

Mind-Body Unity: A Study on the Psychological Healing Effects of Chinese Dance on Dancers

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Received: June 04, 2025; Accepted: June 20, 2025; Published: June 26, 2025

ABSTRACT

As a form of bodily expression that combines artistry and cultural depth, Chinese dance not only showcases unique aesthetic value but also plays a positive role in the psychological regulation and healing of dancers. This study explores how Chinese dance promotes dancers' mental well-being through physical movement, emotional expression, and cultural identity. It highlights the distinctive therapeutic value of Chinese dance and suggests its integration as an effective means of enhancing psychological health, further advancing its application in dance education and psychological therapy.

Keywords: Chinese Dance, Psychological Adjustment, Mind-Body Unity, Emotional Regulation

Introduction

As an essential part of traditional Chinese culture, Chinese dance has a long and rich history spanning thousands of years. From its origins in primitive dance to its various functions in ancient society and culture, Chinese dance has continuously evolved alongside social and cultural developments. In ancient times, dance was not only a form of artistic expression but also an integral component of sacrificial rituals, ceremonies, and entertainment [1]. For example, the Book of Rites (Liji) references "dance" as a significant aspect of ancient social and cultural functions, particularly in rituals and religious ceremonies. Many ancient Chinese dances carried profound symbolic meaning and expressive power. The Rites of Zhou describes "ritual dance" (Yuewu), which conveyed the idea of harmony between heaven and humanity, reinforcing the belief that dance itself was an integral part of ancient cultural rituals [2,3].

In traditional Chinese culture, the concept of "mind-body unity" is a fundamental philosophical principle representing the deep integration of physical and mental well-being. This idea originates from ancient Daoist philosophy, which emphasizes the harmony between the body, emotions, and thoughts. Chinese classical dance places great importance on qi yun qing gan (energy, rhythm, and emotion), requiring dancers to channel their physical strength and inner spirit through soft and controlled movements. Through this process, dancers regulate their emotions via body movements, rhythm, and breathing, ultimately achieving a unified balance of body and mind [4]. The Huangdi Neijing (The Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon) mentions that the human body is a microcosm of the universe, where health and balance are interconnected. With the establishment of modern China and the transformation of cultural paradigms, dance has gradually become a mainstream art form, finding extensive applications, particularly in dance therapy and dance education [5].

Citation: Lei ZHAO, Shungui XIANG, Jimyeong Hong, Xin WEN, Jiawen MENG, et al. Mind-Body Unity: A Study on the Psychological Healing Effects of Chinese Dance on Dancers. Open Access J Clin Path Res. 2025. 1(1): 1-4. DOI: doi.org/10.61440/OAJCPR.2025.v1.05

Theoretical Foundations and Styles of Chinese Dance

The fundamental principles of Chinese dance are deeply rooted in traditional Chinese philosophy and culture, particularly the core concepts of *qi yun jing mai* (the flow of energy and rhythm) and body-mind unity [5,6]. Chinese dance conveys an invisible yet powerful spiritual force, focusing not only on technical execution but also on the transmission of emotions and inner spirit. Every movement and rhythm must align with the dancer's internal *qi* to reflect a natural and fluid vitality. The concept of body-mind unity enhances the integration of physical and mental states within dance, embodying the Chinese philosophical idea of harmony between humans and nature (*tian ren he yi*). In Chinese dance, the body is not merely an instrument for executing techniques but a vessel for emotions and thoughts. Through movements and postures, dancers connect their inner emotions with the external world, achieving a state of unity between body and mind. This philosophy highlights the uniqueness of Chinese dance, which goes beyond physical performance to become a spiritual practice of cultural inheritance and embodiment [7]. As an essential part of traditional Chinese culture, Chinese dance has a history spanning thousands of years. It encompasses diverse styles and techniques, including classical dance, folk dance, and opera dance. These dance forms not only possess distinct artistic value but also play an active role in psychological regulation for dancers.

Classical Dance

The core principles of Chinese classical dance include *qi yun bian yi* (variation in energy and rhythm) and body-mind unity. *Qi yun bian yi* requires dancers to coordinate breath, movement, and rhythm during performance, thereby expressing their internal disposition and spiritual strength. The technical aspects of classical dance emphasize balance and harmony in every transition, focusing on the refinement and elegance of movements. For instance, the *fan gun* (rolling) and *hui xiu* (sleeve-waving) techniques in classical dance not only cultivate graceful postures but also help dancers find equilibrium between physical expression and emotional release.

