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Birds of a feather flock together :

A case study of Chinese *Guangchangwu dama* in a super-diverse city

MSc in Media and Communication

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to critically examine how older women interact, perform to their heart's content, learn music, and communicate across cultures around square dancing in a Chinese context. The paper explores how retired Chinese women use square dancing to build social interactions, find friendships and integrate into diverse group life. It also considers the identity backgrounds of the square dancers and the region's long history of multicultural integration. It investigates how the Square dance community can further undermine cultural conflict and accelerate the integration of multi-ethnic and immigrant populations.

To answer the research questions, I selected a specific square dance community in Dongying, China, and obtained information through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interview transcripts were also analyzed through manual coding and digital coding. I also examined the positioning of square dancing in the daily life, local context, and social environment of older dancers. The findings suggest that square dance communities meet the recreational, self-esteem, and social needs of square dance grannies. Through daily interactions in different 'Conviviality microspaces' over time, the dancers established unified values and friendship, accelerated integration among newcomers, residents, and minorities, and developed a strong sense of community belonging. Dancing grannies create a deep collegial relationship (they described as 'sisterhood') in the community. Music participation provides a platform for dancing grannies to learn from each other and co-create music, helping them to build self-confidence, gain spiritual satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment, and accelerate individualization. The value of musical participation is reflected in the potential for those retired women to gain autonomy and control over their later life.

The paper further demonstrates that the digital media consumption of square dancing grannies supports, to some extent, different aspects of the integration process, such as access to necessary information and shared values. Social media enables them to become more aware of their community identity and accelerates the formation of a Conviviality atmosphere for square dancing. Of course, offline practices in daily life remain crucial for integration within the community.

**Keywords:** Chinese Square dance, Guangchangwu Dama, sense of belonging, friendship, Conviviality, conviviality microspaces, Diversity, super diverse, music participation, empowerment, social media, senior adults, older women

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Never forget why you started, and your mission can be accomplished

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

In the past 10 years, Square dancing has transformed into an evident cultural phenomenon on the Chinese landscape. Guangchangwu(广场舞) is translated into English as "public square dancing." Guangchangwu is a form of exercise performed to music in squares in cities across the country. It is popular among middle-aged and retired women, known as "dancing Dama"(dancing big-mother, 大妈). Thus, in China, people call those women who dance in the square *Guangchangwu-dama*. There is no definitive definition of what a Chinese Dama is, and studies in various fields have offered their explanations. In traditional Chinese culture, Dama is defined as an aunt (specifically the wife of one's father's elder brother) or, more generally, as a respectful appellation for an older woman. In China, Calling someone "dama" is both a sign of her advanced age and lack of understanding of contemporary fashion and culture. The Guangchangwu dama are between 50 and 70 years old. They are energetic, enthusiastic, and officious. They meet in parks and squares and like to dance to loud music. Li (2017) contends the international definition of the term 'dama' probably began in April 2013, when the price of gold plummeted, and tens of thousands of middle-aged and elderly Chinese women bought large amounts of gold worth about 100 billion in just ten days. The Wall Street Journal started called them DAMA, one of the earliest examples of "dama" appearing in a major English-language publication. The word "Dama" in the official media discourse reveals gender inequality in contemporary China (Zhang and Min, 2019). Negative news about the dama group spreads faster than positive news. However, we should not take the word Dama as completely derogatory and negative. The meaning of "Dama" in China has become generalized and can be used in a broader context. Dama represent a particular group of middle-aged Chinese women, who reflect a distinctive social phenomenon at this stage of development in China.

More than just a way to stay healthy and connected to the community, Guangchangwu has now become an integral part of Chinese society (Ricon et al., 2020). Dama's dance groups vary significantly in size, ranging from small groups of about 10 people to large groups of 50 or more. They usually consisted of middle-aged or older women, although there were also young people and a minimal number of male participants (Li cited in He, 2014; Wang Q, 2014). Square dancers danced to various music, mainly Chinese pop songs, ethnic minority folk songs, and some Western pop music (Q. Wang, 2015). Guangchangwu, as a hobby, started in the mid-1990s as middle-aged women who were forced to retire began doing this to keep themselves still in touch with society. Although square dancing in its current form is a relatively new phenomenon, public dance and collective movement activities have a much longer history in contemporary Chinese culture (Mi, 2015). For many Chinese women of the "first generation of lonely mothers," there has been a need to enrich their spiritual lives and keep a connection to their community after they have retired and their children have moved away. "Square dancing has allowed Chinese Dama to break through the gap between each other's class and background, and it has also allowed them to gain friendship (Wang, 2015). Chao ( 2017) pointed out that square dancing allows Dama to express their individuality and provides a space for square dancers to cross over from internal and external families to the community.



Figure1. Everyday Guangchangwu practice in the square(Dongying)

The square dance Dama in Dongying was chosen as my case study because it is a representative city of super-diverse (Vertovec, 2007) migrants. Super-diverse refers to noticeable cultural differences and complex cultures, origins, and identities and rearranges them as they merge (ibid). Dongying was initially just a small town in the Binzhou region of Shandong Province. Since 1964, Dongying has received three large groups of migrants to date, most of whom have come for work. Currently, Dongying has a population of 1.7 million, of which about 1.2 million (migrants) have come since 1964 ('Population and ethnicities of Dongying,' 2019). On this basis, Dongying has become a super-diverse city of migrants. Dongying is where different religions, languages, and various migrant cultures have collided, intermingled, and accumulated to create the unique Dongying immigrant culture. Cultures from all directions collide and intersect in the Yellow River Delta, creating an exchange and fusion of foreign and local "grassroots" cultures. The principal inhabitants in Dongying are mainly Han Chinese. Two thousand nineteen statistics show there are 43 ethnic minority components in the city. The largest population of ethnic minorities in the territory is Hui, and other populations are Manchu, Mongolian, Tujia, Zhuang, Miao, Bai, etc. (ibid). Cultural types in Dongying include Yellow River culture, ancient Qi culture, Confucian culture, immigrant culture, oil culture, and modern urban culture. Dongying people are like Wessendorf (2014). When diversity becomes prevalent in an environment, conviviality is more likely to occur in this super-diverse public space. People will be more likely to develop a sense of belonging. Dongying City Culture and Tourism Bureau, based on extensive consultation with the public, developed the "Dongying City Square Dance Activity Management Code" that requires Dongying City Guangchangwu activities to be carried out in the open space, as far away from the residents' homes (Dongying News, 2020). Communities should plan and improve the venues' facilities and provide convenient conditions for developing square dance activities. And coordinate the allocation and management of the use of the platforms, promote the Guangchangwu teams' harmonious and orderly activities, and strictly comply with national environmental noise pollution prevention regulations (ibid.). The Guangchangwu community that I studied is called The *Best*

*Dance Friends.* The community has been in existence for 8 years, and most of the members have been living in this residential area for more than 7 years, with a few newly moved into this residential area 2 years ago. The list of informants also shows (Appendix 1) that the composition of this community is very Dongying-specific, consisting mainly of second-generation Dongying migrants and a few newcomers and Dongying natives. *There is also complexity in the ethnic design and religious beliefs within the community.* The total membership of this group is currently 67, consisting of Dama from the six neighborhoods surrounding the dance location in Figure 2. The square where the dancing Dama usually dances is inside a park adjacent to a residential area with an artificial lake in the middle. The local government expanded the park in 2014. According to my informants, there had been disputes with other organizations exercising in the park before because of the lack of space. But after the expansion, the problem has disappeared. The open space inside is divided into "territories" by each square dance community to ensure that they can regularly move around in their familiar area. Every night from 7 to 8:30 p.m., the square dancers gather in the square to do group dances as part of their regular training. In addition to their everyday dance activities, they have other music education training and outings organized by the community.



Figure 2. Guangchangwu Dama's dancing location in Dongying

In China, social media helps bridge the digital divide and gives Dama more opportunity to express themselves. In addition to face-to-face interaction, square dancers also communicate through social media every day. To date, Chinese Dama has shown a strong interest in square dancing, group chats, and forming various WeChat groups around a specific topic (Li, 2014). The formation of the WeChat group has played a role in consolidating the stability of the community for Guangchangwu Dama. Media are ubiquitous and "strongly pervasive" in modern society, and they are inevitable in everyday life (Athique, 2016, p. 77). Media and daily life have become intertwined and almost inseparable. Several scholars have conducted some studies on the use of WeChat among older Chinese adults. For example, Wang (2015) argues that WeChat is seen as a communication tool for older adults to cope with loneliness, symbolizing that they are in tune with the times and that mastering new technologies makes them more confident.

Furthermore, The WeChat group is an online platform that enables older people to effectively spread information through their phones and helps square dancing Dama create an online community and an online landmark. WeChat's functionality blurs the boundaries between the private and public spheres, introducing a unique form of senior citizen participation (Guo, 2017). However, there is still little research on the communication science of square dancing from participants' perspectives. I will focus on a specific case: a square dance community formed by older women from different regions, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds in a multicultural city in China through square dancing, how they communicate and interact and solve problems in their daily interactions, and the auxiliary social functions of their WeChat community.

I choose Dongying Guangchangwu Dama's Community because it is highly representative of the cultural phenomenon of media engagement and social pluralism. It is well known that older women are marginalized in society throughout the world. The mainstream media is now increasingly aware of the importance of square dancing in the lives of older people, and more positive reports have made the public more aware of the benefits that square dancing brings. This case demonstrates the expression of media diversity and the role of media in creating more diverse spaces. As an almost daily sport, square dancing makes camaraderie and a sense of belonging among the old women who dance. For (Silverstone 2006, p. 110), media is inseparable from people's daily lives, and interactions through media occur in all corners of life. According to (Duru 2015, p. 243), people from different cultures develop a sense of belonging by sharing a common space despite their differences.

Based on the data obtained from this qualitative research seeks answers to the media connections and social phenomena behind square dancing. To better understand Guangchangwu, this paper seeks answers to the following questions and divide them into three directions:

- 1) How do the Guangchangwu Dama generate a sense of belonging by dancing together?

2) How does musical participation empower older women and influence conviviality within the square dance community?

3) How do Guangchangwu Dama maintain their square dance communities through the WeChat group?

## *Chapter 2*

### **Literature Review**

In my research, my conceptual understanding of Conviviality adheres to (Gilroy, 2006) and (Duru, 2015). It emphasized that the Conviviality atmosphere can transcend racial and cultural differences and allow individuals from different groups to achieve friendly coexistence based on long-term attachments to place and everyday practices. The observation of multicultural practices and unpredictable interactions is placed at the core. Freitag (2014) argues that Conviviality helps draw people's attention to everyday interactions in a given social context, regardless of where they originally came from. Duru's (2015) ethnographic research in Burgaz illustrated that Conviviality connects multiculturalism and social cohesion. On the island of Burgaz, people embrace differences in local identity, ethnicity, religion, and language and build a common culture with people from different backgrounds through a shared way of life in one place. The new settlers of various origins have transformed themselves and become part of Burgaz through Conviviality and interaction with the residents (Duru, 2015, p.243). This case demonstrates individuals from different groups can produce or share a similar set of values in the same place through long-term interaction and daily practice. Wessendorf's (2016) research has more broadly linked the context of diversity research in the UK and elsewhere, thus adding a comparative perspective to diversity research. Neal et al. (2018) argue that people manage social interactions and relationships in multicultural settings, explaining how people engage

in day-to-day negotiations and resolve differences. They argue for the value of focusing on Conviviality because it centers on the affective dimensions of social relations.

### **"Microspaces of Conviviality": diversity and a sense of belonging**

Differences are negotiated every day in numerous social situations in public Spaces (Wessendorf, 2014). Through this ethnographic research, he claimed that he has found that diversity has become commonplace among the local population of Hackney, based on Conviviality in the super-diverse public. The visible and audible diversity of lifestyles, religions, ethnicities, and languages is what gives people a sense of belonging. It helps people from minority backgrounds, whether they are newcomers or long-time residents, to feel like they belong. In this super-diverse place, the differences between newcomers are not "obvious." For example, the interviewee Wessendorf (2014) interviewed in the Hackney area indicated that she would quickly feel safe and comfortable in her new environment because she was not the only one with poor language issues. A sense of belonging would soon develop. He introduced the concept of "Microspaces of Conviviality," which he sees as fixed points where lasting relationships form between community members. The definition of "microspaces of conviviality" refers to places where people interact beyond the brief but engage in conversations and activities that have the potential to lead to friendships. In this conviviality micro-spaces, newcomers can form relationships with other residents based on shared interests or language (Wessendorf, 2014).

Other scholars have discussed Conviviality in everyday multiculturalism. The central question that research on everyday multiculturalism aims to address is often framed as an investigation of how people live with and within "difference" in "mundane (and extraordinary)" ways in familiar settings (Wise and Velayutham, 2013; Neal et al., 2013; Wessendorf, 2014;). Velayutham and Wise (2013) did a series of ethnographic examples of 'conviviality multiculturalism' in Sydney and Singapore based on three

empirical frameworks: (1) spatial ordering, (2) linking and bridging work, and (3) intercultural habits. His research provided a new window to consider how "convivial coexistence" is feasible and replicable. Harris (2014) studied young people in the most multicultural and most impoverished communities in five Australian cities, providing insight into the general processes of particular populations dealing with specific social interactions in multicultural societies. The young people in the research described interdependence on each other in their daily social interactions, forming friendship networks based on tastes (e.g., subcultures, consumption, etc.) and developing a sense of belonging in the process.

Furthermore, Radice (2016) uses the place-based model of Conviviality and focuses on more "tightly delimited public spaces." His ethnographic fieldwork focuses on four multi-ethnic neighborhood commercial streets in Montreal, Quebec, and reflects how situated Conviviality contributes to the analysis of blending temporary urban diversity. He contends that Conviviality means a certain warmth and welcome, an inclusive social atmosphere that allows strangers to blending in. Harris and Ardis' findings provide two entry points for my research: how people of a particular age group and those moving within more strictly defined public spaces interact in a diverse society. However, based on previous work, Conviviality as an analytical framework, a shared life across ethnic and religious divides, has not been applied purely to the Chinese context.

### **Musical value participation**

The musical participation activity of square dancing became a vehicle for Conviviality among Square dancing participants. Musical participation includes the activities of dancers (in some cases), producers, and others who contribute to the musical event (Gates, 1991, p. 1), so I view Guangchangwu as a musical participation performance. According to (Pitts, 2005; Finnegan, 2007; Hallam et al., 2012; Krause, Davidson, and North, 2018), active participation in music brings a range of perceived

benefits to participants or "musicians," including services in terms of social integration, personal well-being, cognition, musical challenge, physical health, and life satisfaction. (Dabback, 2008; Langston and Barrett, 2008) assumed that participation in group music activities is a source of the elderly's adaptation to retirement life, friendship, and a source of increasing social cohesion. This hypothesis needs to be verified in the Chinese context.

