1390-1413.
- Zhang, Y. (2014) Analysing the connotation of Mao Zedong's nationalism. *Int'l J. Soc. Sci. Stud.*, 2, 65.

- Zhang, Y. (2014) Governing art districts: State control and cultural production in contemporary China. *The China Quarterly*, 219, 827-848.
- Zhang, Y., & Petrini, M. A. (2019) Empty-nest elderly: mahjong and Chinese square dance for improving the cognitive function in the community. *Frontiers of Nursing*, 6(1), 71-76.
- Zhao, B. (1997) Consumerism, Confucianism, communism: Making sense of China today. *New Left Review*, 43-59.
- Zhao, et al., (2016) Advances in master planning of urban underground space (UUS) in China. *Tunnelling and Underground Space Technology*, 55, 290-307.
- Zhao, S. (1998) A state-led nationalism: The patriotic education campaign in post-Tiananmen China. *Communist and post-communist studies*, 31(3), 287-302.
- Zhao, S. (2016) Xi Jinping's Maoist Revival. *J. Democracy*, 27, 83.
- Zhao, S. (2021) From affirmative to assertive patriots: Nationalism in Xi Jinping's China. *The Washington Quarterly*, 44(4), 141-161.
- Zhao, S., (2016) *City square dance: From spreading ritual to group identity – A case study of N Dance Team in Nanjing City (Chengshi Guangchang Wu: Cong Chunabo Yishi dao Quntirentong-Yi Nanjing Wudui Weili)*. Master Thesis, Nanjing University.
- Zhen, Z., Jiang, J., & Chang, E. Y. (2021) Life in-between Screens: “The World, Two Meters Away”. *Feminist Media Histories*, 7(1), 61-80.
- Zheng H. & Cherng, H. Y. S. (2020). State-led Chinese nationalism: An analysis of primary school textbooks. *China: An International Journal*, 18(4), 27-48.

Zheng, Y. (1999) *Discovering Chinese nationalism in China: Modernization, identity, and international relations*. Cambridge University Press.

Zhengzhou Daily (2022) Square Dancing for the 12th National Fitness Day on 8th August 2020. Henan Provincial Bureau of Sports. Available at: <https://tyj.henan.gov.cn/2020/08-08/1752410.html>. [Accessed 8 December 2022]

Zhou, L. (2014) Music is not our enemy, but noise should be regulated: Thoughts on shooting/conflicts related to dama square dance in China. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 85(3), 279-281.

Zhou, P., Grady, S. C., & Rosenberg, M. W. (2023) Creating therapeutic spaces for the public: elderly exercisers as leaders in urban China. *Urban Geography*, 44(1), 59-82.

Zhu, X., & Li, C. (2021) A phenomenological exploration of the square dance among the Chinese elderly in urbanised communities. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 28, 100494.

Zhuang, L. (2021) *Neighbourhood attachment and participation in Chinese cities: A case study of Chengdu*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Glasgow.

Zhuang X. (2011) *The Red Album: Photographic Notes of Xiaozhuang*. Beijing: People's Publishing House.

APPENDICES

Appendix A Participant Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet

Research title: The art of square dancing in contemporary urban China

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. To take part in this study, it is important for you to understand where and why this research is being done. This document tells you about the research project, and the way you ask participants will contribute to the research. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and do not hesitate to ask if you are unclear or need more information.

What is the purpose of this study? This research is for Ying Sun's full-time PhD at Birmingham City University's School of Art. This research aims to define the concept of square dancing in urban space in contemporary China and investigate its origins. It will also explore the meaning of the word 'square', 'dancing community', and 'dancing body' in the context of square dancing.

Why have I been invited to take part? You are being asked whether you would like to participate in this study because you are a typical participant in square dancing activities.

Do I have to take part? Participation is entirely voluntary. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What do I have to do if I take part? Based on the field investigation, this study will be conducted in the daily dance spaces of five dance teams in the urban areas of Shanghai, Changzhou, Nanjing and Qingdao in China in 2019. Part of the study includes observing the dancing situation of square dancing. Potential participants will be placed during the study to collect data. This usually involves researchers

conducting semi-structured interviews and taking photographs of square dance participants.

Are there possible disadvantages and/or risks in taking part? There are no foreseen disadvantages or risks to taking part.

What are the possible benefits of taking part? There will probably be no direct benefit to you. Indirectly. As this study will contribute to the profession's understanding of the square-dancing phenomenon.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential? All data will be identified only by a code, with personal details kept in a secure computer with access only by the immediate research team. All information about your participation in this study will be kept confidential, in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Videos or audiotapes will not be used or made available for any purposes other than the research project. These tapes will be destroyed at the end of the study.

