

# Zhengzhou Street Life: City that dances the night away

[Poole, Teresa. The Independent](#); London (UK) [London (UK)]03 Nov 1998: 15.

## Abstract

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## Full Text

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Nearby, in the shadows of the People's Meeting Hall, about 80 people were lined up for a beginners' class in the tango, while more than 200 others glided gracefully across an empty concrete parking area. The romance was blighted only by the traffic on a flyover.

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Like all Chinese cities, Zhengzhou also has its new rich, catered for by expensive seafood restaurants and fancy karaoke clubs. But it is the night-time dancing which is within everyone's reach - at just 1 yuan (8 pence) entrance fee or around 6 yuan (50p) for a monthly ticket.

No one is quite sure why Zhengzhou is gripped by this craze, which residents say has grown in popularity since the late 1980s. But for many people it is now a daily fixture in their lives.

"She's the most skilful," said 42-year-old Gao Xiuying, a scientific researcher, pointing at a middle-aged woman in a red sweater. "If she does not come, the synchronised dancing is disorganised. She usually comes every night."

Chai Mengyue, whose given name translates as Dream of the Moon, did indeed have a level of co-ordination that most of the others lacked. The 51-year-old retired textile worker had thus been cast in the role of unpaid "dance teacher by obligation", said Mr Gao.

"I'm an amateur teacher," said Ms Chai. "I had to take early retirement at 48. Before that I did not have time for dancing."

Just three years ago, one quarter of Zhengzhou's workforce was in the loss-making textile industry, a sector which throughout China is currently slashing its workforce. In her new life, Ms Chai is mistress of the dance on the west side of the square, where those who favour the individual synchronised dancing followed her repeated routines - again, and again and again. "It's popular as a spare-time hobby and for exercise," she said.

On a busy night, the museum venue attracted 700 people, said the ticket-seller. She was employed by the museum's trade union branch. The museum work unit still owned the building and was putting it to use as profitably as it could.

So why was dancing so popular in Zhengzhou? "People want to make a more colourful life, especially older women," she said.

But it was the men of Zhengzhou who were the most anxious to improve their dancing skills, it turned out. At the official dancing school run by Qi Duozen, the "senior dance coach", the number of men noticeably outnumbered women, and women were being offered a 50 per cent discount to enroll.

"Since people's living conditions are improved, they would like to improve their spiritual lives," said Ms Qi, as another teacher, in heels and a sequined red skirt, brought tango to the masses.

## **It's 6 a.m. Shall we dance? Beijing's exercise culture embraces ballroom dancing in the park.**

[Robert Marquand Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor.](#) [The Christian Science Monitor](#); Boston, Mass. [Boston, Mass]04 Dec 2000: 1.

## **Abstract**

In the past few years though, a new fad has arisen among the early risers - ballroom dancing. Yes, it's Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, except there's no black tie or sequins. And here the ballroom is a park, and the dancers are positively proletarian. Bundle into heavy leather coats, don wool mittens, turn on the cassette player: Shall we dance?

Some of the dance crowd are younger Chinese who dance for an hour, then switch to aerobics, "fan dancing," or use various simple rowing or bicycling machines that have long been part of a rigorous morning culture of exercise here.

Actually, the ballroom dance craze is just part of an overall emphasis on health and exercise that is found in urban areas across Asia. For the first time, private gyms and health clubs have started in cities like Beijing and Shanghai, where the younger, moneyed set in the new China go after work. Singles especially will pay relatively exorbitant sums, as much as 1,000 yuan (\$120) a month, for marble floored clubs that offer yoga, pools, and the latest exercise equipment technology.

## **Full Text**

Despite early snows and an Arctic nip, mornings in the Middle Kingdom are a testament to the Chinese love of vigor.

The crack of dawn is when Beijing gets exercised about exercise - with every park and public space packed with spunky grandmothers pumping swing sets, grandsons dueling granddads in hot bouts of ping-pong, and tai chi groups practicing slow-motion aerobics.

Lose those sleepy winks! Just do it.

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A 31-degree F. frost does not, for example, deter the stately crowd at Ritan Park, otherwise known as the Temple of the Sun. "It is never too cold when you are dancing," says Mr. Huang, a retired technician who shows up every other morning.