Coffman and Adamek(1999) conducted a survey of retirees in a wind band community. They found that 90% of respondents believed the band promoted friendship development, and 61% said they achieved spiritual reciprocity (互惠性) by giving and receiving support. "Music can generate intrinsic enjoyment, emotional reward, and social satisfaction." (Dabback, 2008, p. 270) noted that in terms of adjustment to retirement, "mutual participation among musical performers, supportive environments, and group performance practices and rituals appear to reinforce the construction of older adults' identities." Helping older adults adjust to retirement also demonstrates the value of orchestra members and communities as social network builders. Meanwhile, Creech et al. (2013, p. 46) found similar evidence in a study of participants in three UK community music programs. demonstrating that music's contribution to emotional well-being and creativity is fulfilling." Even those with little or no musical background can find satisfaction in participating in musical community activities. " Provides structure, outlets for autonomous learning and creativity, and a social environment in which individuals gain confidence and self-esteem." Musical participation as a potential source of "confirmation and confidence" , "spiritual fulfilment and pleasure" , "enhancing everyday life" , "an opportunity to perform with others" and "for social interaction and friendships" (Pitts, 2005, p. 142-143) . Participation in music-making activities has also been found to help build deep connections with others and a sense of belonging; "A sense of mission, autonomy and control" (Creech et al., 2013). At the level of personal experience, active musical participation provides enjoyment for older people (Fung and Lehmborg 2016), personal development, validation, confidence, and empowerment.

Interdisciplinary research by Fung & Lehmborg(2016) found that the evidence supporting the benefit of older people's participation in music was overwhelmingly positive. Ongoing musical engagement can provide meaningful services to a person's life in a diverse and complex culture (Fung and Lehmborg 2016). Current research confirms that participation in artistic activities (such as choir and vocal ensemble) is a source of friendship and enhanced social cohesion, contributing to well-being in older adults (Langston and Barrett 2008; Fung and Lehmborg, 2016; Lee. et al., 2016). Atkins and Schubert(2014) conducted a study from the perspective of the influence of religious music on participants' experience (117 people attending different types of Christian churches participated in the survey), proving that such "deep and transcendental" spiritual experience is "resurrected" through musical forms. The spiritual experience generated through music is internal. Participants felt more strongly, deeply, and emotionally about music in a religious setting than they did about music in a non-religious background. Pitts et al. (2015, p. 134) report that the decision to stop participating is not easy and is often accompanied by feelings of loss and regret: even those who are actively involved "constantly weigh the benefits and costs of participation." The mismatch between personal and orchestra goals is why many people decide to stop participating (Cottrell, 2014, cited in Pitts and Robinson, 2016).

### **Music empowerment**

Another noteworthy aspect is the empowering function of music participation activities for performers. Keyes (2004) studied the influence of hip-hop music on black women's empowerment and made a comprehensive analysis of the different personalities of black hip-hop women. Through a qualitative study of the various roles played by black women in the hip-hop industry and concluding that "women by continuing to break the stereotype of women as artists [...] Using their performance as a platform to refute, deconstruct and rebuild different views of their own identity. Rappers seek to be empowered, to make choices, and to create a discourse space for

themselves and other "sisters." At the same time, a study conducted in the United States on the use of rap music and the empowerment of young people today also examined the relationship between individual and public empowerment. "Empowered individuals actively strive to realize their perceived potential by using their existing knowledge, positive attitudes, and interpersonal skills. At the community level, empowered adults work to "envision changes in wider social, political and economic institutions and their role in creating positive change" (Travis, 2013, p.144). The study defines empowerment as the process by which adults develop the consciousness, skills, and powers necessary to envision individual or collective happiness and to understand their role in changing social conditions for the opportunity to achieve that happiness(ibid).

### **Localized social media engagement**

Relevant research is needed to complement the local social platform participation of square dancing if it is to be placed in the contemporary context of social media. With the widespread use of smartphones and social media, more and more people engage in specific conversations and provide their opinions (Zuniga and Diehl, 2017). (Kwon, et al., 2020) proposes a concept of localized social media (LSM), conceived as "a social media service that facilitates local news sharing, local social connections, and community engagement. He gives the example of a community church with a private group on Facebook where they interact. The content exchanged in the group can cover various topics. This concept fits my view of square dance online groups and their localized learning software. LSM is the primary way that square dance as a musical participation activity can enable social media engagement.

The source of motivation for social media participation may be related to the fact that the structure of online social media, as described by Benkler (2006), reduces the cost of being a "speaker." The reduced price of participation means that more people will become speakers and potential speakers. Social media increases the potential for

exposure and introduces the possibility of public participation (Baym and Boyd, 2012), allowing people to be heard. We need to understand how certain people and groups are treated by the media and determine whose voices are left out (Bergström and Edström, 2018, p. 15). Harrison and Barthel (2009, p. 161) argue that online users actively use new technologies to serve their "own willingness" which also applies to older adults who need social and personal expression. Miller et al. (2016) state that technology has changed people's lives by providing us with the potential to communicate and interact in ways that were not previously available. Previously, creating group-based interactions through forms of media such as phone calls was nearly impossible. The advent of the Internet has therefore broken the limitations of community members only communicating face-to-face. Meanwhile, the beginning of social media has made a new platform for interaction between groups. According to my study, SLM has created an online space for musical participation for older women dancing where people can interact on an ongoing basis without time and space limitations.

### **Research about older adults in social media**

Coto et al. (2017, p. 76) concluded that the majority of contributions to the social and geriatric media literature were in the area of technology (81%), followed by the scope of older adult affairs (67%) and quality of life (39%). They also noted that future work should focus on increasing researchers' experience in the field and gaining a deeper understanding of the benefits of social media for older adults and the complex aspects of their use of these tools.

Newspapers, television, radio, and other traditional media continue to be used frequently in the daily lives of older adults. Research has shown that despite the popularity of the Internet, older adults prefer to continue to use these traditional media for communication (Bower, 1973; Moss and Lawton, 1982; Nussbaum, Thompson, and Robinson, 1989, cited in Hilt and Lipschultz, 2004). Some scholars are less

optimistic about older adults' participation in social media. They argue that although today's older adults are healthier and better educated than previous generations, difficulties using the Internet and social media can still occur as older adults age. For example, visual function declines with age, leading to problems perceiving and understanding screens for older adults (Charness and Holley, 2004; Czaja and Schultz, 2006). Other scholars (Ongun et al., 2016; Brewer and Piper, 2016; Ferreira, Sayago, and Blat, 2017) argue that most existing research on older adults' use of social media suggests that invisibility of older adults in social media is due to generational differences in users. Despite the increasing focus on older adults, older adults remain a vulnerable group in social media due to the persistence of the digital divide between older and younger adults.

There are also differences in the attitudes of older and younger people toward social media. Studies have found that older adults use social media primarily to stay in touch with family and friends, while younger adults use social media to connect and self-expression (Quinn, 2014, p. 188; Ferreira, Sayago, and Blat, 2017, p. 564).

Charmarkeh and Lagacé (2017) note that older adults may experience more social exclusion as retirement leads to a dramatic late-life transition. Hence, the inclusion of older people in social participation through digital inclusion is a key issue in policy development. The good news is that a growing body of recent research suggests that with the rapid growth of mobile internet networks and increased smartphone ownership, coupled with the use of social media. Thus older adults can also easily connect and share information with family and friends through various digital means such as text, photos, voice, and video (Neves et al., 2017; Kelly, 2015). Meanwhile, older adults have recently shown an exceptionally high interest in new online tools that allow them to share, connect, and update their status. Social media allows older people to express themselves, participate in discussions, stay connected to society and have the potential to "help older people gain more social support and a sense of social connection" (Neves et al., 2017). Social media is providing older adults with a sense of connection, more control, and self-efficacy. These online activities can enhance

their skills and opportunities to participate in society (Hutto et al., 2015; Boulianne, 2015; Quinn, 2018). Social media platforms provide a digital presence for individuals' social networks that are "visible and accessible" to older adults.

Changes in older adults' attitudes toward social media participation can help make it easier for them to engage in social media. Social media participation has many benefits for older adults, and Lippincott (2004) noted that social media encourages easy and indirect access to health information, enabling older adults to be self-efficacious and maintain mental stability. Facebook and other social media technologies can provide quality of life for older adults. Facebook, for example, has proven to be a positive way for older adults to use social media to gain personal quality of social life, life stability, and individual learning. In addition, social media can overcome the barrier of not being able to socialize face-to-face, like online communities and online forums allow for social connections regardless of geographic location and time (Leist, 2013, p 378). Some scholars have also proposed increasing older adults' use of social media by "changing the design of the interface or device" from a technological innovation perspective (e.g., Yang et al., 2016). Although ICT is publicly known as the domain of the younger generation, social media remains an opportunity for older adults to expand their communication skills actively, and cell phones expand their daily lives (Ongun et al., 2016). Despite a large body of research on the importance of older adults' social participation and digital technology use, empirical evidence identifying the relationship between older adults' media use and social participation and social media maintenance for more senior communities remains scarce.

Last but not least, the existing studies on older adults' social media use generally do not have a gender perspective (Yang et al., 2016; Ongun et al., 2016; Coto et al., 2017;). However, these works argue that older adults are a homogeneous group with no apparent gender distinction. However, researchers also found that "female participants were more familiar with the term online social networks and used it more

often than male participants" (Vosner et al., 2016). Thus, there are significant gender differences in social media use, and academic research remains less focused on older women's online social media activities.

### **Social media using in China**

Due to China's one-child family policy, the population is aging rapidly, and an increasing number of elderly Chinese are at risk of social isolation. *Social isolation* is defined as a low level and "quality" of contact with others. Where "quality" can be associated with "contact, sense of belonging, contact with others, satisfying relationships and quality of social network membership.". (Yang, Y et al., 2016) states that ICT (information and communication technology) can help reduce loneliness and improve the mental health of older adults. They identified four functions in which social media could benefit older adults: "communication, information search, knowledge sharing, and relationship building." While communication with peers and social groups may provide self-reassurance and maintain a sense of "normality," support from one another within the group may also provide an understanding of being needed. Social media helps older people reduce loneliness and social isolation by building social relationships through establishing and participating in group discussions.

WeChat, a smartphone-based messaging app, was launched in China in 2011. WeChat's growth has been impressive: By November 2015, WeChat's total monthly active users reached 650 million, already 72% of WhatsApp's global achievement. In 2014, a Global Web Index<sup>42</sup> showed WeChat was the most popular instant messaging app in the Asia-Pacific region. WeChat provides text messages, voice messages, video calls, and multimedia sharing (links, photos, and videos). WeChat "Moments" are users' profiles, and WeChat subscriptions/public accounts are places where users can subscribe to more than 10 million account information(Wang, 2016). Information on WeChat is storable and searchable. WeChat was launched when the Chinese

smartphone market was overgrowing, and WeChat "leapfrog the PC era" and went straight into the smartphone era. WeChat was designed to adapt to the "smartphone lifestyle." Moreover, the voice message function has made communication more convenient for China's older generation in their fifties. In Shanghai, voice mail is also becoming more popular among older adults, and it shows compassion for illiterate, semi-literate, and older people with vision problems. Harwit (2017, p.324) indicates weChat group's focus on adding known contacts in WeChat groups will create greater trust and comfort among intra-group users, encouraging them to stay in these intimate groups. "WeChat tends to channel China's online discourse into small, cohesive collections of like-minded individuals" to assist local communities in "small-scale, politically or socially motivated social action." In this case, the WeChat group can form a linked chain and spread information. WeChat is likely to continue to evolve to meet the needs of citizens seeking intimate, personal, and locally-oriented communication. Wang believes that WeChat is regarded as a communication tool for the elderly to cope with loneliness, symbolizing that they are keeping pace with The Times, and mastering new technologies makes them more confident(2015). Moreover, WeChat groups are no longer isolated private spaces but can effectively spread information on a mobile platform. The function of WeChat blurs the boundary between private and public spheres, introducing a unique form of elderly citizen participation in China(Guo,2017).

### **Contemporary research of Square dancing**

Whether it is derived from a problematic marriage, an empty-nest situation, the sociality in Guangchangwu is the fundamental reason why Guangchangwu is appealing to middle-aged women. Guangchangwu provides social participation that releases anxieties caused by the undergoing individualization process. Early studies on square dance are mainly divided into 1) Definition and essential characteristics, especially the origin and history of square dance. 2) The sports and social functions of square dancing, especially emphasizing its significance in enriching spare time and

middle-aged and older adults' fitness. Square dancing emphasizes a re-understanding of social life and the establishment of unstable and involuntary friendship networks with unique time-space punctuation (Bunnell et al., 2012). However, Chinese scholar (Mi, 2015) believes that square dancing groups usually have stable members, fixed activity forms, and specified time from group characteristics. Members have a sense of belonging and identity to the group. As for whether the social stability of square dancing is characteristic, I think it needs to be analyzed according to specific cases. With the enduring popularity of square dancing as a unique Chinese popular culture, many scholars have noticed this trend and conducted in-depth research on square dancing. Some scholars focus on analyzing the social governance problems and the political phenomena involved in the development of square dancing, such as the government's attitude towards square dancing, public attitudes and the competition for the right to use public places. Dai (2015) said the government acquiesced in the rise of square dancing, and the crowd of square dancing gradually diversified and became younger. The "Cultural Revolution" and "Red Songs" gradually decreased or even withdrew from square dancing because of new aesthetic music culture formation. In 2019, Zhang and Min collected and analyzed 150 news articles published in People's Daily with the keyword "Guangchangwu" (广场舞) from May 2016 to May 2018. Mainstream state media are actively portraying square dancing as a healthy lifestyle, in line with the government's promotion of a national fitness program. However, when it comes to noise pollution and the use of public space, public opinion is still generally negative.

Other scholars produce research based on case studies: Most of them have explored the personalization of dancers in public spaces and the reconstruction of their identities (Wang, 2015; Mi, 2016; Huang, 2016; Chao, 2017; Minhui Lin, Jigang Bao, and Erwei Dong, 2019), but all have ignored the contribution of social media space to their identity reconstruction and personalization. Wang (2015) pointed out Dama as "the first generation of lonely mothers" in China. They need GuangchangWu to furnish their spiritual capital and connect with society. GuangchangWu is allowing

them to bridge the gap between social or class backgrounds and make obtained friendships. She also mentioned that square dancing offers social engagement that releases anxiety about the individualization process being experienced.