What will happen to the results of the research study? Anonymised findings will be used for a final academic paper that will be presented at conferences and written up in journals. Results are normally presented in terms of groups of individuals. If any individual data are presented, the data will be totally anonymous, without any means of identifying the individuals involved. They will not be identified in any report/publication unless they have given their consent.

Who is organising and funding the research? This research is funded by the CSC (Chinese Scholarship Council).

What if there is a problem? If you have any concerns that can be addressed through contact Jiehong Jiang, Director of my PhD study, School of Art, Faculty of Arts, Design and Media, Birmingham City University. Email joshua.jiang@bcu.ac.uk

Further information and contact details:

Any concerns relating to this study can be addressed to the author: Name: Ying Sun
Tel: 0121 331 6208

Email: ying.sun@mail.bcu.ac.uk

Address: Room P104, Faculty of Arts, Design and Media, City Centre Campus, The Parkside Building, Birmingham B4 7BD

信息表

研究题目:当代中国城市广场舞艺术

我诚挚的邀请你参加我的研究。在参加这项研究前,了解这项研究在哪里进行以及为什么进行是很重要的。这份文件告诉你研究项目,以及你要求参与者为研究做出贡献的方式。请花时间仔细阅读以下信息,如果有不清楚的地方或者需要更多的信息请不要犹豫的询问。

这项研究的目的是什么?这项研究是伯明翰城市大学艺术学院全日制博士孙莹的研究项目。本研究旨在界定当代中国城市空间广场舞的概念,并探讨其起源。它还将探讨“广场”、“舞蹈社区”和“舞蹈身体”在广场舞语境中的含义。

为什么我被邀请参加?因为你是一个典型的参与广场舞活动的参与者,将被问及是否愿意参加这项研究。

我一定要参加吗?参与完全是自愿的。如果您决定参加,我们会给您这份信息表,并要求您签署一份同意书。如果你决定参加,你可以在任何时候自由退出,而无需给出理由。

如果我参加,我需要做什么?本研究将在实地调查的基础上,于2019年在中国上海、常州、南京和青岛市区的五个舞蹈队的日常舞蹈空间进行。研究的一部分包括观察广场舞的舞蹈情况。潜在参与者将在研究过程中被放置以收集数据。这通常包括研究人员进行半结构化的访谈,并为广场舞参与者拍照。

参加有可能的不利条件和/或风险吗?参加这项活动没有可预见的因素或风险。

参加有什么可能的好处?这可能对你没有直接的好处。但是,这项研究将间接的有助于专业人士对广场舞现象的理解。

我参加这项研究的情况会保密吗?所有数据将仅通过代码识别,个人详细信息保存在一个安全的计算机中,只有直接的研究团队才能访问。根据数据保护法,

有关您参与本研究的所有信息将被保密。视频或录音磁带不得用于研究项目以外的任何目的。这些磁带将在研究结束时被销毁。

这项研究的结果会怎样?匿名的研究结果将被用于最终的学术论文,该论文将在会议上发表,并在期刊上发表。结果通常以个体群体的形式呈现。如果提供任何个人数据,这些数据将是完全匿名的,没有任何方法可以识别所涉及的个人。除非他们同意,否则任何报告/出版物不会提及他们的身份。

谁在组织和资助这项研究?本研究由中国留学基金委(CSC)资助。

如果有问题怎么办?如果你有任何问题,可以通过联系姜节泓,我的博士研究导师,伯明翰城市大学艺术学院。电子邮件 joshua.jiang@bcu.ac.uk

欲知详情及联络方式:

任何与本研究有关的问题都可以与作者联系:姓名:孙莹。电话:0121 331 6208

电子邮件:ying.sun@mail.bcu.ac.uk

地址:艺术,设计和媒体学院 P104 室,市中心校区 Parkside 大楼,伯明翰, B4 7BD。

Appendix B Consent Form



Square dance in urban spaces in contemporary China

当代中国城市空间中的广场舞

Consent to take part in research

同意参加调研书

1. I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
我.....自愿同意参加本研究。
2. I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind. 我明白，即使我现在同意参加，我也可以随时退出或拒绝回答任何问题，而不承担任何后果。
3. I understand that participation involves some question about square dance. 我知道参与其中涉及到一些关于广场舞的问题。
4. I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research. 我明白我不会直接从参与这项研究中获益。
5. I agree to my interview being audio-recorded. 我同意对我的采访进行录音。
6. I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially. 本人明白本人所提供的资料将会保密。
7. I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about. 本人明白，在任何有关本研究结果的报告中，本人的身分将不会公开。这将通过改变我的名字和掩盖任何可能暴露我的身份或我谈论的人的身分的采访细节来实现。
8. I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the researcher Sun Ying's PhD thesis, and journal paper, conferences. 我知道我的采访内容可能会被研究人员孙莹的博士论文，期刊文章和学术会议引用。
9. I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in researcher's computer and only researcher Sun Ying has access to data until the exam board

confirms the results of their dissertation. 本人明白已签署的同意书及原始录音将保留在研究人员的电脑内，只有研究人员孙颖有权查阅资料，直至考试委员会确认其论文的结果。