From 7 to 10 a.m they come and go, learning the quick step, the rumba, the tango. Dozens of couples, most of whom have started in the past year, move to the oriental tones of "The Butterfly's Love," or a Latin tango - scarves intertwining.

"If you can walk, you can dance," says Chi Liu, a marketing researcher who says the morning activity starts her day on a positive note.

Ballroom dancing has long been known and secretly admired here, but was never widely organized or popular. Now the morning dance groups meet all over China. In Ritan, a small dedicated clique begun a few years ago has spun into four large groups, two of which now have accredited formal instructors.

Amateur sociologists at the Temple of the Sun say ballroom dancing is an activity that allows for more individual expression within a set of still understood rules, and is a group activity - all elements that make it a rough analogy to the changing Chinese society today.

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#### Bourgeois activity

But most are retirees old enough to remember when any "entertainment" or bourgeois activity like dancing was strictly forbidden. BBC commentator John Simpson recalls meeting parents during the regime of Chairman Mao Zedong (1949-1976) who waited until their children were asleep at night to pick up the floorboards of their house, where a tuxedo and a gown were hidden, to silently dance. Had the children woken up and reported this, they could have been severely punished, he remembers.

"Since the open policy started under Deng Xiaoping (in the late 1970s), people started to dance again. When Mao was in charge, if people danced, they did it indoors," says an instructor at Ritan whose red tie and white collar show smartly under an expensive cashmere pullover. "For the first time today, people in Beijing are really feeling they have a good life. For the first time, they have enough to eat and drink. Now they can have fun."

Many use the park experience as a stepping stone to formal ballroom dancing - something enjoying a black-tie comeback in China. In a group led by instructor Cho, the group practices one of six different steps every four days.

#### Cheek to cheek

Men and women dancing in the ballroom style used to remain about a fist-width apart, says Mrs. Wu. Body contact among the sexes in the past was not quite acceptable. "But we aren't so formal today, we just want to relax and enjoy ourselves." Indeed, there is an easy acceptance, a gusto and spontaneity among the dancers - who spin and bow and wander all over the park - that might be hard to find in North American or European urban areas.

At this park, many participants come alone and switch partners after every song. Women often dance with women - due to what seems a universal problem of a dearth of male participants.

Dancers sometimes swap phone numbers and addresses. They say they are thrilled to be making new friends outside their usual circles, and they talk of "networking" and swapping information about everything from jobs to computer technical support. But partly due to a sense of Chinese

decorum, the denizens of Ritan usually do not see each other outside the park. Dance partner friends tend to be a discreet circle that rarely extends to the family, or fellow employees.

Actually, the ballroom dance craze is just part of an overall emphasis on health and exercise that is found in urban areas across Asia. For the first time, private gyms and health clubs have started in cities like Beijing and Shanghai, where the younger, moneyed set in the new China go after work. Singles especially will pay relatively exorbitant sums, as much as 1,000 yuan (\$120) a month, for marble floored clubs that offer yoga, pools, and the latest exercise equipment technology.

The morning culture of diversity in exercise is being encouraged by the Chinese government. Last week, the first-ever official certificates were issued to 48 public instructors in Beijing. The new instructors range from 17 to over 60 years of age. They in turn go out into the parks to lead others in calisthenics, dance, Tai Chi, karate, taijiquan, and so on.

"We never had instructors before, people just volunteered," says Cathy Liu, an expert on Beijing parks and monuments. "It just shows the government is getting more serious about popularizing sports and exercise."

The now outlawed Falun Gong spiritual movement started as a morning-exercise discipline. But no one anticipates the ballroom dancers pose much of what is called an anti-social element here.

## **Dance Craze: In China, Retirees Raise a Ruckus By Getting Down --- As More Groups Boogie in Public Places, Neighbors Can't Take the Noise**

[Chin, Josh. The Wall Street Journal Asia; Hong Kong \[Hong Kong\]28 Mar 2014: 1.](#)

### **Abstract**

Auntie Su's dancers say they have been pelted with water, sand, coins and, once, feces. "One resident threatened me, saying, 'If you continue to dance, I'll throw a knife at you!'" says the 79-year-old. "I said, 'I'll keep dancing even if you shoot at me with a gun!'"

"Are we just supposed to sit around and wait for death?" says Ms. Su, who credits dancing with helping her recover from throat cancer surgery. Ms. Su, who other dancers call "Auntie," wanted to be identified only by her surname. "This is a national issue now," she says.