Moreover, a discussion showed the emergence of shared culture in the Square dancing Community, which deserves further research. For Mi (2016), she analyzed three groups of square dance participants born in different age groups for other purposes of participating in square dance and how they constructed their identities in square dancing. She believes that the purpose of the older women's generation is to rebuild the subject's value. In contrast, the middle-aged women's generation seeks a sense of belonging, and the young women's generation seeks to acquire femininity. It is a pity she did not specify the age range of the cohort. Huang(2016) assumed that people join dance troupes to participate in the individualized consumer culture in their way. The possible impact of individual-based group formation on Chinese society is discussed. Chao (2017) pointed out that square dancing allows individuals to connect and provides a space for practitioners to cross internal and external, family to the community in the context of increasing personalization. The square dancing community is stable and centripetal, but its members show considerable musical taste and social and economic status. It is, therefore, a highly heterogeneous group. Through the "Ritual-like" community as a breakthrough point, scholars believe that individuals with different tastes and economic status can form long-term participation and identification by constructing symbolic boundaries within the group, thus generating the group's cohesion. Participants' perception of the differences between themselves and other group members plays an essential role in forming group cohesion. According to( Minhui Lin, Jigang Bao, and Erwei Dong, 2019), older women practice and reconstruct their identity by embedding themselves in the public space through square dancing. Their research also mentioned self-actualization, intergenerational communication, inclusiveness, and carnival atmosphere. The small circle of friends provided by square dancing is an effective social connection for new urban immigrants in the migrant dilemma. The small "circle" of social contacts based

on shared interests influences new urban dancers to accept their new urban membership(He, 2019). Square dance opens the window for new urban migrants to integrate into their destinations, helping them to build new social relationships, gain additional social capital, and find a new sense of belonging and value at their goals. At present, scholars lack attention to Chinese square dancing Dama from the perspective of communication.

In summary, recent research directions for square dance suggest that scholars have begun to focus on how the heterogeneity of members negotiates collective belonging. However, no scholar has focused on square dance in a multicultural context or analyzed in depth the role of local social media and its impact on maintaining relationships in square dance communities. According to Pitts (2005), music provides a lens for historical and contemporary social issues and serves as a medium for challenging these perceptions and bringing about change. Participatory art activities contribute to the physical and mental health of older people. However, there is still a lack of future research on the value of music participation from participants' perspective (Skingley, Martin, and Clift, 2015, p. 1). Furthermore, there is currently a gap in the analysis of the value of musical participation and the empowering function of square dance in China.

This research utilizes the concepts of "Conviviality" and "musical value participation" applying to the Chinese context. This study examines how migrants (ethnic minorities, Han Chinese) and residents (ethnic minorities, Han Chinese) in urban China find a sense of belonging in square dance communities through long-term daily interactions and exchanges in a multicultural context. This qualitative study in a Chinese context will also analyze the value of music participation for older Chinese women from the participants' perspective. How they communicate cross-culturally in their musical participation, perform together every day, create music, build identities, and position themselves in different "convivial microspaces" and social media spaces to find a sense of belonging. The main purpose of this study is to critically examine

how older women engage in daily interactions, collaborative performances, musical learning, cross-cultural communication, and social media use around the medium of square dance in a Chinese context, and how these interactions relate to enabling older women to take control of their retirement, build friendships, and gain a sense of belonging. It explores how multicultural groups form a sense of community belonging through square dancing in the context of China's multicultural immigrant cities and mobile social media applications. As well as the empowering value, collective identity and belonging value that musical participation provides to marginalized groups in the Chinese context. Square dance mothers in China, both online and offline, have proven to be able to continuously express their emotions through "subjective state of body feeling " and be friendly with people of unfamiliar or completely different ethnicities, religions, cultures, and classes (Hill, 2018).

### *Chapter 3*

#### **Methodology and Methods**

This chapter begins with a description of the researcher's methodology, methods, and the case, followed by a detailed description of how the sample was narrowed down to square dancing mothers in Dongying, China. Ethical considerations for the qualitative interviews are explained, the steps for coding and analyzing the empirical material, and finally, how the researcher obtained consent to ensure the participants' privacy.

#### **Qualitative approach and case study**

A qualitative approach guides this study that giving new audiences a voice (Hermes, 2012, p. 198; Hill, 2015, p. 20 ), which, as Bazeley (2013, p. 4) notes, focuses on "observing, describing, interpreting, and analyzing how people experience, act, or

think about themselves and the world around them. " This is consistent with the aims of my research. As Flyvbjerg (2001, p. 226) states, "the strategic choice of a case may add significantly to the generalizability of a case study." Therefore, a case-centered qualitative analysis approach applies to this study. To understand things in this field in greater depth, we must understand them in a specific context. Despite the nationwide prevalence of square dancing, a case study was conducted to investigate the impact of square dancing on the lives of older retired women in a migrant city, the "The community of square dancing Dama in Dongying." Compared to other cities, Dongying, as a migrant city with a super-diverse background, has a long history of interaction between new/old migrants and residents. And the emergence of square dancing provides a social network (community) for these older women with different ethnic identities, religions, languages, and cultural backgrounds. Wessendorf (2014) mentioned that an essential feature of Conviviality is that a place is ethnically diverse and super-diverse in terms of language, religion, and lifestyle, making it easier for people to settle down. The case study includes two different social spaces in the square dance community: first, socialization in the real-life space, including interactions at regular dance venues and other gathering activities. The second is the socialization in the online area, where the Dama interacts in the online space through local social media(Wechat). Dama works together on music production and dance performances and helps and accompanies each other in their daily lives. They have happy times and tense moments when conflicts arise during their interactions, fully reflecting the complexity of this case study. Therefore, this case study can explore the formation of Conviviality and the value of musical participation among older women in a super-diverse city in the Chinese context.

The case provides the researcher with a more realistic view of the substance. The advantage of case studies is that they can be "close" to real-life situations and develop perspectives directly related to the phenomenon in practice (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p235-236), thus allowing researchers to get a "thick" and deep narrative in a specific context. The in-depth contents give us a comprehensive understanding of how Square

dancers interact daily and which modes and places of interaction generate Conviviality and a sense of belonging to the community. Through the researcher's deep integration with the dancing community, the researcher also placed herself in the study context during the four months she was part of the square dance WeChat group to achieve the highest understanding of the case content (ibid.).

### **Designing for the research**

A qualitative interview is considered a kind of social contact and a cooperative process between researchers and participants. The interaction between researcher and participant forms a detailed description of experiences, emotions, and perspectives (Rapley, 2007, p. 15). The researcher needs to follow the conversation to obtain the "detailed descriptions" required for the study to capture the participants' subjective feelings and lived experiences (ibid., pp. 15, 21). This study will use semi-structured interviews (Jensen, 2002) to understand why square dancing has become a joyful atmosphere and a sense of belonging among Chinese mothers from their perspective as participants. The interview outline includes the interviewees' daily participation in square dancing, the joys, and conflicts between the Square dancing Dama, their other interactions beyond square dancing, and their interactions in the social media group. Semi-structured interviews are widely used in the social sciences because they allow researchers to obtain detailed data about people's opinions, experiences, feelings, and daily practices, revealing the meaning behind people's lives and behaviors. Gunter (2012, p. 244) notes the best way to understand the audience's experience is to ask them, give them space to create their purpose, and use their associations to participate in the interview. As Jensen points out, an interview needs to be carefully planned and guided (2002, p. 219). Thus, in-depth, semi-structured are the way to maintain the flexibility of observation. The interviews can reveal how the Guangchangwu dama view their behavior on a self-reflective basis, which according to Travers et al. (2015), is a process of "self-reflective knowledge acquisition."

I hope to understand and perceive Chinese square dancing dama through this rich and detailed research. Therefore, the design of the interview guide also needs to focus on ensuring that all interviews are relevant to the research question. The literature provided the basis for the initial interview guide, which I revised through the participants' interview experiences and the results of two pilot interviews conducted with two participants on February 15 and 16, 2020. After pilot interviews, I reduced the initial 38 questions to a final set of 22 questions divided into five themes. Some of the previous questions were revised and trimmed because participants gave duplicate responses to some questions. The interview questions were not specific enough, and I did not know how to respond during the interview. The revised interview guide began with small talk-like, lifelike questions and built "follow-up questions based on participants' responses" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 133) about what they thought to participate in Guangchangwu meant or felt in their daily lives. The reflection and revise of interview guides helped improve the accuracy of the findings and provide a comprehensive understanding of the proposed study.

Concerned that informants might be nervous about the relatively formal interview format, I also maintained casual conversations with informants to learn about their daily lives. In some cases, these informal chats provided me with more unexpected information. Removing the sense of distance through casual conversation helped as our friendship developed and more in-depth personal interviews followed.

Fortunately, my interviewees showed a great deal of interest in the interviews. A wealth of analytical data was provided as far as content was concerned. After each interview, I would set aside about 5 minutes for interviewees to supplement their answers or ask questions to the researcher to enrich empirical materials and inspire me to make improvements in the following interview. For example, after one interview, my informant LvLuo accidentally mentioned that dancing grannies (dama) in the community are currently learning square dancing through social media Apps and have professional teachers, which provides an essential direction for improving the question outline.

## **Sampling for the research**

This study intends to collect material from specific groups as material samples. The researcher recruit participants based on the following selection criteria: middle-aged and older female square dancers aged 55-70 years in Dongying, Shandong Province, China was selected as the study population. The sample attempted to cover members within a dance group in the Dongying area. The narrowing of the samples was not just socio-demographic, but because it provided "a more direct and in-depth analysis of the observed characteristics" (Gobo, 2006, pp. 411-413). Due to the enormous geographic scope of China, there may be potential differences in attitudes toward square dance among square dance Dama living in different cities. My case study had to be conducted in a super-diverse immigrant city with explicit restrictions on the age of the sampling range to answer the specific research questions more rigorously. To ensure that the case study is conducted from the perspective of the correct group of participants. For my research, the target number of interviews will be 10.

The researcher sought additional participants by asking respondents if they knew anyone who met the study's sampling criteria. The researcher used a snowball method to recruit interviewees. The initial respondents were asked if they knew any square dance participants who lived close to them and had similar or different perspectives to be interviewed for this study (Patton, 2015, p. 298). Although the snowball sampling method has enough respondents, it is not perfect. Because this method relies on interpersonal relationships, interviewees may exclude people who are not in their friendship group when introducing other interviewees, potentially missing the opportunity to hear more diverse voices from within the target group (Browne, 2005). Interviews are conducted via video/voice calls, and moderation through this study will need to take place over this long-distance contact (Byrne, 2012). Video calls allow for remote observation of participants (Nehls et al., 2014). The researchers acknowledge the importance of face-to-face interviews in qualitative research. However, during this stage of the study, the coronavirus was still spreading globally. For this study, I

decided to complete the interviews by phone or webcam for the safety consideration of participants, based on the school's advice and the supervisor. However, the observations may have been limited. However, it is also because video/voice calls do not have any geographical restrictions, so that I could collect samples from China in this way entirely. In addition, since most of these digital-based conversations took place in the researcher's communal dormitory and the Lund University library, there may have been interruptions in the process due to the internet and access to other roommates. In addition, the entire interviews were conducted in Chinese.

### **Analyzing for the research**

All interviews are conducted in Chinese and will be recorded and transcribed into English at the end. Interviews lasted around 40-60 minutes, with individual participants recorded for more than 90 minutes. "Paper and pen" coding was the closest core strategy to the researcher. According to Bazeley (2013), Coding enabled the researcher to interact with the data. However, the number and length of qualitative interview transcripts led to a reconsideration of the pen and paper strategy. In this study, not only was paper and pencil used as a traditional coding method but Google Docs was also used to code the text, using "annotations" as text coding (ibid.). Thus, the combination of digital Coding and manual Coding allowed me to code the 10 interviews efficiently and detailedly.

I entered the generated codes into an Excel file called *Coding* for revision, which was used throughout the analysis. The codes were revised iteratively by the researcher during the process to ensure that all essential codes were covered while reducing duplication of information by eliminating irrelevant codes (Kuckartz, 2013; Bazeley, 2013, p. 150). The researchers pointed out the codes, categorized similar codes, and placed them in different categories. The codes emerged according to the five themes in the interview guide: feelings about square dancing, music participation, Conviviality(Harmony & Conflicts), social media use related to square dancing

activities, and others. The researcher simultaneously strung together themes and ideas by drawing mind maps, constantly reviewing the Codebook and literature review, allowing the arguments to become clearer gradually, eventually answering the research questions (Kuckartz, 2013).

### **Ethic concern and Reflections**

Prepare a consent form for participants before each interview begins; dictate it to them before each phone or video interview. The purpose was to ensure that participants were aware of the content of the study and the consequences of their participation and protect participants' privacy from unnecessary or potential harm (Christians, 2005, pp. 144-145). I briefly informed participants about the study, indicated how their personal information would be used, and requested their consent to the terms. The researcher announced that the survey would be anonymous. Still, general information about them, such as their age, occupation, and behavioral habits related to the study, will be disclosed. Participants were informed that they had every right to choose not to answer any questions and to stop the interview at any time. The interviewer will record the participant's verbal consent in a recording. The purpose of these is to protect data privacy and to ensure informed and secure interviewees, which guarantees that participants are free to discuss these topics (Bruhn , 2012).

Due to COVID-19, I could not come back to China to have face-to-face communication with the old ladies in this study because the research method lacked their daily interaction, so I might still be regarded as an "outsider." Fortunately, the Square dancing dama was very kind and gave as many detailed answers as possible to my questions. When I first got in touch with the Guangchangwu dama group, they did not understand my research on square dancing because, from their point of view, square dancing was nothing special and had become their daily routine. With the

deepening of their communication, they realized how much square dancing had changed their daily lives and how it values them. I think my interview gave the dancing dama a chance to reflect on themselves, and they would ask to see the questions before I interviewed them to provide better answers. Undeniably, their living environment and cognition are also limited and affected their responses to a certain extent.

Additionally, this study examined the value of music participation among older Chinese women in specific regions, how multicultural populations and immigrants in super-diverse cities integrate and build friendships through square dance communities, and the complementary role of digital media on community integration. Thus, the study findings are geographically limited. However, due to time and staffing constraints, it was impossible to recruit participants from all provinces in China for this study. Future researchers could create a "square dance map" of China that already specifies regional differences in the effects of square dancing as a social medium.

## *Chapter 4*

### **Analysis**

#### **The conviviality atmosphere in Dongying Square dancing Community**

We all live in an increasingly culturally diverse world. People from different races, classes, and religious backgrounds live together in today's rapidly changing society. "People are interconnected and open to new relationships" (Wills, 2016: 648, as cited in Neals, 2019).

The emergence of square dancing has provided a casual social outlet for middle-aged and older women in a multicultural environment. People who share common interests socialize, talk, and provide assistance to other members. However, as the study progressed, the results revealed the internal complexity of the square dance community, where friendship, harmony, and skirmishes coexist.

### **Friendship in "conviviality micro-spaces" of square dance**

We all live in an increasingly culturally diverse world. People from different races, classes, and religious backgrounds live together in today's rapidly changing society. "People are interconnected and open to new relationships" (Wills, 2016: 648, as cited in Neals, 2019). The emergence of square dancing has provided a casual social outlet for middle-aged and older women in a multicultural environment. People who share common interests socialize, talk, and provide assistance to other members. However, as the study progressed, the results revealed the internal complexity of the square dance community, where friendship, harmony, and skirmishes coexist.

### **Friendship in "conviviality micro-spaces" of square dance**

Conviviality is the bridging element that connects multiculturalism and social cohesion. On Burgaz, people accept local identity, ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences and build a common culture with people from different backgrounds through a common way of life in one place. New settlers of different origins changed themselves and became part of Burgaz through Conviviality and interaction with the older residents (Duru, 2015, p. 243). This case demonstrates that individuals from different groups can generate or share a similar set of values in the same place through long-term interactions and daily practices. This value is reflected in people recognizing each other's ethnic and religious differences, "people internalize each other's cultures," and emphasizing "bonding" through Conviviality, solidarity, and intimacy. Despite the differences, they developed a sense of belonging to the place.