From a psychological perspective, classical dance movements and techniques have significant effects on dancers' mental well-being. Through rhythmic bodily movements, dancers can release internal stress and enter a meditative state, leading to psychological relaxation [6]. The control of movements and rhythmic awareness in classical dance helps dancers regulate emotions, alleviate anxiety, and reduce stress. During performance, dancers integrate emotions with movements, transmitting *qi yun* and experiencing a profound sense of unity between body and mind. This experience contributes to reducing negative emotions and fostering inner balance [8]. In traditional Chinese culture, the unity of body and spirit is regarded as a foundation for overall well-being, and dance serves as a vital pathway to achieving this harmony.

Folk Dance

Chinese folk dance is an essential component of traditional Chinese culture, reflecting the customs, history, and lifestyles of various regions and ethnic groups. Due to China's vast territory and diverse ethnic composition, folk dance styles exhibit significant regional and ethnic characteristics, showcasing the unique cultural features of different localities.

Northern Folk Dance

Northern folk dance is generally characterized by its simplicity, boldness, and dynamic movements filled with strength and rhythm. Influenced by the cold climate and the hardworking, unpretentious agricultural culture of the north, northern folk dance emphasizes the joy of labor and festive celebrations. Movements tend to be direct and powerful, with strong expressive qualities. One of the most representative northern folk dances is *yangge*, which is particularly popular in provinces such as Shandong and Hebei. *Yangge* features flexible and rhythmic movements, often performed alongside gongs, drums, and high-pitched singing, expressing the joy of farming and festival celebrations. Dancers use exaggerated movements such as jumping, twisting the waist, and swinging their arms to convey enthusiasm for labor and celebration, creating an uplifting and positive emotional atmosphere [9].

Southern Folk Dance

Southern folk dance is typically more delicate and elegant, with smoother and more coordinated movements that emphasize body flexibility and fluidity. Due to the warm and humid climate in the south, southern folk dances are often closely connected to natural landscapes and human emotions, with dancers performing softer and more poetic movements. *Zhùmǎwǔ* (Bamboo Horse Dance) is a classic example of a southern folk dance, particularly popular in Guangdong and Guangxi. In this dance, performers hold bamboo horses and use light, nimble footwork combined with rhythmic horse movements to create a festive atmosphere. The dance features agile and rhythmic movements, with dancers executing graceful steps and gentle postures that embody the charm of traditional folk art. It reflects people's wishes for happiness and a bountiful harvest [10].

Folk Dances of Southwestern Ethnic Minorities

The southwestern region of China is home to many ethnic minority groups, each with its own distinctive folk-dance traditions, often incorporating elements of religious rituals, festivals, and cultural heritage. Southwestern folk dances emphasize emotional expression and the connection between humans, nature, and spiritual beliefs. These dances often feature expressive movements with religious and symbolic significance. One of the most representative folk dances from this region is the Miao dance, which vividly portrays the celebratory and uninhibited spirit of the Miao people. Miao dance highlights quick footwork and energetic jumps, often accompanied by exhilarating music, with movements full of strength and rhythm. Dancers use expressive techniques such as spinning, arm swinging, and high kicks to celebrate nature, life, and happiness, creating a deeply emotional and captivating performance.

Moreover, the communal nature of folk dance plays a significant role in fostering positive social interactions. Participating in group folk dances helps dancers establish connections with others, encouraging cooperation and a sense of belonging. This type of social interaction can alleviate feelings of loneliness and social anxiety while enhancing a sense of security and inclusion. By engaging in collective coordination and interaction, folk dance contributes to mental well-being. This is particularly valuable in modern society, where social pressures and feelings

of isolation are increasingly common. Folk dance provides an effective outlet for social engagement and emotional release, helping individuals maintain psychological balance [11].

Opera Dance

Chinese opera dance is a comprehensive art form that integrates dance, drama, and music. The movements in opera dance are highly expressive and symbolic, with dancers using exaggerated body language and rich facial expressions to convey characters and emotional storylines. The movements in opera dance are standardized and have a stylized form, especially in Peking opera, where body movements and gestures follow strict rules. The psychological therapeutic effects of opera dance are mainly reflected in its symbolism and expressiveness. Every movement in opera dance has a clear emotional direction, and dancers, through portraying characters and expressing emotions, can release emotional tension under certain guidance. For example, in Peking opera, complex emotions of characters are conveyed to the audience through body movements and facial expressions. Additionally, the unique techniques and structured movements in opera dance require dancers to focus their minds and engage in intense emotional expression and physical control. This concentration and self-control training help improve the dancer's psychological regulation abilities, enabling them to better cope with anxiety and stress in daily life [12].