"Dancing in and of itself is nothing to criticize," the Communist Party-run Guangzhou Daily said in commentary in November. "But as soon as 'group dancing' becomes 'public nuisance dancing' that infringes on the right of others to relax, it's another matter."

## Full Text

WUHAN, China -- Months after "Auntie" Su and a dozen or two retirees began squeezing into a small outdoor square every night to dance to music supplied by a brick-sized portable music player, residents of the tony Hankou Center Gardens apartment complex began to complain about the noise. When that didn't deter the dancers, they started to hurl abuse.

Auntie Su's dancers say they have been pelted with water, sand, coins and, once, feces. "One resident threatened me, saying, 'If you continue to dance, I'll throw a knife at you!'" says the 79-year-old. "I said, 'I'll keep dancing even if you shoot at me with a gun!'"

In China, there is a new group stirring up controversy: middle-aged and retired city dwellers dancing together in parks and squares.

Residents in nearby buildings say the noise makes relaxing after work hard and, worse, disturbs their children's studies. Participants say the dancing keeps them active and healthy.

"Are we just supposed to sit around and wait for death?" says Ms. Su, who credits dancing with helping her recover from throat cancer surgery. Ms. Su, who other dancers call "Auntie," wanted to be identified only by her surname. "This is a national issue now," she says.

Efforts to regulate public dancing are under way in several cities to quell the outcry from apartment-dwellers, many of them first-time homeowners.

The southern city of Guangzhou has announced plans to designate "silent zones" in park areas abutting schools, hospitals and residential buildings, with fines as high as \$160 for violators. In prosperous Hangzhou, residential committees have begun a systematic noise-monitoring program, using decibel meters, in areas where dancers congregate.

In the central city of Liuyang, dancing groups in one community were compelled by the local residential committee to sign on to a "public dancing communique" that limits dancing to after 7 a.m. or before 8:30 p.m.

"Dancing in and of itself is nothing to criticize," the Communist Party-run Guangzhou Daily said in commentary in November. "But as soon as 'group dancing' becomes 'public nuisance dancing' that infringes on the right of others to relax, it's another matter."

Moves to control public dancing threaten a tradition that has wide appeal among members of the country's rapidly growing elderly population. According to a recent report by China Central Television, the state broadcaster, as many as 100 million people, mostly women in their 50s and 60s, now take part.

"It's not only good for physical health, but also spiritual and mental well-being," says Tang Keming, a self-educated public dancing choreographer who helped organize a 1,200-person group that danced during the torch relay for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. "It's not just about dance. . . We use dancing to promote ideas about caring for children and the elderly."

The dances take place in venues ranging from parks and public squares to parking lots. They take a variety of forms, from traditional folk dances involving silk fans and drumming to improvised routines set to patriotic songs, saccharine pop and sanitized rap.

Public dancing caught on in Chinese cities in the 1980s and '90s partly as a way to stay healthy after the state health-care system atrophied under market reforms, says Caroline Chen, an environmental planning expert at the University of California, Berkeley. She says the dancing also helps older Chinese recover a sense of Mao-era collectivism at a time when old neighborhoods have been razed and replaced with high-rise living.

The problem, according to Ms. Chen, is that public dancing, for all its benefits, conflicts with an increasing desire among many for a quieter, less chaotic urban lifestyle as public spaces are being squeezed by development. "The exuberance of this communal culture is being hushed and the modern idea of what a city should be is taking its place," she says.

In the town of Changping, dancers say they took to a basketball court after complaints from neighbors drove them out of an apartment complex. In August, a man enraged by the noise emerged from his house near the court with a shotgun that he fired into the air, and later set three Tibetan mastiffs on the crowd, according to dancers and state media reports.

"One group would leave and another would come," the man, surnamed Shi, told China Central Television in a jailhouse interview. "I have dogs, and they would bark incessantly. I couldn't sleep."

An official with the Changping District People's Court said the man was found guilty of illegal possession of firearms in November and sentenced to six months in jail. The court wouldn't provide the man's full name. Efforts to reach him through the court and a neighbor weren't successful.

The basketball court still bears instructions spray-painted on the concrete by the dancers -- "step together, turn left."

A desire for peaceful modern living is what led many residents of Hankou Center Gardens to pay extra for units on the inside of the complex, which overlook a tree-lined square.