Similar contexts and things in Duru's description happened in my case as well. In my case, nine of my informants were either newcomers (within two years of moving in) or migrants, and only one was a native resident. Most migrants moved to Dongying with their parents or siblings between 1964 and 1970, while others were born after their parents moved to Dongying and became second-generation migrants to Dongying.

*“Personally, I still feel like I'm surrounded mostly by second generation oil field migrants. Although we come from different places and have different cultures or ethnic, we have all lived here for a long time. You've always been exposed to people from all over the country, I'm already getting used to accepting different cultures.” (Mumu, phone interview, 66 years old, 15/3/2020 )*

As my informant expressed, Dongying, as a super-diverse migrant city, has a good ground for Conviviality, and people are very tolerant and welcoming to foreign cultures and people. Acceptance of different and diverse cultures has become a perceptible or imperceptible part of their lives. Most of my informants have lived in Dongying for several decades and experienced critical oil field construction (oil field battle) since 1964. After the hard work of all oil field employees, they built the second-largest oil field in China within 40 years, which is the pride of the whole city. 'A Preliminary Study on Migrant Culture in Dongying Area ' (2021) indicates that as an emerging migrant city with only 37 years of history. Dongying people have a strong sense of belonging to the Dongying Oilfield because they have worked together for a long time to overcome cultural, religious, ethnic, and even linguistic barriers and accomplish the great cause of oilfield construction. Based on this, people in Dongying have formed the unique Dongying Shengli oilfield spirit and Dongying Shengli oilfield culture of "entrepreneurship, innovation, competition and development" ('Population and ethnicities of Dongying,' 2019). This common values framework of Dongying people provides fertile soil for the development of Conviviality in the Dongying square dance community. My minority informants,

Annie(Uyghur) and Qiangwei(Manchu), agreed that the square dance gave them a place to practice their Mandarin and a chance to integrate into the new environment.

"I can be myself and make friends here, although we are originally different, this is not a problem between me and my sisters." (Qiangwei, Phone Interview,63 years old, 10/3/2020). Annie also mentioned that she was afraid of not making friends in a new environment as a newcomer because her Mandarin was not so good. Still, to her surprise, the community members were very patient and welcoming, and as she continued to interact with them, she became fluent in Mandarin. Here, square dancing further weakens the difficulties brought by cultural differences among immigrants in in-depth communication to a certain extent. Through square dancing, these middle-aged and older women, who have retired or are about to retire, have gained a platform to express themselves and find their peers. Square dancing is a platform for older Chinese women who have retired or are about to retire to express themselves and find companionship (Wang, 2015). Various square dance communities have subsequently emerged, where specific interests in certain types of music and dance are necessary within different communities. The continuous interaction of older women within the community takes over almost their daily lives. Wessendorf (2014) introduced the concept of 'micro-spaces of conviviality', referring to places other than brief nodding acquaintances, where people engage in conversations and activities that have the potential to develop into friendships. Therefore, in my case, the spaces and places associated with the interaction of members within the square dance community can also be considered micro-spaces of Conviviality. For example, the venue where they dance, space where they participate in outdoor activities, or the network space can be regarded as Conviviality micro-spaces. As a common interest of square dancing Dama, Square dancing helped them build a "weak" to "strong" connection with each other. They create those micro-spaces where they can communicate, be together, form Conviviality, develop friendships and a sense of belonging.

*"Doing square dancing helps me forget the troubles of the day. It's the thing that I most look forward every day! Go to the square and share my day with my sisters."  
(Zisu, phone interview, 57 years old, 18/3/2020)*

I assume the regular interactions with community members make their daily annoyances seem less critical, and square dancing communities become a spiritual utopia for those older women. (Chao, 2017) says that square dancers never miss a night unless they are sick or in extreme weather. Square dancers usually dance together almost every night in a fixed time and outdoor space. Conviviality is made up of the "daily interactions" of people living in the same place (Duru, 2015, p.244). Over time, their friendship was not limited to the online and fixed square dancing space and brought into daily life. Conviviality has a unique ability to allow people to transcend differences of race, class, and religion (ibid.).

First of all, helping each other and sharing positive energy in life has become a shared value in the community. "I am forever grateful to Zisu and Xuelian, who would take turns picking up my medication from the hospital because I couldn't drive and it was too far from home. We are not just dance partners. We are sisters. If they need anything, I will also be there to help." (Xingyun, phone interview, 67 years old, 12/3/2020). Such cases of helping each other in their lives kept coming up during my interviews, and they had great trust in the community and the community members and found each other's company very secure. Friendships that go beyond dance partners stem from the deeper communication and mutual help in these daily micro-spaces. Secondly, in addition to the dance training routine every night, the dancing dama community also organizes regular outdoor group activities in their daily lives, such as gardening, hiking, picnics, and trips together.

*"We went to Jiangnan (some cities in southern China) together last time... Some small cities in Shandong province that are close to us... We would all prepare some nice clothes to take pictures together. Many people in our community rent a plot of land together in a rural area, and we grow vegetables together on weekends and share them with the community members when they are ripe" (Xuelian, phone interview, 67 years old, 19/3/2020 )*

It also proves an authentic, friendly atmosphere among the community members beyond the square dance itself. By participating in different social activities, people who would have met simply through dancing can create and share Conviviality in other spaces and build deeper friendships. As Changlele describes, the process of interaction and teamwork in Square Dance Dama's daily life is also a process of strengthening mutual trust, attachment, and belonging among its members, dispelling stereotypes about each other's cultures and peoples. According to (Duru, 2015, p. 260), People from different backgrounds living in the same area, dealing with their tensions and conflicts, recognizing and respecting the diversity among each other. Similarly here, square dancers in Dongying have been experiencing different backgrounds and cultures. They have become more tolerant in their interactions and open to sharing and learning from different cultures. For example, Shu Yan, Qiang Wei, and some other group members accompanied Zisu (Mongolian) back to Inner Mongolia for the 2019 Naadam Temple Festival, a traditional Mongolian festival featuring Mongolian wrestling, horse racing, and archery, held in the province in mid-summer. They participated in archery and women's horse racing, but not in Mongolian wrestling. Through this trip, they learned more about the charm of traditional Inner Mongolian culture and developed a love for Mongolian music. "I was happy to bring my friends back home for the festival, and they got to experience the charm of our ethnic culture firsthand." (Zisu, video interview, 57 years old, 18/3/2020)

The above reflects that members of the square dance community recognize and respect each other's cultural and ethnic differences and further deepen each other's conscious and unconscious acceptance of multiculturalism within the community through participation in the cultural activities of internal minority members. Conviviality emphasizes differences and diversity and the ability of people to communicate and interact in a shared space (ibid.). Other participants mentioned more than once anecdotes of different cultures colliding, but they did not see the differences as "weird"; instead, they were very positive in accepting new things. As Radice

(2016) points out, Conviviality is an inclusive, friendly, and welcoming social atmosphere that allows strangers to integrate. Friendships among square dancers develop from the small squares where they dance daily to more external shared spaces because of their tolerance and patience and respect and tolerance for new things and cultures, which are prerequisites for good and positive interactions among them.

"We can learn from each other and make up for each other's shortcomings. We can also monitor each other and make progress together, we need each other." (Lvluo, phone interview, 56 years old, 17/3/2020). The Square dance community empowers square dance members to supervise each other, which makes them feel needed.

Zimmerman (2000, p.44-46) contends that empowerment increases member participation and the effectiveness of organizational goals. The square dance Dama becomes friends with a common hobby and develops team spirit in the daily learning process, helping each other, sharing worries, overcoming difficulties, and building team honor. Moreover, this builds friendship among each other and forms a benign and spontaneous monitoring mechanism to make better progress among each other.

"A bosom friend afar brings a distant land near(远亲不如近邻). Square dancing has enriched my retirement life and allowed me to make good friends who are like siblings." (Xingyun, video interview, 12/3/2020). Such "sisterhood" (姐妹情) as they described created in their dancing community can even be elevated to kinship to some extent.

According to (Flewitt et al., 2017; cited in Riley, 2017, p. 2), a sense of belonging is when you can fit confidently into a place, feel secure with your identity, have a sense of being at home and a feeling of being valued. In the interviews, the square dance Dama saw each other as family in the community, and the community became another "home" for them. They support each other and listen to each other, which are the sources of their sense of belonging. Thus, we see the Square dancing Dama interact and build friendships in "micro-spaces of Conviviality" that transcends ethnic,

cultural, and linguistic limitations. In the process of accompanying and interacting with each other, these participants develop shared values of helping each other in their daily lives, respecting each other's ethnic, dietary, cultural, and religious diversity, and seeing themselves as part of a community.

### **internal conflicts in the “conviviality microspaces” of square dance**

Karnaer & parker (cited in Duru 2015, p. 244) argues that Conviviality includes not only harmonious good times but also "tensions, conflicts, and disputes." While all the Square dancers love to come and have a good time together and are very loyal to the community, there are still some internal conflicts behind this harmony and prosperity that I analyzed. The conflicts and tensions can be categorized into three main areas: 1. cultural differences; 2. competing community leadership identities; and 3. aesthetic differences (music and dance).

Conflicts generally caused by cultural and religious differences are relatively intense. Tensions generally caused by cultural and religious differences are more sensitive. For example, as a Manchu, my informant, Qiangwei(63 years old, phone interview,10/3/2020), stated that dogs have a high status in Manchu tradition and are not allowed to eat dog meat or kill dogs. "One of my sisters in the group who is very close to me used to eat dog meat. In the beginning, I think it was inexcusable, but after all, she is not Manchu, and the culture is different, we discussed the matter, and she promised that nothing like that would happen again since she cares about my feelings."(ibid.). Acknowledge the inseparability from each other, positive social interaction and negotiation through Convivial approaches, and problem-solving under tension and conflict (Neals et al., 2018, p. 73). People in the Dongying square dance community resolve tensions by acknowledging the existence of differences and certain irreconcilability. The interview also revealed the occasional tensions within the team regarding religious beliefs." It's best not to bring up sensitive topics like

religion in public places. There are so many people of different faiths in our community that I would at least consciously avoid discussing it with others and be more tolerant of each other's differences." (Meizi, phone interview, 01/3/2020). While there can be tensions caused by cultural differences in the "Conviviality microspaces," diversity can also help resolve social conflicts (McQuail, 1992, p. 143). The cultural-religious differentiation and diversity in the square dance Conviviality atmosphere also made participants aware that they were not the only ones "different" in the group. Thus, despite this occasional tension, as Wessendorf (2016, p. 12) argues, visible diversity also helps those from minority backgrounds, whether newcomers or long-time residents, to feel a sense of belonging to the environment. The visible and audible diversity of lifestyles, religions, ethnicities, and languages makes people feel safe, acknowledge diversity, and embrace this tension. In addition, a second reason for tensions in the square dance community had a competition between members regarding leadership. From the content of my interviews, some Dama became leaders mainly to be seen and to be able to participate in decisions and choices about dance steps and music. Therefore, some dancers would constantly try to be in the front row and be the leader, and the position was thus essential (Aken, p. 212).

Last but not least, conflicts also arise from different aesthetic needs. Participation in music has the potential to energise, to empower and to promote agency (Mcferran and Rickson, 2014). Square dance, as a musical art form of performance, provides a space for fair and individualized self-expression for participants. Dancing Dama were able to express their different views on music choices and dance movements in this egalitarian square dance community. The square dance mentioned above is empowering for each team member. Here, the expression of individual opinions and the process of discovering their preferences help those square dancers personalize themselves. They choose music together, rehearse together, and find the latest dances. In this series of interactive activities, they feel that they have created value for the collective, thus gaining self-satisfaction and realizing their self-worth. Although the members of the dance community in the case are all lovers of folk dance, each

individual's musical preferences remain contentious." We may have had different opinions, but everyone agreed on the voting rules. So even if my favorite dance wasn't chosen, I wasn't too upset. As we've noticed, the community allows everyone to express his or her thoughts on the dance, and ultimately, everyone agrees on what's best. The act of allowing people to express their opinions not only legitimizes individual opinions, but this form of humanization is part of their sense of belonging to the community (Couldry, as cited in Thomas et al., 2014). In short, square dance moms generally resolved their differences by acknowledging tensions and communicating effectively. Square dancing Damas' commitment to the broader dance enterprise and the strong emotional bonds between them support them to engage in shared activities that transcend disagreements and occasional tensions, and increase intimacy in the process. Guangchangwu Dama can see themselves as belonging to a place-based identity in square dancing. According to Akin (p. 213), dance and music are a way of defining identity, a way of defining oneself and the "other" in a diverse social context. In this case, "others" refers to team members or outsiders whose musical or dancer preferences are different from one's own.

### **Valuing musical participation in square dancing**

Active participation in music combined with social contact is an essential part of the transition to later life (Argyle, 1996a: 66; McLveen & Gross, 1999: 71, as cited in Pitts, 2005, P46). According to People's Daily (2019), by the end of 2018, there were 249 million people over 60 in China. And by the middle of the century, this number will approach 500 million. China's aging population is becoming more and more serious, optimizing the later life of older women becomes more critical in the future. And square dance, as the most popular musical participation activity for older Chinese women, has essential research significance. The Best Friends Guangchangwu Dance Team that I interviewed performs music mainly in ethnic minority folk dances. Their repertoire consists mainly of ethnic minority folk dances, ethnic minority style pop music, and a very few popular songs from the internet. My informant Yuer, who is

also the group's current leader, says the community currently has about 200 pieces of songs in their hard drive. The most popular tunes in the community are mainly Mongolian and Xinjiang folk music. They update their repertoire at a rate of two songs a week, and their shared musical tastes bring them together for musical performances.

*"The music of different ethnic groups can reflect different cultures; Mongolian music is bold, Han Chinese classical dance music is slow and elegant, and Xinjiang dance is cheerful and lively. These different cultures are what excites my sisters and me, and I can always stay curious. We also have minority members in our group, and learning their music is a way to bring us closer to them, I guess" (Meizi, Han ethnic, 58 years old, 01/3/2020)*

Multi-ethnic music has come a long way in the evolution of music within the Best Friends dance community. The variety of music within their original founding was far less than it currently is. Learning different ethnic styles of music and dance is essentially a symbol of unity within the square dance community by expressing a commitment to the friendship of different ethnicities. Cultural integration and interaction often occur naturally. People living in the same environment unconsciously absorb elements of other communities' cultures in their daily lives (Cai, 2012). As a common hobby, multi-ethnic music participation activities are shared among its members-ethnic minorities, Han Chinese, people of different religious beliefs, and new and old residents. Thus, as we saw in the interview content, there is a friendly atmosphere within the square dance community, where the relationship between the individual and the whole is harmonious. The coexistence of multi-ethnic dance in the community also unifies different individual music and dance styles, preserving the differences within the group and providing a platform for square dance mothers to express, interpret and embrace different cultures. There is no doubt that a multi-ethnic musical culture can deepen understanding and harmonious coexistence between people of other ethnicities and religions and enhance social cohesion.

