

# The Intervention of Anxiety Symptoms by Using Improvisational Chinese Classical Dance

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## Abstract

Under the severe situation of COVID-19, millions of people start to appear stratified overdriven symptoms, including physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions. In 2022, China implemented a social distracting policy that increased several people who stay at home to suffer from anxious and depressed emotional, as well as insomnia. To some degree, it is an imperious demand for people to seek an automatic adjustment method to regulate emotion. This paper is conducted to explore the impromptu intervention of Chinese classical dance on the emotional distress caused by social isolation, such as loneliness, anxiety, and insomnia, using the aspect of Laban Movement Analysis to increase the efficiency of emotional elasticity. The researcher in this paper analyzes the characteristics of Chinese classical dance through the aspects of Laban Movement Analysis, and conducts a 5-person experiment group, coaching them to dance improvised Chinese Classical Dance and comparing their interview about their emotions before and after the research. Impromptu Chinese Classical Dance cannot only intervene and regulate emotions through its specific movement characteristics, but it can also enhance people's emotional resilience through a rich library of movements.

## Keywords

Improvisational Chinese Classical Dance, Laban Movement Analysis, Anxiety Symptoms, Social Isolation

## 1. Background

In 2022, the situation of COVID 19 in China has gradually come under control, but still some cities got infected at different times. In Guangzhou, the government supports China's policies to use isolation to separate virus carriers, asymptomatic carriers, and super-spreaders away from normal healthy people. How-

ever, keeping long-time isolation to prevent the diffusing of the virus may also cause people to suffer psychological problems. Because of the long-term isolation, people's behaviors are severely restricted, and their ranges of activities are decreased, easier appearing different kinds of the psychological problem (Hou et al., 2020) including unstable mood states. According to some recent research, the influence of social isolation includes increasing anxiety, depression, stress, and other negative feelings (Holmes et al., 2020). According to personal experience, the author feels dancing improvisational Chinese classical dance can adjust emotions and increase emotional stability when feeling anxiety, loneliness, and other emotional pressure under the situation of being isolated for 21 days in Guangzhou. In consideration of limited space and the sports habits that Chinese people have, dance improvisational Chinese classic dance at home is an appropriate method for people to release their negative feelings and maintain a pleasant mood.

## 2. Physical and Psychological Problems under the Social Isolation

In 2021, January, Huang Cui Yi and other doctors at Southern Medical University organize a survey about SCL-90, and it refers that the quarantine personnel body factors and anxious factors of isolated people are much higher than normal norms in the country, regardless of centralized isolation (hospital and hotel) or home isolation. Even though home isolation has fewer negative effects compared with centralized isolation, it is not possible to ignore the increase in anxious feelings (Huang et al., 2021). In 2021, psychologists Santini and Koyanagi designed a cross-sectional study, including 50,609 participants around Europe, using a survey to research the participants' self-reported symptoms. Based on their research, there are 30.4% of people are reported to prominent associated with loneliness, which exacerbated anxiety symptoms and sleep problems.

Using psychosomatic mechanisms can illustrate the physical issue, such as anxious feelings and insomnia, which are caused by social isolation. The immediate changes in lifestyle and abrupt changes in sensory stimulus density will cause the body's stress response. Endocrinologists Seley and Canon state the opinions that stress response will activate the sympathetic nervous system, change the body's neurotransmitter, hormones, and a series of stable changes in the body (James W. Kalat, 2009). During the COVID-19 pandemic, segregated individuals' sensory stimulations significantly decrease than what is available in normal life. It is common for them to only perceive mundane and monotonous scenes, such as hospital walls and home wallpaper, and lack the rich auditory and tactile stimulus of social normal social interaction. As the result of changes in daily routine and stimulus, it will cause an imbalance in the mechanism of processing information, which causes symptoms such as pains, restlessness, and difficulty concentrating. At the same time, the abnormal nervous mechanism will release deviant levels of dopamine, Cortisol, and norepinephrine, which simultaneously trigger anxiety symptoms and depression (Leach, 2016).

### **3. An Embodied Cognition Theory that Uses Improvisational Expressions to Regulate Emotional Behaviors**

Under severe situations of social isolation, it is imperative to find a suitable method to improve the negative emotions. By associating with the knowledge of movement to regulate emotion, physical and exercise interventions can be regarded as a significant way to regulate insomnia and alleviate anxiety. Psychological anxiety and loneliness caused by social isolation can not only affect physical sensations but also can change the senses of the body and psychological feelings and emotions.

Neuroscientists at the University of Los Angeles Naomi Eisenberger and Matt Lieberman began experimenting an experiment that associated with physical pain and social pain and conducted that our physiological pain system and social pain system are the same (Beilock, 2016), demonstrating the interaction between negative feelings occur in isolation, physical sensations, and mental feelings.

Neurophysiologists Antonio Damasio considers that emotions are generated by communicating the body's current state to the brain through internal sensations, including temperature, heartbeat, and proprioception (input from muscles and joints) (Rachelle P. Tsachor & Shafir Tal, 2017). Different body postures and movements can activate and alter distinct emotional states (Rachelle P. Tsachor & Shafir Tal, 2017). For example, sitting in a drastic sitting posture and walking with your head held high can increase positive emotions, and the expression of depression, the reclined and paralyzed sitting posture, and the slow walk with a low chest and hunchback will trigger negative emotions. (Huang Wei, Wang Lan, & Yang Wendeng, 2020)

A study by De Meijer (1989) showed that people thought that raised arms and extended torsos were happy, while bowed torsos were considered an expression of anger, and closed arms to the body are a sign of sadness. Coulson reports similar findings that the associations with pleasure and anger are the head bending backward and the arms stretching outwards, while sadness is characterized by the head bent forward and the arms placed on one side of the torso. In addition, the orthostatic position is connected to lower levels of shame, sadness, or boredom (Wallbott, 1998). Resemble movements are learned by musicians during a performance. Regarding the expression of the performer's emotional intentions, it has been argued that slow and fluid movements are associated with sadness, throbbing movements have a relationship with anger, and large, fast movements correspond with pleasure. Examples from these studies show that emotions can indeed be successfully expressed through the posture and movement of the body and are recognized from the movements of the body (Edith Van Dyck, Birgitta Burger, & