

SQUARE DANCE AND INTERCULTURAL ADAPTATION- A CASE STUDY OF ONE CHINESE DANCING DAMA ARRESTED IN NEW YORK

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ABSTRACT

Square dance is an art form and can represent vivid Chinese cultural features. The square dance the Chinese dama practice daily is easier to make them happier and happier when they tap to the tune in the public or in the parks. However, the author takes a case which involved one Chinese dama who was arrested for square dance in New York as an example and tries to analyze this accident from a perspective of intercultural adaptation. Also, the author deeply elaborates the features of Chinese culture and compares the Sino – American cultural differences in how person use a public space and what is acceptable behavior and what is not acceptable behavior, and offers some suggestions about how to adapt to a new culture in order to avoid unexpected and unpleasant accident in the intercultural adaptation.

Keywords: square dance, art, Chinese dama, cultural customs, cultural difference, intercultural adaptation.

INTRODUCTION:

With the successful development of China's reform, the Chinese people are getting much richer and many Chinese people have enough money to support their children to study abroad. In recent years, more and more Chinese students have gone to the college and universities in the United States of America. Meanwhile, the students' parents often visit their sons and daughters. Especially, some students' mothers are living together with their children to study everywhere in the United States. The typical Chinese lady – middle – aged and middle – class has of late been making waves in world financial markets. The group is called Chinese dama and for the lack of an accurate English equivalent even the mainstream Western press has been using the easily pronounceable dama. Dama literally means “big mama,” but one should refrain from adding an African – American accent to it. It is an affectionate term in the vein of “aunty”, which can be addressed to any middle – aged woman whether you are related to her or not.

At the same time, Chinese dama also brought the Chinese square dance of their daily life's components into the United States. The square dance is the dance at the square the Chinese dama practice daily is easier than the original ones, but it's the same free – spirited and engaging dance that just makes dama happier and happier when you tap to the tune. The square dance is a traditional Chinese dance across the country in the morning and early evening in warm weather but it is not always welcome due to its high and strong volume. Hence, the author will take a case which involved one Chinese dama who was arrested for square dance in New York as an example and try to analyze this accident from an intercultural adaptation perspective. Further, the author will deeply elaborate the features of Chinese Culture and discuss the Sino – American cultural differences in how person use a public space and what is acceptable behavior and what is not acceptable behavior, and offer some suggestions about how to adapt to a new culture, so as to improve the people's intercultural communication awareness and intercultural communication competence in an intercultural adaptation, and to make the people smoothly communicate with other people from different cultures and to avoid unexpected and unpleasant accident in the intercultural adaptation.

A CASE:

New York is the most populous city in the United States and the center of the New York metropolitan area, one of the most populous urban agglomerations in the world. And Sunset Park, Brooklyn, is now New York's largest Chinatown and has had quickly increase of Chinese residents in recent years.

In June, 2013, a group of Chinese dama had square dance at Sunset Park, Brooklyn. The square dance group made the sound volume louder so that the residents nearby complained about the square dance. The square dance is fun and easy for the dancers themselves. To some extent, the primary function of square dance is socializing. The retired population including “dama” needs a public place to interact with one another and establish a sense of belonging in their minds. And they would enjoy dancing in the public or in the park. The square dance is not only a good physical exercise but also an activity of mental agility. People become very invested in it in China. The volume of the dancing music, which is usually loud and has now set off a intercultural skirmish. Parks in China are generally located far away from residential areas. This kind of square dance music is by far not the most annoying.

But for some in Sunset Park, the music accompanying those doing the dance is nothing less than noise – obnoxious and objectionable noise. And it has caused confrontations between dancers and police. (Berg, 2013) When the policemen were called in response to multiple noise complaints, they brought a pair of handcuffs and arrested the square dance group leader, a 60 – year – old woman known by the surname Wang who was found guilty of making excessive noise at the park in court. However, Dama Wang said to the reporters that she could not understand why she was arrested and she believed the police were guilty of ethnic discrimination. In New York, it has been the law since July 2008 that sources of all noises beyond 45 decibels must be suspended. But in China, there is no way to transplant this efficient means of noise control. This might lock up millions of the square dancing dama.

After the news about this accident was reported, many Chinese people were surprised at it. Some

thought that square dance has swept the entire nation in China and become the most fashionable form of physical exercise and has been popular among Chinese dama, who gather together at parks or at some public places punctually every day, even in chilly northern winter. The Chinese dama's square dance was banned and one of the square dance group leader was arrested by the American police. It is a worthwhile our further analysis and discussion as follows.