## **Music empowerment in square dancing**

In subsequent interviews, I learned that this dance community was established in 2014. Over nearly seven years of living closely and communicating together, more and more minority folk dance songs have been gradually adopted with the participation of minority members and professional folk dance teachers. Although the community members of the dance company came together because of their shared musical preferences, there is a wide variety of ethnic music genres in China. Moreover, musical "effects" are highly subjective and personal understandings, as well as about how people interpret and define it so that their preferred repertoire is individually ranked by their musical maps, musical semiotic networks, and other musical associations (Pitts, P2). Therefore, there will still be disagreements within the community about the extent of repertoire. According to Pitts (P214), musical participation becomes a way of promoting and preserving repertoire. The musical participation and genres that participants engage in are aligned with other aspects of their worldview. My informant, Qiang Wei, used the phrase "a form of self-expression" and "be recognized by my peers" to describe why repertoire was so important to her, and musical choices became a process of achieving individuality as well as gaining a sense of validation. At the same time, Dancing dama wants their voices to be heard within the group and contribute to the community. "It is valuable to be part of the process of choosing music together, to work together with my "sisters" and contribute to our common passion."(Shuyan, video interview,62 years old, 10/3/2020). Creech et al. (2013) noted that participating in music-making activities helped establish a deep connection with others and a sense of belonging, giving people "a sense of purpose, autonomy, and control". Observations revealed that the motivation to participate in music selection and promotion of repertoire fell into three categories:

1) To create frequent and enjoyable performances for themselves. My informant Shuyan said that: " I would like to see an increase in the repertoire of popular music. When I come across some music that I don't like, I have to stop and take a break." The dancers' concern for their feelings, protecting their musical aesthetic, and making independent choices about their actions are expressions of agency. The concept of agency, defined by Anthony Giddens, is the ability to "intervene in the world" and to "make a difference" (Giddens, 1984, p. 14). This expression of self-needs makes it possible for dama to gain autonomy and control. 2)Self-directed learning: A vast number of dancers in the interviews reported engaging in music selection and composition as a process of continually exploring new things for themselves. My informant Lvluo said she would often try different online channels to download and edit music, working with her computer-savvy "sisters" in the community. Music participation provides an outlet for self-directed learning and creativity and a social environment for individuals to gain self-confidence and self-esteem. That music participation gives Guangchangwu Dama self-confidence and a sense of spiritual satisfaction and accomplishment (Pitts, 2005). 3) Mission: "As an ethnic minority from Xinjiang, I need to promote Xinjiang dance. This is my mission. I hope more people can understand the folklore of Xinjiang and feel the joy and warmth of Xinjiang music." (Anni, phone interview, 64 years old, 11/3/2020). The participants defined promoting minority music as a sense of responsibility and obligation in promoting the play, a sense of unshirkable mission. The conversation shows that Annie wanted to show her friends a different Xinjiang through its music and culture. Aim to dispel rumors and negative stereotypes about Xinjiang (rumors and stereotypes about Xinjiang from other regions are that people don't eat pork, many thieves in Xinjiang, people are brutal, and only ethnic minorities). The minority groups are promoting the repertoire and a way of awakening to "cultural self-awareness," which fits Pitt's description of those who subjectively see themselves as supporting a "particular cause." when promoting a specific repertoire.

All of the above are manifestations of self-empowerment in square dance music participation. I found square dance dama to be more community-dependent in music participation and composition and have a strong sense of community compatibility. Participants will seek a balance between social interaction and personal motivation in their musical involvement, enabling them to satisfy their motivation and musical needs while maintaining a good relationship with their social environment (Pitts, 2015, p.46). Dancing Dama enhanced their comfort level by gaining personal confidence and empowerment, which also provided the prerequisite for a sense of belonging. All are guided by the overarching premise of achieving a common goal (to become a professional folk dance community and make friends) and a common interest (to be healthy and happy). At the same time, in this dynamic process, the aunties create and choose the music together, gaining confidence and a sense of accomplishment in a diverse and complex cultural activity, a source of friendship and enhanced social cohesion.

### **Active music participation is more likely to integrate into the community**

Another interesting finding was that the personalities of some square dancers changed throughout their involvement in music. These changes varied widely and may be related to the individual's previous work environment and level of education. Still, I hypothesize that they occurred due to interacting with community members, under the influence of other dancers, or better integrating into the community. According to Pitts (p. 56-60), music can reshape personality and rebuild character. The performers can liberate themselves and become "other people" by participating in the music. Guangchangwu dama change their persona or personality in participating in square dance performances to gain positive emotions and make themselves feel comfortable and happy in the community. Xuelian mentioned she was very introverted when she worked before, but after joining the community, she became especially lively and had a sense of humor.

*" I posted a video on Tiktok, a video of me dancing by myself. My former boss saw it and left me a comment. The ladies got crazy, and times were different (淑女也疯狂). But that video, I also got a lot of likes from my dance friends." (phone interview, 67 years old, 19/3/2020)*

In my opinion, square dancing empowers dancing Dama themselves and can choose the personality they want to show to the outside world. Some personality changes make it easier for them to interact with more dancers in the community and better integrate into the community, and they want to be fun people. For some of the dancing dama, being a hard-working mother (toiling away) and immersing themselves only in household chores will not make them happy. And they are trying to escape the pressures of home. They do not want to spend their evenings being bothered by the chores of life and will subjectively ignore anything that might upset them when they do square dance outside. According to Pitts (P146), music is an escape from everyday life. Focusing on the music helps participants clear their minds of other thoughts and experience the energy of musical engagement. Lotus, my informant, said that she has to cook and take care of her grandchildren every day. But when she goes out on her own to enjoy "me time," she doesn't care about them at all. Square dancing became a utopia where the aunties collectively avoided real life, space where they would not feel the anxiety of everyday life and could still gain the approval of others in the company of their own kind. But we need to acknowledge that we cannot simply say that the participants are merely escaping from everyday life and changing their original personalities. It may be a practical attempt to better integrate into the community, explore how to make themselves feel more comfortable and safe in the community, and create a sense of trust.

Music participation does create opportunities for the older women to perform and dance together to their heart's content. When they are on stage or in the square, they can get away from some stress, relax, and return to their daily lives with a clearer head. They have little time to focus on themselves when they are at home. Daback and Smith (2008) suggest that a mutually supportive and engaging environment and the conventions and rituals of group performance may enhance the construction of

older adults' identities. On stage, they are no longer in the role of a mother or wife, but a new individual or the closest thing to their true self." I love dressing for the stage, and last month I participated in a dance competition at the local cabaret, dancing in a traditional Mongolian costume. At that moment, I was no longer a 60-year-old woman. I became one of the girls dancing on the grasslands." (Anni, phone interview, 64 years old, 11/3/2020).

Within the temporal and spatial framework of musical participation: they can forget their actual age and identity. In line with Pitts (P144), the personalities of certain characters in specific costumes and music make them feel liberated from their everyday roles and form new ones. At this stage, they interact with other "actors" and must ensure that their movements are orderly and harmonious. The dancers work together to complete the performance, defining and pursuing their changes and challenges in a supportive group context, where they work together and achieve their self-goals. They see themselves as a community-based identity, which is a sense of belonging. At the same time, when the Square dancers perform on the stage (square), they also feel noticed and welcomed by the outside world when they hear positive comments, applause, or praise. In musical participation, dancing Guangchangwu Dama achieves individual liberation and release of mental stress. By performing to their hearts' content together, they develop a sense of teamwork and ritual among themselves. In music participation, "identity is used to discuss musical behaviors, preferences, and self-perceptions." Discourse in the popular music literature tends to focus on people's identification with a particular genre, using "identity" to denote a sense of collective participation that is experienced through the presentation of shared music. A sense of collective participation can be experienced through the performance of shared musical preferences (Bennett, 2000; Frith, 1996, cited in Pitts, 2015). This positive emotional feedback helps dancing Dama create a sense of belonging to the community.

## **Musical participation breaks down social barriers**

Faced with the sudden loss of social activities at work after retirement, square dance moms are generally very positive about the new social activities the square dance community brings. As we mentioned above, square dancing provides individuals with a more personalized display of their "self." Self-actualization and recognition in the group also make it easier for square dancing dama to adjust to retirement and old age. In the space of square dancing, in the cases mentioned in Pitts' (p144-150) book, performers constantly talk about tolerance and friendship, and there are no "secular" status comparisons. In this space, wealth and success in life have no impact on their interactions. Reinventing oneself in the community is also a process of building a sense of belonging, stripping oneself of old identities, and then recreating them in the space of square dancing, where everyone can find their place in the community.

My informant, Zisu (phone interview, 57 years old, 18/3/2020), said, " I am a regular oil field worker, but we also have some retired principals and professors in our group. Also, some private business owners and some wealthy housewives. But I think we are all equal. It just means they have more education or have more money. But when you come to dance, people look at whether you're a good dancer and bring value to the team. And our goal is mainly to stay healthy and make each other happy." Thus, individuals who once had privilege and money in society must also accept the loss of that privilege. At the same time, the shared goal of musical participation and the intention to collaborate is critical to overcoming the mindset of climbing with others (Pitts, p. 140). She notes that participants relied heavily on whether the leader had business skills even when choosing a team leader. They referred to this as the "professional level" of dance and music appreciation. In this particular space, music served to balance class relations. Or as my informant, Lvluo (phone interview, 56 years old, 17/3/2020), confessed, " Some invisible constraints are broken here. You have to let go of past accomplishments and try to adapt to new circumstances. You need to start over, and no matter what you did before you retired, now you're just a

retired old lady." In square dancing, a space of musical participation, a level playing field has been created based on musical aesthetics and dancing skills. People have abandoned their former social identities and torn away labels of personal achievement to fit the new standards by which the community is judged. Square dance moms have constructed a "shared way of life" through personal interest and collective emotion. Through the group's practical activities and interactions with others, they accepted the stripping away of social identity and achieved a sense of self and identity construction. The process of identity reconstruction also enhances the sense of community.

### **Musical Education in Community**

The most unexpected finding of the study was the professional development of square dance education, as reflected in the community music education training. My informants said that since 2016, their square dance club has had two instructors from professional colleges and universities to guide the teaching and that the activity is changing. In Dongying, Square dance instruction has become part of the education at the senior university. Before the outbreak in late 2019, the Guangchangwu dama regularly attended music appreciation and dance training classes at the aging adult's university two days a week. After the COVID-19 epidemic, although there were no local cases of infection in Dongying, the senior adult's university and the square dancers complied with the government's call. They decided not to continue indoor dance instruction. After a one-month hiatus from teaching, all the music education classes were switched to online instruction as of February 2020. Funded by the government, a series of online educational resources have been developed. Square dancing dama could take courses through the oilfield employees' intranet site and their computers. Later, as user demand increased, they also created a community learning app that can be used on all Android smartphones.



Figure 3. Screenshot of localized Guangchangwu learning App

"Since square dancing was included in senior education, we think the dance team has become more professional. And people are very willing to participate. The online classes are also easy to operate because we can listen to the classes through the website or the same App on our phones. We can watch online courses and live streaming music/dance courses repeatedly. If I can't attend a class when it's offered, I can choose to watch it later. We were able to see live classes from some of the best

dance teachers in China. It's pretty interesting to start to learn tech together with my sisters." (Mumu, phone interview, 66 years old, 15/3/2020). Lvluo, another active informant, said they learned many of their new skills at the senior college and that their regular evening exercise time in the square was more like homework. This type of online learning makes them feel fashionable and basically like young people. She mentioned that her grandchild is also taking online classes at the school during the pandemic. The similarity to the younger generation gives her a great sense of accomplishment because she is also trying the latest things. The Dancing Dama also describes learning as a shared experience. How much the learning helps and contributes to the collective and others creates a more meaningful outcome for everyone involved in music learning. And sustained community learning is motivated by finding friends with similar interests and hobbies through community and the opportunity to socialize in a stress-free environment (Hansman and Moot, 2010). This shared learning energy enabled participants to achieve a sense of self-worth and gain self-esteem, and deepened their sense of belonging to the group.

### **Maintaining the relationships of the square dance community on Wechat**

The long-term musical participation and interaction between each other in square dancing "Conviviality microspaces" allows Square dancing grannies to gain a sense of togetherness and emotional attachment to the group. The 'glue' that brings people together is proxemics (Riley, Morey, Griffin 2017, p.348), local or near to each other in either a physical or virtual way. Effective communication is increasingly dependent on the media in the modern context, reflecting different voices in society. Apart from face-to-face interactions, the leading virtual communication channel in the square dancers' everyday life is WeChat, a Chinese instant messaging App. WeChat has become the localized social media (LSM) for square dance Dama to communicate with each other. It was designed and launched by Tencent Company in 2011, combining features of Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram has become very popular

among the older people in China (Ke, 2015, p.11). WeChat has become an essential communication tool for the elderly to cope with loneliness. They have found new ways to develop self-awareness by forwarding interactive messages or comments to others on WeChat (Ke, 2015, pp.18-21). Because WeChat has a good user experience and operability, it is flexible enough to be used even by older users with no computer knowledge or knowledge of the Internet(Guo, 2017).

In the view of Guo, WeChat provides at least some older adults with the opportunity to add their voices and opinions to the digital world. My informants told me that the WeChat group is their leading online communication platform. Harwit (2017, p. 324) states that the primary purpose of WeChat groups is to add known contacts to the organization. To enhance mutual trust and comfort for users within the group, and to encourage them to stay in these intimate groups." WeChat groups tend to channel Chinese online discourse into small, cohesive collections of like-minded people" to assist communities in "small-scale, motivated social action." WeChat group, where the community publishes the latest community announcements and notices. In my research, the three main functions of the WeChat group for Square Dance Dama are: 1) Organizational function: to give community instructions and notifications, to organize daily dance or music learning activities or others (e.g., small group tours).2) Interactive function: for daily interaction, sharing news or square dance-related material pieces increases intimacy. 3) Regulatory function: internal community spending, repertoire selection voting, and leadership election to ensure a clean team and build trust.

The community leader, my informant Yuer, mentioned in the interview that the WeChat group was convenient for them to give out activity assignments and community indicators. For example: if there is a temporary extreme weather change, the notification function within the WeChat group is much more convenient than calling each member of the community to cancel the dance practice that night. At the same time, the constantly improving and updated community standards constantly

remind Dongying's Square Dance Dama always to discipline their behavior to avoid disturbing the public. For example, volume requirements for radio music, daily dance time contact rules, etc. WeChat makes it much easier to pass information between square dancers and the community. The establishment of community rules has been spread and promoted in the WeChat group. These community rules have also helped the Dama's establish a collective consciousness, values, and standards of judgment.