Psychological Healing Effects of Dance

During the dance training process, the dancer's emotions, stress, and anxiety levels undergo complex and dynamic changes. At the beginner stage, dancers may feel passion and excitement, but simultaneously, they may experience anxiety due to unfamiliar movements, lack of proficiency, and uncertainty about their own abilities. As training progresses, dancers gradually adapt to the high-intensity training routines, but the high demands for technique and constantly rising standards may bring new pressures, especially when facing complex choreography or the need to push their own limits. Through the repetitive training process, dancers may gain a sense of accomplishment through technical progress and physical adaptation, thereby enhancing their self-confidence and motivation.

In terms of psychological regulation, classical dance emphasizes body control, emotional expression, and the cultivation of inner energy. Dancers need to remain highly focused during the learning process and use "body rhythm" training to control their emotions, achieving a harmonious unity between body and mind. This restrained and profound artistic expression helps improve the dancer's psychological resilience, making them more composed and focused when facing challenges, and allowing them to find inner balance and tranquility through dance. On the other hand, folk dance features strong regional styles and joyful, free emotional expressions, such as the energetic and uninhibited movements of northern yangge or the bold and free-spirited nature of Tibetan dance. This dance form encourages dancers to release inner tension through body language and emotional expression, enhancing group interaction, social skills, and emotional regulation. Therefore, classical dance training fosters self-discipline and emotional depth in dancers, while folk dance enhances social and emotional regulation, making dancers more optimistic and cheerful [13].

Discussion

Many forms of Chinese dance are closely linked to the philosophical thoughts in Chinese culture, such as Daoism's concept of "wu wei" (non-action) and Confucianism's "the Doctrine of the Mean." These philosophies ensure that when dancers engage in dance training, they are not only exercising their bodies but also cultivating and adjusting their minds through dance. For instance, through practices such as Tai Chi and classical dance, dancers cultivate patience, focus, and harmony with their environment through slow movements and graceful steps, which helps alleviate anxiety, stress, and emotional downturns. Moreover, Chinese dance emphasizes body control and emotional expression, and by releasing and channeling emotions, dancers can achieve psychological balance. The rhythmic and rhythmic aspects of dance stimulate bodily movement, which in turn sparks inner joy and satisfaction, helping to eliminate tension and anxiety, thereby improving mental health. Therefore, Chinese dance is not just a form of artistic expression, but also an effective method for psychological regulation [14].

Traditional Chinese sports, such as Tai Chi and Kung Fu, also serve a role similar to that of dance, focusing on the coordination and balance of the body and mind, emphasizing the flow of internal energy and the smoothness of external movements. Its uniqueness in psychological regulation lies in its emphasis on both physical exercise and mental relaxation and adjustment. In Tai Chi practice, the slow and rhythmic movements emphasize the combination of breathing and movement, which helps dancers achieve relaxation and stress relief [14]. Compared to Western sports (such as intense basketball or soccer), traditional Chinese sports place more emphasis on inner peace and stability, with a stronger meditative quality. In contrast, physical activities associated with issues such as obesity, like aerobic exercises, although beneficial for physical health, focus more on weight control and fat burning, often leading practitioners to focus on external changes in appearance, which may cause excessive anxiety and stress. This stress is often linked to the athlete's psychological state, especially when pursuing quick weight loss results, often neglecting inner health. Chinese traditional sports, however, emphasize the state of balance between body and mind, helping participants not only shape their bodies through gradual exercise but also achieve mental relaxation and comfort [15,16].

Conclusion

Chinese dance emphasizes the coordination and unity of body and mind. Dancers, through precise control of body movements and profound emotional experiences, not only enhance flexibility and strength but also regulate emotions through rhythm and changes in tempo, releasing accumulated negative emotions and achieving harmony between body and mind. In the practice of mental health work, therapists can incorporate elements of Chinese dance to help patients relieve emotional stress and improve their emotional response patterns.

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