10. I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above. 本人明白，根据资讯自由法例，本人有权在上述资料储存期间，随时查阅所提供的资料。
11. I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information. 我理解我可以自由地联系任何参与研究的人，以寻求进一步的澄清和信息。

In addition to entering your name above, please also indicate how you would like us to refer to you if mentioned in the research. 除了上述签名，还请表明如果研究中涉及你的信息，你愿意以何种方式被提及。

1. No name used 名字不被使用
2. Your own name used 自己的名字被使用
3. Another name used to choose one 选择一个其他的名字被使用——

Signature of research participant

Date

研究参与者签名

日期

Signature of researcher

研究者签名



01/04/2019

Signature of researcher

Date

If you have any questions about this research, please contact the researcher Ying Sun: ying.sun@mail.bcu.ac.uk or call 01213316208. 如果对于本研究有任何疑问，请联系孙莹，邮件 ying.sun@mail.bcu.ac.uk 电话 01213316208。

Appendix C Part of Observation Note

地点：山东省青岛市，曳舞团，海宜路

时间：2019年4月4日，19:00-20:30

今天是观察广场舞舞团活动的第二天，参与者没有周周末多。

成员构成：拽舞团的成员大部分在70年左右，舞团里核心队员7位，其他队员十几位，其中三位男士，还有一些站在边缘跟着摇摆的路人。广场舞地点选址：路边，公交车车站边。

过程：跳舞时长为一个小时，期间会休息三次每次五分钟用来喝水交流。19:00开始时参加人数为18人，慢慢增加到25人。大家可以随意加入和随意离开。今天我加入了广场舞微信群，惊讶的是其中有成员180人。微信群内有规范群公告。

舞者行为表情：今天发现广场舞歌曲非常流行和大众平民化的音乐。今天特别感触是广场舞的参与性非常灵活。

观众行为：有很多人会驻足观看。甚至还有兴奋的狗穿梭在其中。有一对情侣饭后遛街时也情不自禁地加入其中。非常热闹。

场景：不仅仅是跳舞，健身，更是一个交流的空间，比如大家会交流穿着，有两个舞者甚至交换衣服互相试穿，表达着舞者们对美的向往。

情绪思想：我感到广场舞舞者之间对美的向往，舞团内的竞争和比较性。一个舞蹈队里大家会比较谁学的更快。



Fig. 1 Observation note in Haiyi Street, in Qingdao on 4/4/2019, 19:30 pm- 20: 30pm. (Photo taken by author, 2019)



Fig. 2 Observation note in Haiyi Street, in Qingdao on 5/4/2019, 19:30 pm- 20: 30pm. (Photo taken by author, 2019)

Appendix D Part of Transcript of Semi-structure Interview



Fig. 3 Interview with dancers of Dagang dancing group in Dagang Street, in Qingdao on 20/4/2019, 19:30 pm- 20: 30pm. (Photo taken by author's mom, 2019)



Fig. 4 Interview with dancers after the square-dancing competition in Cangkou Park, Qingdao on 30/4/2021, 15:30- 16: 30pm. (Photo taken by author's mom, 2019)

1.介绍自己和课题。

2.阿姨您跳广场舞跳了几年了？

也带四年了吧。

3.阿姨您今年多大？

我今年 55 了。

4.那您平时上班有时间过来跳舞吗？

下了班过来跳啊，今天就是下了班。

5. 阿姨你是做什么工作的？

我是做会计。

6. 阿姨你们跳的这个是广场舞吗？

我们应该是比广场舞还……应该……不应该……严格意义上不应该是广场舞，我们对那个……应该是舞蹈的成分多一些。

7. 那你觉得什么是广场舞？

广场舞吧属于那种比简单的，你看现在对广场舞在网上的很多编排都比较简单，那种简单的呢可能对于上了年纪的人来说活动活动腿脚挺好的，对于稍微年轻一点的他们还想感觉能让舞姿更优美一点，展演自己的时候也想着就是更美一些，你看虽然说现在有很多广场舞大赛吧，可是广场舞大赛并不是简单的那些，很多都带有舞蹈的成分了。从我们这你就可以看出来，很多东西并不是简单的。