The interviews revealed that the informants' children were away from them most of the time, so they needed to find something for themselves to do to fill their lives and social needs. As mentioned by (Wang, 2015, p. 44), Chinese square dancers are the "first generation of lonely mothers in China." Some of the first generations of lonely square dancers' children study abroad, and some are married. Most of their children have moved out of their homes and are building their own lives outside. Therefore, it becomes vital to provide more social support for the elderly from friends and neighbors. The formation of senior citizen associations can help empty nesters participate in social activities(Liu and Guo, 2007). With the advent of SLM (e.g., WeChat), senior communities are also setting up online communities (WeChat groups) centered on their respective themes. Dancing Dama can exercise by participating in daily outdoor square dances and participating in group chats, and interacting with their fellow dancers in WeChat groups. The square dancers think the interaction of the WeChat group makes their communication more convenient and exciting. Social media (WeChat) serves as an essential communication medium for square dancers. They share their daily lives, news, funny stories, household tips, identify dance music, purchase new equipment, grab red envelopes(抢红包) and holiday wishes, and even make travel plans in WeChat groups.

"Square dancing is not just about fitness. Chinese people like to live in groups and interact with each other, especially women. We share all kinds of fun information in our community, not just dancing, which is much more fun than cooking and taking care of the kids. We also leave comments on each other's movements in our circle of

friends." (Zisu, video interview, 57 years old, 18/3/2020). Guangchangwu Dama exchanges a wide range of content, covering daily news, children's education, music and dance videos, recipe sharing, life tips, and more. Moreover, many members have built up friendships through their long-term interaction in the WeChat group, so some of them also add each other as WeChat friends privately so that these people can interact in the WeChat group and each other's friend circle. Friend circles function in the same way as Instagram, where users can post about their daily lives, and your friends can comment on what you post and give you a thumbs up.

"WeChat group gives me more opportunities to express myself, which has helped me integrate into this new environment very well." My Uyghur informant, Anni, as a newcomer to the community less than 2 years ago, said that the interactions within the online community gave her a sense of ease and eliminated the loneliness she felt like an immigrant due to quickly finding friends with similar interests in the group. As Quinn (2018) indicated, social media provides a sense of connection for older adults. It fulfills Dama's need to seek intimate, personal, and locally oriented communication. Interactions within the WeChat group deepened Dama's sense of intimacy with the community. More than one informant said that checking the group's content had become a daily must for them. Square-dancing Dama has created their sense of belonging and familiarity in WeChat groups to express their opinions. Whether these opinions are related to politics or everyday life, WeChat has created an online cultural space for the square dancers and their community.

"We have funds for our activities, and although it's not much, I've chosen another member to oversee the money with me. We make our community's current expenses public every month in the WeChat group. The team leader is not the only one who manages the expenses, everyone can participate in the management." (Yuer, phone interview, 62 years old, 05/3/2020) . Thus, the WeChat group also acts as an online monitoring tool. Because Dama's are empowered by the community, everyone can play a supervisory role on this platform. The square dance community on

LSM(Wechat) empowers community members to ask any questions they want within the community. According to Zhang, Jiang, and Carroll (as cited in Dixon, 2014, p. 38), community identity helps people identify who they are and what they should do. In square dance communities, members recognize each other's regulatory functions. WeChat ensures that information is open and traceable. Everyone, especially those with clear identity labels within the community, needs to be accountable for what they have said within the community (Wang, 2015). At the same time, on some controversial issues, the community generally considers whether most people agree. It provides them with appropriate social guidance in the social life of the community. For example, the regulatory function becomes essential in selecting new repertoire and dance genres within a dance group. The community needs a level playing field for everyone to voice their opinions and seek identity. As my informant, Qiangwei said, "We always start by having the most fashionable ladies in our group find the right clothes on Taobao (an online shopping site). After that, they can share the link in our WeChat group, and if everyone agrees to buy it and there are no other comments, we will buy it. Everyone will share the cost, including electricity and sound equipment. The community leaders will then be responsible for purchasing all the items." Through the WeChat group, the dancing Dama can accomplish their tasks or solve problems more efficiently, fairly, and openly. The function of the Square Dance WeChat group is dedicated to developing diversity and ensuring equity and inclusion so that the community is a place where each team member feels valued, heard, and appreciated.

Building on this foundation, WeChat provides a space for square dancers to express themselves in the modern digital world and build shared values and culture through long-term daily communication. It helps everyone find their identity in a community where people grow, refine themselves and improve the community. Ensuring a fair and inclusive community, new technologies on social media provide this ongoing dynamic of interactive relationships. WeChat allows Dama to break down spatial

distances and expand the scope of "conviviality microspaces". The interaction between the square dance community can take place in the square and away from the physical spaces. WeChat provides opportunities for square dance dama to communicate face-to-face and in cyberspace and establish deeper face-to-face connections through the web. The WeChat group was created so that dancers would feel they were always with their community members. People could interact with community members anytime, anywhere, breaking the limits of time and space. "Some issues can't be solved face-to-face that we can solve in the WeChat group. When no one can come out to dance on a rainy day, we play online poker together through our cell phones." (Mumu, phone interview, 66 years old, 15/3/2020 ). It is the breaking of the spatial limitations of face-to-face communication that deepens the community's Conviviality atmosphere. The Chinese Dama's daily face-to-face dancing and interaction brought them closer, while their daily sharing and transmission of information in cyberspace through social media further deepened their relationship. It has also accelerated the formation of a tacit understanding and sense of belonging among retired older women of different religions, ethnicities, and classes in Dongying.

### **A new era of square dance?**

As square dancing has become increasingly accepted by mainstream society in recent years, square dance moms have been targeted by various businesses. According to data released by China's Xinhua News Agency in 2017, there are about 2 million leaders and active members of many dance teams in the group of square dance moms. All types of businesses are trying to get into the square dance user base. According to my informant Lvluo, the merchants have many "tricks up their sleeves" and are constantly changing. Some ways can feel like harassment. In a subsequent interview, I learned that they once had a large dance group of nearly 200 people. Still, because some merchants had somehow gotten mixed in, Dance Dama couldn't stand being attacked by various small ads in the group every day, so they disbanded the original

group and set up a new WeChat group. Currently, there are only 67 people in this stable WeChat group. They are all active members of the dance team, which is the same WeChat group I introduced in the social media interaction section above. In addition to viral marketing by joining those Dancing Dama's WeChat groups, some businesses also promote their products or businesses by sponsoring performance costumes or props to the old dancers. These businesses print their company logos or advertising slogans on T-shirts or dance fans. However, this behavior seems to be more acceptable to the dancing groups because this kind of promotion requires the consent of them.

Finally, the emergence of performances and competitions organized by the community and some commercial and cultural companies might affect the stability of the square dance community shortly. The primary purpose of these performances could be to promote a positive image of square dance or carry out commercial activities for promotional purposes (e.g., opening events, company anniversaries, etc.). This format carries the risk of challenging the stability of the community in the future. Performance and competition leaders will reach out to Dama to participate in different events. In interviews, we learned that some of them participate in contests and shows primarily for the attention they enjoy on stage rather than the prizes they receive for performing. My informants Annie and Shuyan both mentioned in interviews that they enjoy being on stage and showing themselves. They can get photos and videos taken by a professional team during the show and invite their families to watch them dance on stage. What Guangchangwu Dama cares about is being taken seriously and the feeling of being seen on stage. As a result, a situation has arisen where some of the dancing grannies who worked out in the park every night have occasionally started to show up irregularly because they have to go to rehearsals for competitions during the daytime. Community leader Yuer is concerned that if too many people attend competitions and performances, it will create attrition,

as nightly routines in the community are not mandatory. Pitts (2015, p. 134 ) has noted that even those actively involved in musical activities "constantly weigh the benefits and costs of participation." A mismatch between individual goals and those of the music community may cause members to stop participating in activities (Cottrell, 2014). The emergence of commercial performances gives community members more platforms to express their individuality and capitalizes on their desire to be noticed as older adults. They stray between their original purpose of finding friends and fitness in the community and what may be a personal showcase. Thus, participation in commercial performances and competitions creates tensions that may stimulate new inter/intra-group relationships. Nonetheless, there is still a lack of sufficient research data to examine whether commercial activities negatively affect dharmic community affiliation, but this is a worthwhile direction for future research.

## *Chapter 5*

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this dissertation is to critically examine how older women communicate, perform to their heart's content, learn music, and communicate across cultures around the medium of square dance in the Chinese context. And how these interactions relate to enabling older women to take control of their retirement lives, build friendships, and gain a sense of belonging. Participation in music is enriching and stimulating for people of all ages, and this enrichment and stimulation is a necessary component of healthy aging (Pitts, 2012). The enduring popularity of square dancing as a musical participation activity in China and its continued popularity with older women is also because dancers continue to meet again and again in a lively daily atmosphere, cementing their friendships with each other. In this study, I selected one of the representative square dance communities in Dongying City as a specific case study. Information was obtained through semi-structured in-

depth interviews to answer the research questions of this study. The transcription of the interviews was also analyzed through manual and digital coding. I will conclude with a summary of key findings related to the research questions, reflections on the limitations of this study, and recommendations for future research in the final section.

### **1) How do the Guangchangwu Dama generate a sense of belonging by dancing together?**

In Dongying, a city of super-diverse immigrants, the foundation for conviviality has been laid by the long-term integration of many first-and second-generation immigrants with the local population. The tolerance of different and diverse cultures has become a regular part of Dongying people's lives. These retired or soon-to-be-retired middle-aged and older women gain a platform to express themselves and find peers through square dancing. Their interactions form broader "conviviality microspaces": 1) a regular daily nighttime dance practice space (1h30mins), where square dancers usually dance together almost every night at a regular time and in an outdoor space. Conviviality is constituted by the "daily interactions" of people living in the same place (Duru, 2015, p. 244). 2) Other spaces to meet and interact with square dance members (e.g., picnics, shopping, traveling, staying overnight in each other's homes, etc.). Square dance effectively fills the social gap for older adults after retirement, providing a space for retired women, and Wang (2015) described it as the "first generation of lonely mothers", providing a channel to re-establish new social circles and eliminate loneliness. When people are familiar with the people around them, especially when there are similarities between them, it is easier to build trust (Hooghe. et al., 2005). When people are familiar with the people around them, especially when there are similarities between them, it is easier to build trust (Hooghe. et al., 2005). Over time, their friendships developed beyond the online and regular square dance spaces and were brought into everyday life. 3) Local online social media spaces for Square dance. The formation of these spaces also helped them establish an in-depth practice and a sense of belonging. Thus, square dancing as a common

interest for square dance mothers to initially meet together enabled them to build "weak" to "strong" connections with each other.

The square dancers also establish unified values through square dancing: 1) helping each other and sharing positive energy in life. 2) respecting each other's cultural, ethnic, and religious differences, daily interactions further deepen each other's conscious and unconscious acceptance of multiculturalism. The establishment of shared values allows square dance to further weaken the difficulties of in-depth communication between immigrants due to cultural differences to a certain extent as well. In addition, square dance can also serve as a space for local identity construction among immigrants, filling the gap of lack of leisure activities after immigrants' relocation in the process of rapid urbanization, allowing immigrants and outsiders to integrate into local society more quickly. It enhances mutual understanding between ethnic minorities and Han Chinese. 3) Square dance members are empowered to monitor each other and express themselves, which allows them to progress together and build a sense of community trust. The unified values and the exercise of supervision gave the square dance mothers a sense of confidence and accomplishment in their community activities. They made them feel that they were contributing to the community. They also gained friendships and support from their community and friends in their lives, which became the source of their sense of belonging to the square dance community. The expression of personal opinions and discovering their preferences helped the square dancing dama personalize themselves. They choose the music together, rehearse together, and find the latest dances. They felt self-satisfied by the value they created for the group during the group activity. The act of allowing people to express their opinions not only legitimized personal views, but this humanizing form was part of the sense of belonging they felt to their community (Couldry, as cited in Thomas et al., 2014).

Besides harmonious coexistence, conflicts still occasionally arise in the space of square dance conviviality, such as those caused by cultural differences, conflicts over

internal competition for positions, and conflicts caused by aesthetic differences (music and dance). Because there is already a stable set of values and regulatory system within the square dance community, internal disputes and conflicts will eventually be weakened and resolved. Square Dance Dama generally resolves their differences by acknowledging tensions and communicating effectively. The stark differences, inclusiveness, and close interactions make them feel safe and comfortable about being in a square dance community. The commitment of Square dancing Dama to the broader dance enterprise and the intense emotional bonds between them support their participation and continued socialization in the square dance Community. And this strong sense of belonging and attachment to the community also transcends disagreements and occasional tensions and enhances intimacy in the process.

## **2) How does musical participation empower older women and influence conviviality within the square dance community?**

Peer relationships are part of the appeal of musical activity (Pitts, p. 140), and square dancing provides a supportive environment for older women from diverse class and cultural backgrounds where shared interests are allowed to flourish in the community. Participants can define and pursue their personal music participation goals and challenges within a supportive and stable community. Music participation brings together friendships, shared goals, and interests in musical activities (ibid.), all of which are highly valued by square dance participants in their daily lives. Minorities have the opportunity to promote their repertoire in Square dance performances, increasing the diversity of the community's musical culture. As a common hobby, multi-ethnic musical participation activities are shared among its members - ethnic minorities, Han Chinese, people of different religions, and new and old residents. A multi-ethnic music culture can deepen understanding and harmonious coexistence among people of other ethnicities and faiths and enhance community cohesion. The relationship between the individual and the collective within the Square dance community is harmonious. The coexistence of multi-ethnic dance within the

community preserves the differences within the group and provides a platform for square dance mothers to express, interpret and embrace different cultures. Square Dance Dama also emphasizes collaboration, fairness and openness, and a sense of inclusion in musical participation and composition. Square dance moms value the satisfaction of their personal needs and the respect and protection of other members' self-esteem. They enhance their sense of security and comfort in the group by gaining personal self-confidence and competence, which also provides the prerequisite for a sense of belonging. Despite the complex composition of the members, they all share the general premise of achieving a common goal (to become a professional folk dance group) and the common benefit (to be healthy and happy). At the same time, the dynamic process in which the aunties create and select music together, participate in diverse and complex cultural activities together, and dance to their heart's content enhances community cohesion. It contributes to the emergence of an atmosphere of Conviviality in the community.

The empowering value of musical participation for older women is mainly reflected because Dama becomes empowered to choose the personality she wants to present to the outside world. In participating in music, the dancing Dama achieves individual liberation, releases mental stress, and develops teamwork and ritual tacit understanding. Moreover, musical participation provides a level playing field for the square dance ama based on musical aesthetics and danceability, creating a new standard of judgment within the community. Dancers pay attention to their feelings, protect their musical aesthetics, and make independent choices about their behavior as an expression of agency. And musical participation provides avenues for dancers to learn and create for themselves, and they can teach themselves according to their individual needs. Guangchangwu helps square dance Dama build self-confidence and gain a sense of spiritual satisfaction and accomplishment. Thus, Square dance teams of older women offer the possibility of gaining autonomy and control over their later years in an empowering way that helps them to express themselves and even more to influence other groups of older women.