"This was supposed to be the quietest apartment," says Peng Ji, 40 years old, whose third-floor unit overlooks the square. He says his parents, who suffer stomach and nerve problems, moved out because they couldn't stand the nightly dance parties. He also says his 7-year-old daughter has trouble studying and that he can't leave his windows open in the summer.

Dancers typically gather in the morning around 6 a.m. and in the evening after 7 p.m. for about an hour. Residents say they took their complaints to the apartment management office and asked that the dancers start earlier in the evening, to no avail. "We like to dance after dinner. It aids digestion," says Ms. Su.

The dancing dilemma isn't likely to go away. By 2020, according to state media, people 60 years or older will make up roughly 16% of China's population at 240 million or so.

## **Dancing Loud and Proud - China's senior ladies are causing a stir with their bouncing beats**

Yuan, Yuan. Beijing Review; Beijing (Nov 13, 2014).

### Abstract

[...]China's seniors seem to be eager to spread this small slice of culture. In Wenzhou, east China's Zhejiang Province, in order to fight against the noise of square dancing, a group of residents spontaneously raised 260,000 yuan (\$42,276) for a "loudspeaker cannon" to cover the dancing noise.

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Lin Qiaofen has been doing morning exercise in Beijing' Purple Bamboo Park for six years since her retirement in 2008. It was not until recently that she learned that this popular form of recreation for seniors is known as square dancing.

She heard the phrase for the first time from her grandson, who learnt it from a series of news reports about how senior Chinese women in Chinese communities overseas dance.

"I was confused when I first heard the name of the dance as we didn't dance in a square, it should be called park dance," said Lin.

There are about 30 women in Lin's dancing group. They gather at 7 a.m. in the park every morning and the organizer, who carries a portable sound system, charges 30 yuan (\$4.76) each month. The organizer also gives simple instructions to the new members.

When Lin joined the group six years ago, the music they danced with were mostly old songs from the 1980s or even earlier, though now they even dance to modern pop hits.

Square dancing can be traced back nearly 30 years to public discos in the 1980s. With the introduction of the reform and opening-up policy, dancing in public gained growing acceptance. By the late 1980s, this form of exercise had become a common scene across the parks of all China's big cities.



"The movements are simple and easy to learn," said Lin. "You don't need to spend much time memorizing the dance. Just go along with the music."

"Square dancing is a good way to get some exercise in the morning and it enriches senior people's lives," said Jin Xing, a famous dancer in China. "Groups of people dancing together happily in parks every morning is a sight unique to China. I think other countries could benefit from following our lead."

In fact, China's seniors seem to be eager to spread this small slice of culture. There have been reports of old Chinese women dancing in New York's Sunset Park, Moscow's Red Square, and in front of Paris' Louvre Museum in recent months and in the photographs, the dancers, who dress uniformly, are all dancing with a glowing smile on their faces.

### Conflict

Unfortunately, those who have reacted to the dancers have tended not to share their smiles, but rather wear a frown. People living nearby have complained about the noise, and in New York, the square dancers were even confronted by local police to get them to turn the volume down.

Similar conflicts occur in China all the time. When dancers are unable find a park or an open area far from their residence, they choose an open space in their housing community.

"It gives me a headache every time the music starts downstairs at night," said a resident surnamed Yang in Taizhou, east China's Jiangsu Province. "They start dancing around 7 p.m. every day and it lasts for more than an hour. I can't hear myself think."

Yang said she talked to the dancers but nothing changed and then she had to turn to the local police. "They stopped for a few days but resumed after that," said Yang. "What can we do?"

Things get worse in summer as Yang has to open the windows. "It sounds they dance right next to my ears," said Yang.

In November 2013, a man in Beijing's suburban Changping District released three Tibetan mastiffs into a crowd of dancing seniors whom he failed to stop after talking with them.

In Wuhan, capital city of central China's Hubei Province, a resident put layers of broken glass on the square to stop dancers gathering there. In Wenzhou, east China's Zhejiang Province, in order to fight against the noise of square dancing, a group of residents spontaneously raised 260,000 yuan (\$42,276) for a "loudspeaker cannon" to cover the dancing noise. This attracted attention from all sectors of society. After coordination, residents eventually agreed to remove the "remote directional sound amplifying system."