然后，我觉得广场舞吧就是大家都能接受，不管你跳的好或者是坏，就是说听到歌曲舞曲之类的能愉悦自己，我觉得广场舞之前的定义啊，就是因为没有场地，大家都在广场上，如果说随着以后条件好了，每个社区都有自己的舞蹈室啊之类的，大家就不会再上广场上，特别是空气不好的时候冬天又这么冷是不是，下雨的时候大家也想出来锻炼，如果说每个社区每个街道给你们一块地方让你们跳，那叫什么舞呢？那不可能叫广场舞了是不是？就是定义说成广场舞。

8. 阿姨我想问，您跳广场舞的动力和原因是什么？

我感觉吧就是在班上一座就是一整天，像我们这种工作种类白天就是静坐，晚上吧如

果说回家吃晚饭之后还是呆在电视旁边，第一个对身体不好，再就是这人吧通过跳舞吧能把人的思维发散一些，能让灵活起来。健身是一个方面，很多都会认为你晚上出来干什么/是为了减肥锻炼身体之类的，这都是一个方面，但是最终的目的还是为了让自己的身体灵活起来，灵活起来之后身体也就好了。

9.阿姨你以前就会跳舞吗？

原先我一点都不回。来了以后跟着老师一步一步的学。

10.阿姨咱们舞团里面的阿姨一般年龄都是多大？

50/60/70 的都有

11.基本上都是 50 岁以上吗？

对，基本都是 50 以上

12.阿姨你觉得你跳了这四年的广场舞之后你有什么变化吗？

我觉得我的最大的变化就是，我原先挺胖的，来了之后自然而然的就瘦下来了，当时没想着要减肥，就想出来锻炼锻炼身体，每天上班坐着不动太难受了。我每天上在单位坐着 10 个小时，回家吃晚饭之后坐着看电视又不活动，一天下来很不舒服。

13.阿姨您平时跳广场舞什么频率？

对对对，我是孩子上大学的时候，我没事儿就下来跳舞。其实跳广场舞就是一个习惯我感觉，自己养成习惯了之后就会觉得在家里就坐不住了，我们现在一个星期，跳舞 6 天，休息一天。也是很有规律的啊。你如果说休息时间长了，像是五一假期吧，大家在家里呆了 4、5 天吧，大家就不习惯了。过年的时候修的时间长，大约 1 个周吧，回

来以后大家都说在家呆着没有意思了，过年是中国传统节日春节嘛，做完亲戚之后就觉得无聊了，现在大家的生活习惯一般中午吃，晚上吃的就少一些了，到了晚上大家都喜欢出来走一下。可能现在广场舞受限制还是场地的原因，场地很受限制，像咱们这个地方还有个天幕城，像很多人都在露天的地方。

14.对对，我见一些都在路边跳的,存在扰民和不安全的因素吧？

像有我们这种场地的就很少。这个地方是青岛市的一个景点，人家也没说不让你过来跳，你来跳就行，冬天不至于那么冷，你看是因为有几面墙在这个地方挡着。

15.阿姨咱们舞队成立多少年了？

这个舞队有 7/8 年了吧。一直是老师自己，也是她个人的一个举动吧，义务的教我们。毕竟有这样专业的老师少，像我们团队的老师是属于比较专业的了。像这么专业的老师，义务教，很难得。这些老师应该都是在老年大学义务教课的。

16.舞蹈队组织最重要的是什么？

第一个是专业，再就是特别团结，这点特别好。团结与老师有很大的关系，你看他来了之后没有别的事儿，来了以后先开始形体训练之类的，你看现在这个扇子舞吧是第 8 套全国健身的那个，你看我们这些人都不是专业的人，现在跳的很有模有样了。是吧。像这个扇子舞吧大部分都是专业团队跳，就是说文化馆里面的人跳，在我们这个业余的团队跳成这个样子很不错了。

17.您觉得舞队还有什么需要完善的地方？

如果能完善，从政府的角度上，我觉得随着以后咱们国家在发展，条件越来越好了，

肯定会注意到这部分人群，毕竟这部分人群有年轻的也有年老的对不对，50 岁就是个界限对吧？，就像咱们中国吧，3 分之二是年轻，剩下三分之一就是 50 岁以上的是不是？老龄还很严重了，80 岁 70 岁以上的出来活动的少了，那么 50/60/70 这三个年龄段的人你要给他们一个空间，也许条件好了以后会考虑的，不能像现在成天在露天上跳舞，不安全，对身体 2 次伤害就不好了。