### **3) How do Guangchangwu Dama maintain their square dance community through the WeChat group?**

WeChat as a localized social media (LSM) for square dance Dama to communicate with each other has become an essential communication tool for older adults to cope with loneliness. The primary purpose of the Guangchangwu WeChat group is to add members from within the team and increase mutual trust and comfort among users within the community. WeChat groups help cohesive communities to engage in "small-scale, politically or otherwise based social action" (Harwit, 2017).

Interaction within WeChat groups encourages Dama to remain in the close-knit group. The organizational function of WeChat groups provides guidance and notification of community actions, organizing daily dance or music learning activities or others (e.g., small group tours). WeChat groups can also be used for day-to-day interaction, further deepening internal multicultural exchange. The supervisory function of WeChat also ensures community fairness and builds community members' trust in the community. The role of the square dance WeChat group is to work to develop diversity, ensure equity and inclusion, and make the community a place where each team member feels valued, heard, and appreciated. The WeChat group provides a space for square dancers to express themselves in the modern digital world and build shared values and culture through daily communication. It helps everyone find their identity in a community where people grow, refine themselves and improve the community.

Chinese urban elderly square dance groups are social groups formed based on shared hobbies. Square dance as a musical participation activity is a relational bond for group members in real life. In contrast, the WeChat group replicates and migrates square dance Dama network identity in real geo-society. The social relationship network in the entire Guangchangwu community is copied to the WeChat group. Square dancers build their social relationship networks through the WeChat group's daily interactive rituals, information sharing, offline interaction, and Square Dance Dama achieves

social interaction and emotional contact by mastering new social media technologies. WeChat group provides opportunities for square dance Dama to communicate in cyberspace and create a virtuous cycle and positive feedback through cyberspace programs and deeper face-to-face interactions after they are established. The WeChat group allows dancers to feel that they are always with their community members. WeChat makes it easier for square dancers to communicate with each other. They share some information and announcements through the WeChat group. And establish their own community rules, which leads to a collective consciousness, shared values, and standards of judgment. WeChat also allows them to recognize their community identity better. WeChat breaks the limits of time and space, ensuring that people can still stay connected even when they cannot communicate face-to-face. The emergence of the WeChat group has also accelerated the formation of an atmosphere of Conviviality in square dancing.

### **Limitations and recommendations for Square dance research**

First, from a research methodology perspective, if this study were to be repeated, I would prefer an ethnographic research approach when conditions permit. Most importantly, I might choose an even longer time to study the square dance mothers in the context in which they live through methods such as participant observation and face-to-face interviews. Because ethnographic methods can provide a more comprehensive perspective to observe and explain the complexity behind group behavior, reveal the multifaceted interrelationships in interactions within the square dance community, and provide a detailed description of the behavioral context (Sangasubana, 2011).

Furthermore, reviewing the sample objectives and scope, I believe that the initial selection of cases and the set sample boundaries in this study were reasonable. I was ultimately successful in recruiting 10 respondents and collecting and analyzing their

data in terms of the initial objectives. However, more potential respondents will be recruited initially in the future to have more options once my study begins and avoid the risk of temporary withdrawal of respondents. In the case design, I emphasized my desire to recruit older adults of different ages in the square dance community to observe the integration of different generations of older adults within the multicultural community to ensure as much rigor as possible in the sample data. However, it was later recognized that, perhaps due to the limited sample size, no significant differences were found between them. Therefore, in future studies, additional resources, a more extensive data collection procedure, or a larger sample size may yield better results in the field of study.

At the same time, the scope of the study was geographically limited. As a super-diverse city, Dongying is somewhat irreproducible. This study is only applicable to the living scenarios of square dance dama in other similar multicultural towns. It is not representative of other mono-ethnic/religiously congregated urban and rural areas. However, due to time and staff constraints, it was impossible to recruit participants from all provinces in China for this study. However, this does provide a direction for subsequent research, where future researchers can create a "square dance map" of China that has clarified regional differences in the effects of square dancing as a social medium.

Follow-up studies could further explore the experiences of marginalized (and relatively rare) groups addressed in the study, such as in-depth studies that target a specific group. For example, a study focusing only on minority participation in square dance activities. In addition, another exciting direction of research could focus on factors that challenge the stability within Square dance communities. For example, the commercialization that emerged around square dancing identified in this study could pose a potential threat to the sense of community belonging.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### List of interviewees

Name	Gender	Age	Civil status	ethnic group	Religion	Interview length	Date of interview	migrant status
Lvluo	Female	56	Married	Han	None	48min11s	17/3/2020	Dongying native
Meizi	Female	58	Married	Han	Buddhism	41min28s	01/3/2020	newcomer(moved in Dongying within 2 years)
Yuer	Female	62	Married	Li	Catholicism	1h17mins22s	05/3/2020	newcomer(moved in Dongying within 2 years)
Zisu	Female	57	Divorced	Mongolian	Tibetan Buddhism	49min36s	18/3/2020	second-generation migrant
Qiangwei	Female	63	Married	Manchu	Christian	39min07s	10/3/2020	second-generation migrant
Shuyan	Female	62	Married	Han	None	42min36s	10/3/2020	second-generation migrant
Anni	Female	64	Married	Uyghur	Islam	45min46s	11/3/2020	newcomer(moved in Dongying within 2 years)
Xingyun	Female	67	Married	Han	Christian	42min01s	12/3/2020	second-generation migrant

Xuelian	Female	67	Divorced	Han	Buddhism	57min17s	19/3/2020	second-generation migrant
Mumu	Female	66	Divorced	Han	None	53min38s	15/3/2020	second-generation migrant

## *Appendix 2*

### ***Consent form Lund University***

*Consent form presented to participants ahead of in-person interviews*

**Researcher:** Miaoer Chen

This research will interview Chinese women between 55- 70 years old who participate in Square dance (Guangchangwu). The Interview aims to talk about how they engage with Guangchangwu and their daily interactions . It will include questions about how older women communicate, learn music, perform together and communicate across cultures around the medium of square dance in the Chinese context, and how these interactions relate to enabling older women to take control of their retirement lives, build friendships, and gain a sense of belonging. These interviews will be between 30 minutes to an hour.

The data will be used in a Master’s thesis for the Media and Communication Studies program at Lund University, which will be made available to the public later. The research will not use your legal name but will include general information, such as age, ethnicity, gender and civil status.

The researcher would like your written consent to record the interview and use it to present their findings. You are welcome to say as much or as little as you want. You can also choose to not answer any of the questions or stop the interview at any time.

Please sign your name below if you agree to join this research.

**Full name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Gender:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

### *Appendix 3*

#### ***Pilot interview guide***

##### **Participation**

1. Do you usually dance at a regular time? When?
2. how long have you been dancing?
3. what makes you want to square dance?
4. when did you start square dancing and why? Do you remember the first time?
5. Do you have a particular choice of music? (Musical repertoire).
6. What are your feelings and opinions about the songs? Were there any other emotions involved?
7. As far as I know, if you want to dance, there are many options. You can also go to dance halls or senior colleges. Why did you choose to dance in the square?
8. Do you have to pay anything for dancing in the square?
9. When dancing in public, does your group follow any rules (e.g., limits on performance length, music volume, dance group size)? Is it voluntary or mandatory?

##### **Conviviality**

1. Are there other online/offline activities you do with other dancing grannies? Can you share your story?
2. have you made new friends in your dance community?
3. How has the square dance community changed your life?

4. Are there people from different regions, religions and cultures in your dance community? Does it become a barrier to community cohesion? Can you give me some examples?

**Emotions:**

1. How do your family members feel about you dancing in the square? Have they ever danced with you? How did they feel?

2. Have you heard any negative comments about your square dancing? Can you tell me what they are?

3. What reactions do you encounter when you say you square dance? How do other people react? Can you tell me your story or your friend's story?

4. How do you feel when you dance? Do you feel shame/uncomfortable because of being watched or photographed by strangers?

**Everyday life**

1. What benefits has square dancing brought to your life? What do you think has been the biggest change in your daily life since you started square dancing?

2. How has Covid 19 affected it?

3. What do you think is the most attractive thing in square dancing?

**Media engagement/Social media**

1. Do you mind strangers videotaping you while you are dancing? Has this ever happened?

2. Do you share your dance videos online? What do you usually talk about in the online community?

3. what is the significance of the online community (WeChat group)?

4. what role do you think you play in this dance community? Why?
5. What does WeChat do most to help the community communicate?
6. without the WeChat group, would it be impossible to form a square dance community?
7. Are there any other activities generated by this group?

#### *Appendix 4*

### ***Revised Interview guide***

#### **Participation**

1. Do you remember the first time you participated in a square dance? Can you share your story?
2. Why were you able to keep participating in square dancing?
3. Do you have a particular choice of music? What do you think is the value of music in square dancing?
4. How did you learn to square dance?
5. Are there any participation rules in the community (e.g., restrictions on performance length, music volume, dance group size)? Are they mandatory?

#### **Conviviality**

1. Do you have other online/offline activities with community members? Can you share your story?
2. We have people from different regions, religions, and cultures in our dance community, does this diversity act as a barrier to community cohesion? Can you give me some examples?
3. Is there conflict within the team? Usually for what reasons?

4. What activities are there in the community other than square dancing? Where are they?

### **Feelings:**

1. What are the comments you hear about your square dancing? Can you tell me what they are?
2. How has participating in square dancing made you feel? Have there been any unhappy experiences?
3. Can you tell me about some experiences that have impressed you about interacting with your friends?
4. How do you feel when you dance? Do you feel shame/uncomfortable because of being watched or photographed by strangers?

### **Everyday life**

1. What benefits has square dancing brought to your life?
2. How has Covid 19 affected your dancing practices?
3. What do you think is the biggest change in your everyday life since you started square dancing?
4. How has square dancing become part of your everyday life?

### **Media engagement/Social media**

1. Would you mind if strangers videotaped you while you were dancing? Has this ever happened?
2. What do you think is the main function of the WeChat group and how it helps the community?
3. What is your role in this dance community? Why?

4. What is the main communication in the WeChat group? Do you follow them?
5. What would be the impact on the square dance community if there was no WeChat group?

## *Appendix 5*

### *A translated interview transcript*

*When do you usually dance? Do you remember the first time you participated in a square dance?*

We now basically dance all at night. It takes most of the day to care for the elderly. After we moved to this community, we had a dance teacher who graduated from Renmin University and taught more professional dance. Once you start and you will... Feel the beauty of dance. I started dancing 7 years ago, pretty long time.

*Why were you able to keep participating in square dancing?*

Afraid of loneliness and want to make friends. When you retire, you can't go back to work every day and socialize with people like them. As soon as I retired, I entered my second life. This is our second circle, where you have to make new connections with new people and form new life situations. Then you make a lot of friends through group activities and learn a lot from new friends. Square dancing gives you a chance to meet people at all levels and all kinds of people. The relationship is more genuine now because there are no conflicts of interest. It's just pure fun.

*What do you think is the value of music in square dancing?*

I like folk dance, such as Mongolian dance and Tibetan dance. In my early forties, I preferred upbeat music. Now, with the growth of age, the rich life experience. More and more, I like folk dances that are slower and have more connotation and meaning.

I like listening to music. That's why I choose to go dancing after a long day at work. I feel comfortable listening to music. I feel relaxed when I hear beautiful lyrics or melodies, and I am very absorbed in the dancing process. I feel I can forget everything. Is this my own way of meditation? I don't know.

*Do you remember what it was like to dance for the first time?*

The first time I danced was actually when I stood next to it. I felt the music was so beautiful that all the cells in my body became active. Because at the beginning, I danced with simple movements that were easy to do. And then as you get more and more professional you get to feel it, to feel the rhythm of the music. But I still do Mongolian dance more now.

The Mongolian dance is more rough, and you can imagine the feeling of dancing on the grassland. Xinjiang dance is more lively, nifty and cheerful, the temperament of each dance is different. Every nation has its own customs and habits, human and geographical differences. It is all in the music, so the dances of these ethnic groups also give us a good understanding of some characteristics of their culture I think.

*How do you feel when you dance?*

It feels like a special commitment of mind and body, or a kind of freedom. When you dance, you lose yourself in the music, you try to be better, more relaxed, more in the song, the words and the music can make your body and mind very happy.

*We have people from different regions, religions, and cultures in our dance community, does this diversity act as a barrier to community cohesion? Can you give me some examples?*

I don't think so. First of all, dancing has no national boundaries, not to mention we are from the same country. And I don't think this pre-retirement social identity is going to work for us. We don't talk about religion when we dance, so even though we have different religious beliefs, we all come here to exercise and make friends. I think that

we are in a collective dance, and in an atmosphere where the relaxation of the dance is not utilitarian and snobbish, the social labels that you carry on are not meaningful in this environment. No one will want to be friends with you if someone shows off their status as a member of the upper class or rich. Dance makes people more equal, no class or inequality. Because it's not like during the work period, our dancing relationship is very simple.

A bosom friend afar brings a distant land near. Square dancing has enriched my retirement life and allowed me to make good friends. We know each other for a common purpose, but there are no interests involved. So I think it's easier for people to interact. Yes, communication is extremely easy. We are Dongying. It is a city of immigrants. The community is full of people from different backgrounds, and then, as you said, it might be different. It used to be the leading cadres and the ordinary employees, now everyone dances together, well, even everyone has different religious beliefs, maybe some people have faith and some people don't. But I don't think it will affect our daily dancing. Because they're not going to be promoting it while they're dancing. She will tell you some of the benefits of being religious. But not so much that it bothers you.

*Is there conflict within the team? Usually for what reasons?*

I don't feel like there's any big conflict. In fact, I'm glad that the place where we dance is less crowded now. If the site is relatively small, it may cause some unnecessary conflicts. Now every organization has its own place, and the field is pretty much fixed, and they've been there for a long time and basically everybody says, OK, this is your place, this is my place. I can't say there wasn't a bit of conflict, but everything worked out. Everyone is basically coming together with a common goal. At first, the team was small and the dance was simple. Later, the group gradually grew in size. So we set up the WeChat group. Everyone shares the dance they want to learn in small groups. Speak in the WeChat group, you can refer to and choose.

We have over 100 songs on our hard drive right now. The difficulty of the dance also increases gradually from simple to complex. We are harmonious together. Of course, everyone has their own personality. Everyone has their own interests. But they all live in harmony. But as time goes by, the biggest problem now is that there are more and more communities, which often organize some art activities and performances. Many performances are either organized or spontaneous. Now because everyone has a certain dance foundation, they are eager to show themselves on the stage. So some of them spend a lot of time training and practicing. I didn't go because I was too old to attend rehearsals for hours every day. So now we have a very large group, we could say two-thirds of them are now out performing. There are more and more of these shows, more and more... A lot of people stopped coming to the dance at night, and now the dance group has become smaller.

*Do you have other online/offline activities with community members? Can you share your story?*

Every family is different, and the older ones can't often participate in our collective outdoor activities. Some close friends still take a trip at least once or twice a year. Long distance travel and suburban travel, when the ginkgo leaves yellow we will wear beautiful there to take photos and then share. I went to Europe twice in the last two years. I like France and Switzerland very much. Last year it was supposed to go to the UK, but it was abandoned because of the outbreak. Our age is now regulated on national flights. People over 70 are not allowed to travel abroad. So I want to use these years to see more of the world. Dancing is also about getting involved while you're healthy.