ANALYSIS:

As Edward T. Hall points out, "culture hides much more than it reveals, and strangely enough, what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants." And he also says that "culture controls behavior in deep and persisting ways, many of which are outside of awareness and therefore beyond conscious control of the individual." (Hall, 1959)

As humans, we learn some of the ways of our culture by being taught by our parents or teachers. We learn more of the ways of our culture by growing up in it. We see how other people in our culture do things, and we do them the same way. We even learn how to think and feel in this way. Since we learn the ways of taking care our basic needs in the cultural group in which we grow up, our own culture seems very natural to us. We feel in our hearts that the way that we do things is the only right way to do them. Other people's cultures often make us laugh or feel disgusted or shocked. (Xu, 2012) However, we should remember that most of the time, the different ways that are the customs of different cultures are neither right nor wrong. It is simply that different people do the same things in different manners. Thus, we should know some things about characteristics of Chinese cultures.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHINESE CULTURE:

Chinese culture can be defined as a cultural system rich in distinct national style which took shape within the terrain of China. The culture includes the spiritual culture and behavioral culture as well as their materialized presentations. It is these cultural forms that signify the fundamental features of the Chinese culture. It belongs to the historical category, having undergone 5,000 – year's development before it turns into today's splendid sight, both extensive and profound. To some extent, the Chinese culture indicates the Chinese tradition. After a long process of relatively independent development followed by the collision and exchange afterwards between China and foreign countries, the Chinese culture assumed unique characteristics, became an outstanding member in the brilliant global family of national cultures, and grew to be a main representative of Oriental national cultures (Huan, 2011).

Music is one part of cultural components. The tradition of Chinese music dates back to remote antiquity. Governing the country and nourishing the mind through music are two of the main functions of this tradition. According to ancient Chinese culture, rituals provided the norms of conduct for people. The goal was to maintain social order. Music was for the mind's cultivation and expression. Its purpose was to enhance people's outlook on life and imbue them with energy and creativity, such that they could enjoy a more harmonious and happier spiritual life. Individual contentment would then lead to social harmony, as well as to a more harmonious relationship between people and nature. The highest level of ancient Chinese music was to represent spiritual harmony with nature.

Hence, "Music brings harmony" is an important concept that has influenced Chinese culture for several thousand years. It stresses harmony as the culture's core value. The tradition guiding rituals and music is that of a harmonious world order." (Ye and Zhu, 2008)

Generally speaking, square dance has a very strong cultural tie with Chinese music, and dates back to the traditional Chinese folk dance, it is a natural invention. The square dances began as a ceremony related to the group's belief, cultural lore, and are part of educating the group on manners and behavior. These functions of the dance waken with urbanization, but the dances remain a very important part of Chinese culture.

China is one of the large countries in the world, and has fifty – six ethnic groups with different cultural traditions including different music and dances. Also, square dance of each ethnic group has a little difference, but is a mixture of dancing styles and folk themes. It is engaging, entertaining and distinctly

characteristic of its own cultural upbringing. Each square dance is representative of each ethnic group's cultural identity. It is very easy for Chinese to judge the dances' hometown from their different dancing styles.

Moreover, the square dance is fun and easy for the dancers themselves. People become very invested in it. And most importantly, the dance brings the dancers knowledge of themselves. The moves are the ritual that gives them Chinese the sense of order and human relations.

Nowadays, the square dance is very popular for the Chinese dama' self – entertainment, especially in the depth of the Chinese dama hearts they wanted to impart their joy to those around them. Not in a thousand years did it occur to them to disturb the peace of the environment. However, China does not have lots of facilities for the retired including dama. Many of the retired including dama have to dance in the public square or in the parks, so as to show off their talents and joy in front of a live audience.

DISCUSSION:

In intercultural interactions, each participant is required to acquire the sociocultural skills necessary to interpret the codes and sets of social and cultural rules in friendship building (Collier, 1996), meet a set of expectations about how people should behave appropriately in a particular social situation (Callan, Gallois & Noller, 1986; Lewthwaite, 1996), and find a match between cultural identities and “develop the knowledge and ability to track and sometimes adapt to their partner's cultural competence, participants can achieve a mutually satisfying relationship and at the same time maintain each individual's cultural identities (Collier, 2002). Many of the problems in intercultural relationships can be traced to the participants' lack of necessary sociocultural skills and knowledge (Leong & Chou, 2002).