"I think the government should ban square dancing in communities and allocate some specific plots for people to dance," said a resident surnamed Shi from Shanghai. "It is so annoying, especially in summer."

Some dancers argue that there is nowhere else for them to go, however. Hu Shuqin, a square dancer from Shanghai, explained that "normally dancers in one group are all neighbors and we need to find a nearby place to gather up, but there are no parks or enough open areas for us to dance. We have no other choice."

In June, Xi'an of northwest China's Shaanxi Province released draft legislation banning square dances from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. in residents' communities. It says that individuals will be fined 1,000 yuan (\$158.73) if they violate the curfew.

Searching for a solution

Scientists from Fudan University have invented an instrument to reduce the noise generated by square dancing, which has been called an "active directional loudspeaker."

Ma Jianmin, a professor at the Department of Mechanics and Engineering Science in Fudan University explained, "This device enables us to control sound waves within a certain area. Within the area, the sound waves are strong, while out of the area, they will become weaker and eventually fade out. With this instrument, square dances will not disturb residents any more".

It will take time for the new hi-tech invention to be put into practice, though. Some dancers couldn't wait, however, and have found a solution in bluetooth earplugs.

"One night I was walking in the community and when I turned at a corner I almost screamed-rows of grannies dancing together, but without any sound," said a netizen from Chongqing Municipality in southwest China. "They were silent and smiling. I swore that I wouldn't walk in the community any more. It creeped me out!"

Another netizen from Beijing praised their innovative solution. "The dancers are smart, and it seems to be the best choice for everyone."

May 1, 2015 / 12:10 AM / Reuters

**Square dancing runs circles around other hobbies for China's elderly**

[Sabrina Mao](#)

BEIJING (Reuters) - Chinese-style square dancing is running circles around other hobbies for the elderly, with millions taking to parks and plazas across China, swiveling their hips and rolling their arms - but it's not to everyone's liking.

Every evening through the year, hundreds of grannies gather on a large square outside the Master Centre in west Beijing to dance with their instructor, who puts them through the motions of side steps and rotations to help them keep fit and, in the bitter winters, to keep warm.

"There are several benefits," said Yan Fuzhi, 71, who has been dancing on the square for five years. "First off, it helps me lose weight. Secondly, it's good for my health and it gets rid of bad habits..."

Seventy-nine-year-old Wang Baorong (C), dressed in military style clothes, and other participants perform square dancing at a park square in Beijing, China, April 9, 2015. REUTERS/Kim Kyung-Hoon

“I used to sit watching TV, which is bad for my heart and causes high blood pressure. But I’m really happy when I dance, listening to the music, chatting and laughing. All my problems go away.”

But it’s that music, pop from the present and decades ago blasted out of tinny speakers, that is the problem for many residents, who complain they can’t get to sleep at night because of the racket. But the grannies have nowhere else to go.

“There are definitely objections against square dancing. Some people don’t like dancing and see it as a disturbance,” said 78-year-old Zhang Lianmeng.

“I think our country should encourage it as long as they can make appropriate arrangements and make sure they do it in appropriate places.”

Instructor Fan Tiemin, 55, said his group was the biggest in Beijing, with around 500 dancers each evening - sometimes more than a thousand, depending on the weather. Xinhua news agency said more than 100 million were involved nationwide.

“They don’t have much to do, now their children are grown up,” he said. “...They are facing diseases like high blood pressure, high cholesterol and high blood sugar. So they need the exercise.”

Du Peng, a professor at Renmin University and Director of the Institute of Gerontology, said China had made great strides in looking after the elderly, with improved pensions and insurance schemes.

“But a third area is the spiritual and cultural life of the elderly,” he said. “Square dancing is a part of it. That is, when your basic living standard has been met, especially for those who are healthy, what people most need is fulfilment.”

### **Dancing in the park, forging Chinese friendships**

Shanghai Daily; Shanghai, China [Shanghai, China]03 Feb 2017.

When they retired from teaching in the western state of Idaho in the United States, Roundy and her husband decided to come to China to teach English. [...]she knew little about China and had no idea that middle-aged women liked to dance in public areas in early mornings or evenings. The former special education teacher was speaking as she guided me around the Tianping Community Center. Roundy and her husband have been active in community life, teaching English and helping elderly neighbors. Roundy and five teammates closed the ceremony with a well-choreographed, three-piece dance in bright pink dresses. [...]Chinese husbands and wives are very respectful of each other," Roundy says.

