

Insight into Chinese Ways™ Series

Part 2: Chinese Plaza Dancing

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Chinese Plaza Dancing



Chinese plaza dancing, also known as square dancing and park dancing, is an exercise routinely performed to music in squares, plazas or parks of China's cities. It is popular with middle-aged and retired women in China who have been referred to as "dancing grannies" in the English-language media. CCTV estimated that over 100-million practitioners engage in this form of dancing.

There are different online jokes about Chinese plaza dancing such as "China's dancing aunties were slowly taking over the globe... I hear that Moscow's Red Square and America's Central Park have already been occupied... These two powerful countries are finished. What's the next target, Mars? ET, take care!"

Plaza Dancing Across the Globe?

Yes, some Chinese women took their dancing acts overseas and got onto media's radar screen because of conflicts found between dancers and the local police:

... In Moscow, in front of the Kremlin

... In Paris, outside the Louvre

... In Brooklyn, at the Sunset Park

Plaza dancing also made headlines at home in China in some cases because local residents find this nightly occurrence of choreographed dancing with amplified and earsplitting music quite a public nuisance.

Plaza dancing is a favorite past time – early morning and evening – for middle-aged and retired women in China who find it a good way to keep fit and socialize. Morning dancers in general try to avoid parks as they are preferred locations for *taiji* and *qigong*. There was little complaint, if at all, from residents about the congregation for *taiji* and *qigong* exercises in parks early morning because they are conducted very noiselessly.

Cultural Difference

In Western cultures, making a public and disruptive display of oneself is not just irritatingly anti-social, it's illegal; violating the peace carries with it legal consequences. While in Chinese culture there is a genuine respect for the elderly and a reluctance to curb what is essentially – if they would just tone it down – a healthy pastime. Plaza dancing, with the estimate of over 100-million practitioners, is very common in communities in China.

Some view the plaza dancing done overseas as a way to carry Chinese culture abroad – as a part of the Chinese Dream to show the world the beautiful dream and spirit of the Chinese race – and also a way for the elderly to have fun and stay healthy. Others are somewhat embarrassed as such actions cause a bit of controversy in other countries.

How, then, is the Chinese plaza dancing different from the American line dance and swing dancing where loud music is also involved? Well, these are done indoors.

Well then, how is the Chinese plaza dancing different from Chicago's SummerDance and Sydney's Summer Dance that are outdoor with loud music involved? Well, these are scheduled and well planned with permits secured ahead of time; they are not done on the spur of the moment.

“When in Rome, do as the Romans do” is certainly a wise way to conduct oneself in a foreign country. And, as long as we recognize there is cultural difference, and agree to disagree, people will get to know each other eventually, and their cultures will emerge.

Taking the World like “Gongnam Style”?

Since mid-2012, the beat, the move and the fun that the song and video Gangnam Style took the world and made a new record; by the end of 2012, the song topped the music charts of more than 30 countries.

China’s pop songs “Little Apple” and “The Most Dazzling Folk Style”, together with their dance moves, made quite a splash in China too. In March 2015, the General Administration of Sport of China released 12 sets of plaza-dancing calisthenics that went with these two songs and other plaza-dancing tunes, making plaza dancing even more popular in the country.

These plaza-dancing numbers are a recommended standard that has a cheerful rhythm and simple movements; they are scientifically choreographed by experts, suitable for all types of people and age, and easy for the masses to learn.

With the scientifically choreographed movements, will Chinese plaza dancing get popular in the world’s plazas, or will it take the form of aerobics and be enjoyed by individuals or groups in an indoor setting?