At the same time, Ellingsworth assumes that all communication involves some degree of cultural variability. He, therefore, argues that explaining intercultural communication needs to start from interpersonal communication and cultural factors need to be incorporated. Ellingsworth's theory is designed to explain how communicators adapt to each other in “purpose – related encounters.”

Therefore, from the above the case, the analysis and some scholars' insights, we may easily find that if anyone includes immigrants, businessmen, students, tourists, or even Chinese dama enter a strange cultural region, he or she should have intercultural knowledge and backgrounds.

First of all, preparing for a trip abroad is one concrete thing anyone can do to increase the chances of adapting to the new culture successfully. Good preparation will not prevent culture shock, but it can help to make it less severe. Taking the time to learn about the new culture helps the newcomer to anticipate what the new experience will be like, knowing about the culture, including history, geography, social conditions, arts and customs, is one way to increase cultural awareness and to gain an intellectual appreciation for it. (avis, 2010)

In addition, the Chinese dama including other newcomers, or sojourners should adjust their behaviors to the cultural framework of the host culture. For example, Chinese dama should know, generally speaking, parks in China are generally located far away from residential areas. If a residential building can hear the music, there are probably all kinds of noises that either drown out the music or blur it into the ambience. In China, this kind of dance music is by far not the most annoying.

But not in New York, where one culture's mellifluousness could be another's stridency, Chinese music, especially that is used for the square dance, does not easily merge into the background. It catches attention simply by its exoticism. Under the influence of the high volume from dancing music, it may arouse unpleasant response and uncomfortable feeling from the neighbors near the park square, who do not enjoy the Chinese music and share this kind of dancing culture in the public.

Although the Chinese dama claimed the square dance was for self – entertainment and wanted to impart their joy to those around their neighborhood in the depth of their hearts, they unfortunately felt unexpected and unappreciated for their efforts to entertain the neighborhood.

The old saying, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do” which clearly places the responsibility for change on the newcomer, offers a great deal of wisdom, but it cannot be followed in all circumstances. In most cases, behaviors that conform to cultural expectations show respect for the other culture and its

ways. (Xu, 2012).

At last, anyone should not only conformity with common cultural customs and practices from the host culture but also obey the social laws and regulations in the host country. For instance, in New York, it has been the law since July 2008 that the sources of all noises beyond 45 decibels must be suspended. Naturally, it is why the policemen arrested the Chinese dama and stopped dancing in the Sunset Park, Brooklyn of New York.

The law is a system of rules which a society or government develops over time in order to deal with business, agreements, social relationships, and crimes such as theft, murder, or violence. The two main branches of the law in most countries are the criminal law and the civil law. The former deals with wrongs affecting the community for which the State may prosecute in the criminal courts, which the latter is about deciding disputes between two parties, including individuals, administrative authorities, and commercial organizations. (Wang, 2008) In sum, law is a rule which is supported by the power of government and which controls the behavior of members of a society.

The citizens of any country are supposed to have equal rights. They should all be equal in the eyes of the law. They also have their duties and obligations to abide by the laws. They should perform their civic duties in the same spirit that they accept their lawful rights in their own country or host country. To some extent, law is a representative of one country 's cultural and social l values. So, people who settle there, including Chinese dama should seriously obey the local cultural customs, and the law, and learn how to apply for the free use of community centers where rooms are sound – proof and air – conditioned. In this way, the Chinese dama may avoid to disturb their neighborhood while dancing.

CONCLUSION:

Square dance is an art form, can represents vivid Chinese various cultural features. Different people dance with different performing styles. The square dance the Chinese dama practice daily is easier than the original ones, but it's the same free – spirited and engaging dance that just make Chinese dama happier and happier when they tap to the tune. The Chinese dama really enjoy square dancing in the morning and early evening in the public and in the parks..

However, the square dance is not always welcome by the local people and will be forbidden by the police in New York, because of different cultural values and customs, even the laws, especially a big difference between American and Chinese cultures.

Therefore, any Chinese dama including sojourners should learn some basic knowledge about intercultural adaptation which involves a choice of how or what to adapt to or change to fit into the American culture. And then the Chinese dama should adjust their behaviors to the cultural framework of the host culture. Finally the Chinese dama should obey the law or regulations from the United States of America. In this way, the square dance the Chinese dama perform would be eligible for the requirement from both the different cultures and laws. And the Chinese square dance would be welcome by the different people with different cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, the Chinese dama would really be melted into a new culture, smoothly communicate with the Americans through the square dance, and then become a cultural mission between China and America.

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