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At 7am on the campus of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, a dozen or so middle-aged women dance to the tunes of Chinese songs.

It's a familiar early morning sight in parks across Shanghai. What is not familiar is the sight of an expat tripping the light fantastic along with a group of Chinese dancers.

Her name is Debrah Roundy, and she is a retired American school teacher now giving English lessons in Shanghai. She is the only foreigner in the Tianping Community dance group.

During breaks, Roundy communicates with her Chinese dancing friends by using body language or the translation app on her iPad. Most of the time, language is no barrier. The group has its own internal intimacy after practicing together four times a week for four years.

"Debrah has been with us for so long that we know what she is talking about even without the translation app, and it is probably the same with her," explains team leader Chen.

Roundy has learned Chinese dancing from her teammates, and she sometimes shows them American dance steps. It's obvious from the expression on her face that she's having the thrill of a lifetime.

"I don't speak Chinese and there is still so much about this country that I find confusing," Roundy says. "But I have many friends here and I feel very comfortable living in Shanghai."

When they retired from teaching in the western state of Idaho in the United States, Roundy and her husband decided to come to China to teach English. At the time, she knew little about China and had no idea that middle-aged women liked to dance in public areas in early mornings or evenings.

The couple had planned to stay a year, but that has now stretched into five and counting.

"Many people came to China and wanted to change things here," Roundy says. "I just came to learn more about China and its culture, and to explore why the country has been so successful for 6,000 years."

The former special education teacher was speaking as she guided me around the Tianping Community Center. As we moved about, staff and neighbors greeted her warmly, like old friends.

Roundy and her husband have been active in community life, teaching English and helping elderly neighbors.

When the couple first came to China in 2012, Roundy taught English at Jiao Tong University and lived on campus. Every morning, she walked around the campus, and it wasn't long before she discovered the groups of middle-aged and elderly people dancing there.

"They seemed to be having so much fun, and I wanted to have fun as well," she says. "I love dancing."

At first, she was hesitant. She spoke no Chinese and she could see no other foreigners in the dancing groups. She wondered whether she would be welcomed.

Her fears were unfounded. After initial contact was made, the group welcomed her warmly. She joined different groups that met at different times for dancing, exercises and tai chi.

Roundy has since moved to teach at Tongji University, but she still boards the Metro at dawn to travel to Jiao Tong to join her teams four times a week.

"Every now and then, some foreigners join in dancing, but nobody has ever stayed as long as Debrah," team leader Chen says.

At performances and competitions, Roundy always attracts attention. She dresses like the Chinese and shows great agility with Chinese dance steps.

Their most recent performance was at the awards ceremony of the Shanghai Get-Together 2016 - Writing and Photography Contest, organized by Shanghai Library. Roundy and five teammates closed the ceremony with a well-choreographed, three-piece dance in bright pink dresses.

She also took home the first prize for writing in an international category. Her winning essay was about dancing with Chinese women. She titled her work "The Builders of a Nation."

"I love dancing with them, and we also go out on food and field trips together," Roundy says. "We have a lot of fun together. When we aren't together, members look out for one another via WeChat."

She says dancing older women stay healthier and don't become medical burdens to their families or the public purse.

"So much of the country is like this," she says. "People contribute to society in some small way."

It took Roundy some time to master the techniques of Chinese dancing.

"It was different," she recalls. "I used to do ballet, and in the States, we always dance facing the audience. Here, they change directions all the time, and it was very confusing for me at the start. The first year was really a struggle."

She eventually came to appreciate why Chinese dancers rotate their positions. It's because Chinese dance is often performed in a stage area surrounded by audience.

Living in China has opened a host of similar revelations. For example, many of Roundy's foreign friends have commented that older Chinese couples don't seem very close or even acknowledge the presence of the other on the street.

"In fact, Chinese husbands and wives are very respectful of each other," Roundy says. "They are not demonstrative about it on main streets, but if you walk along back streets where expatriates don't usually go to, the couples are very sweet, often holding hands."

She says the secret to living in a foreign culture is to keep an open mind and a warm heart - looking for the positive instead of fretting over differences.

"If you are happy with yourself, you can be happy anywhere," she reasons.