*What benefits has square dancing brought to your life?*

My former retired colleague suggested that I join the community dance group ahead of time. She told me that when you retired, you basically immediately had nothing to do every day, plus you had menopausal symptoms at that age, and you were prone to

depression or illness. You can join groups ahead of time and come to exercise every day. The activity is better for your body and mind and can prevent this from happening. I think it works. After you retire, you won't be able to socialize with your colleagues in the office every day. You imagine being alone at home, no friends, no work to do, you'd be depressed and bored if you didn't have another social circle.

*How has square dancing become part of your everyday life?*

I think square dancing is inseparable from my daily life. Without square dancing, you would stay at home or go for a walk every day. Life would be boring...I just looking forward to dance every day

I want to enjoy my time with friends by doing square dancing. And then learn something from it. Whether it is life knowledge, or other aspects of knowledge, you can learn some knowledge. For example, people will share some recipes. Or ask a friend for advice on what to wear. We talk about everything. As you know, old people have a lot of chronic diseases. We will analyze which kind of medicine you should take and which doctor you should go to which hospital for treatment. Because everyone has their own specialty. Square dancing provides a platform for people to communicate and share information with each other. Let's introduce our resource sharing experiences to each other. That's all very well. You can't know that much on your own, and it becomes a platform for information sharing,

*How you learn square dance usually?*

Yeah, we used to go to classes every week before the epidemic. There is a place on the second floor of our community for people to sign up for square dancing lessons. Professional dance teachers come twice a week. But now there is no, because they have changed to online learning. I really like going to college for the elderly. I have also signed up for a guzheng course.

*How do you think this dance community has influenced your life?*

That certainly has an effect. People who are similar, people who have the same goals, do things together that we all enjoy. Have something in common with each other and make yourself in a good mood. For example, a lot of things happened during the day that caused you to be stressed out, or you were lonely and didn't feel understood. I come to the park to dance and chat with my friends. Listen to your favorite music and study the dance moves together. Honestly, it's almost impossible to go out and talk to your colleagues after you retire. You need new friends to enrich your life.

I get depressed if I have to play at home all the time. Listening to music is a pleasure. It's great to dance to music. I want to get into the community early. I have two years to retire, so I need to fit in quickly. You know when you retire, you get old, you can't be with your kids every day, it's kind of lonely, isn't it? Go out and spend time with friends. Chatting or traveling together, singing and dancing, I feel good. Of course, we also have problems, but there is no big problem, just because some dances, some people think it is easy, others find it difficult. Or the choice of music may be contradictory, but this is not a big problem. We would decide which songs to dance *the next day and post them on the WeChat group a day in advance.*

*Would you ask a friend or family member to take a video or photo for you?*

Yes, but very few. There may be some performances that family members videotape and post on social networking sites.

*What do you think is the main function of the WeChat group and how it helps the community?*

I think we should become a big family. Of course, we can't be familiar with everyone, but this channel allows us to meet each other, have an impression on each other, and it is more convenient for us to communicate at ordinary times.

Sometimes it's inconvenient if you don't have WeChat. So I think it's important now that all organizations are associated with the WeChat group. Because there's a

notification function in the group. And share some new dance videos. Let's take a look first. Study at home. Then we go to squares and parks to learn together, so that we can learn quickly. In fact, WeChat group is mainly a public platform for everyone to contact, in fact, it is a function of contact.

*What is your role in this dance community? What do you often talk about in online communities?*

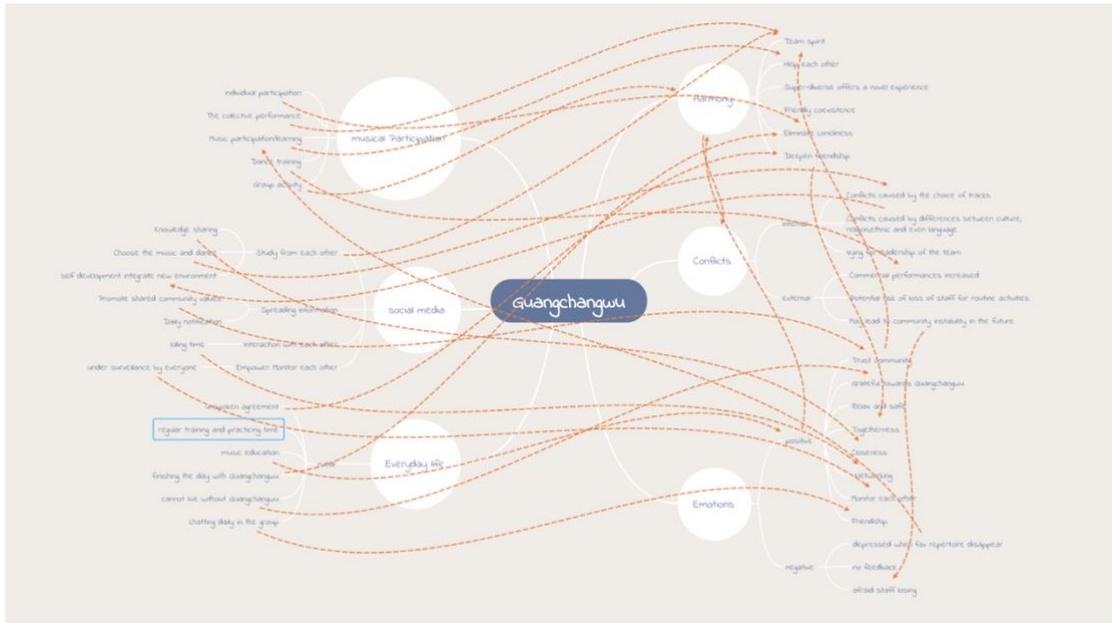
What we communicate most is to share new dances, good music. There are also some flowers, life tips, the weather of the day and so on. There are also regular announcements, such as the next day's dance music.

*What would be the impact on the square dance community if there was no WeChat group?*

Well, I think it will have an effect, because there are so many people in the WeChat group. Without such a platform for communication, there would be a loss of people, and they would only become friends with the people dancing next to them. The platform will give you a chance to talk to everyone.

*Appendix 6*

***Related categories and the subcategories***



Appendix 7

*Coding of all 10 interviews were organized into 6 themes, 23 categories and 50 subcategories. The codes in the following table do not represent all of those codes.*

Themes	Categories	Subcategories	Quote
Participation	Individual participation The collective performance Music participation/learning Dance training Group activity	Music creation Stage performance Square performance music education(elderly university/community teacher) Music empowerment(Expression of self willingness) Rules & rregulation Other team activities	

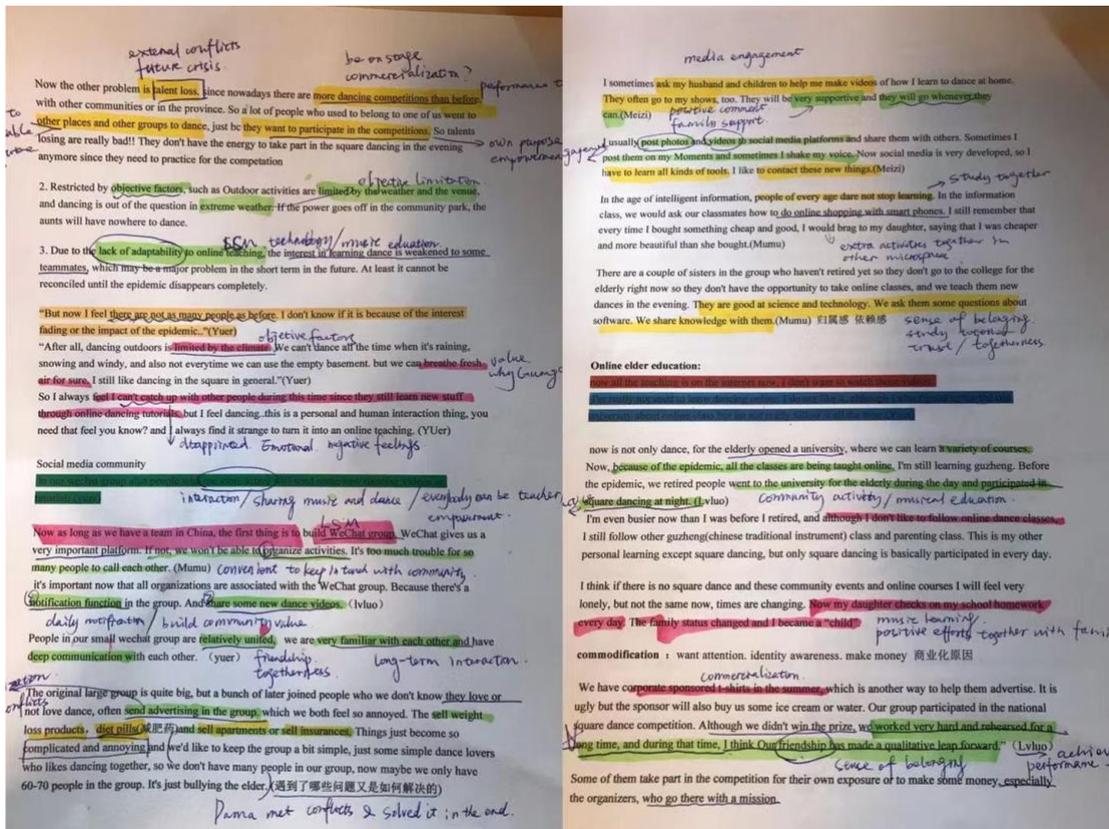
		Internal small group activities	
Harmony	<p>Team spirit</p> <p>Help each other</p> <p>Super-diverse offers a novel experience</p> <p>Friendly coexistence</p> <p>Eliminate Loneliness</p> <p>Deepen friendship</p>	<p>Mutual assistance has become a value</p> <p>Experience different cultures and cuisines</p> <p>Make them feel good</p> <p>make up for each other's shortcomings</p> <p>Learn from each other</p> <p>Benign mutual supervision</p>	
Conflicts	Internal conflicts	<p>Conflicts caused by the choice of tracks</p> <p>Conflicts caused by differences between culture, religion, ethnic and even language</p> <p>Vying for leadership of the team</p> <p>internal discrimination</p>	
	External conflicts	<p>Commercial performances increased</p> <p>Potential risk of loss of staff for routine activities</p> <p>May lead to community instability in the future</p>	

Emotions surrounding Guangchangwu	positive	Trust community Grateful towards Guangchangwu Relax and safe Togetherness Closeness Networking Monitor each other Friendship	
	negative	depressed when fav repertoire disappear disappointed when can't get positive feedback Anxious	
Everyday life	Ritual Habit	unspoken agreement regular training and practicing time music education finishing the day with Guangchangwu cannot live without Guangchangwu chatting daily in the group	
Social media engagement	Study from each other Spreading information Interaction with each other Empower: Monitor each other	Promote shared community values Daily notification killing time Knowledge sharing Choose the music and dance	

		<p>self development integrate new environment under surveillance by everyone</p>	
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Appendix 8

Manual Coding



Appendix 10

Digital Coding

interview transcription ☆ 最近一次编辑是在几秒钟前执行的

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100% 普通文本 Arial 11

What impact does square dancing have in your everyday life?

Wow, I would say, every night I eat quickly, and then go to dance, very discipline. Before, there were two different teachers to teach us in the park. At that time, it was very new to me. so I'm so excited and studied every day and the teachers taught me very well. Even when it was raining or super heavy snow and we could not dance outside but it can not stop me dancing. I really dancing everyday! Me and my dancing friends we shivered under the umbrella but everybody was happy. We had to move to an empty basement room to dancing when it's super bad weather. But now I feel there are not as many people as before. I don't know if it is because of the interest fading or the impact of the epidemic...

Can you tell me in details about why the teacher stopped teaching later? and how you maintain learning everyday?

We started with two teachers teaching two new dances a week. Unlike those who just walking around the park, there are very few repetitive movements in the whole dance in our dancing. If you miss one class, you will not be able to catch up. it's so easy to forgot about something that you just learned. so you need practice, everyday we learn something new every once in a while. But ofc in our wechat group also people who are more active will send some new dancing videos or tutorials. I personally like to learn with the teacher face to face, now all the teaching is on the internet now, I don't want to watch those videos. Now the weather is getting warmer and more people seem willing to go out. After all, dancing outdoors is limited by the climate. We can't dance all the time when it's raining, snowing and windy, and also not everytime we can use the empty basement. but we can breathe fresh air for sure. So i still like dancing in the square in general.

BUT you mentioned the elder university have good online courses right? its free and even more famous teacher on it.

I don't really follow the online courses. I prefer to learn in person. I'm really not used to learn dancing online. I do not like it, although I also signed up for the old university about online class, but im not really follow it all the time. Ha ha ha but dancing really can give me a good mood in a day! ah, watching other people's dancing posture, listen to the music, enjoy the music and dance with it... yes that's square dancing. This is totally different from other simple square exercises. I don't think that kind of aerobics belongs to square dancing. what is wrong with those people who think simple bodybuilding exercise is square dancing. It's stupid! but maybe now it's probably more developed than it used to be. We used to call it a zombie dance(僵尸舞). The music is boring and the movements are monotonous. It's really boring.

I know we didn't stop dancing during the pandemic since we have 0 cases, but in what

- miaoer chen 下午3:26 4月18日 social media group, interaction with each other
- miaoer chen 下午3:27 4月18日 online education
- miaoer chen 下午3:29 4月18日 limitation of Guangchangwu
- miaoer chen 下午3:29 4月18日 online education, feelings
- miaoer chen 下午3:30 4月18日 musical value participation, performance together
- miaoer chen 下午3:30 4月18日 discrimination towards other dancing group

Appendix 11

*Google Sheets, an online spreadsheet software, was used to sort these codes into themes, categories and subcategories.*



	A	B	C	D	E
2	Lvluo	every night very discipline	regular training and practicing time	Ritual	everyday life
3	Lvluo	two different teachers to teach us in the park	music education(elderly university/community teacher)	Music participation	participation
4	Lvluo	I really dancing everyday	regular training and practicing time	ritual	everyday life
5	Lvluo	Unlike those who just walking around the park	internal dicrimination	internal conflicts	conflicts
6	Lvluo	wechat group also people who are more active will send some new dancing videos or tutorials	Choose the music and dance cannot live without Guangchangwu	Interaction with each other Guangchangwu empowerment	social media engagement Participation
7	Lvluo	all the teaching is on the internet now	music education(elderly university/community teacher) LSM(Local App)		
8	Lvluo	dancing really can give me a good mood in a day	Value of music participation	music participation	participation
9	Lvluo	I always feel I can't catch up with other people during this time	anxious	negative	Emotion
10	Lvluo	Vendors sell weight loss products, diet pills and sell apartments or sell insurances in the group, so annoying	WeChat group previous internal problem	Spreading informations negative feelings	Social media Emotion
11	Lvluo	everyone has different ideas everybody want to use their own decisions	Conflicts caused by the choice of tracks	internal conflicts empowerment	Conflicts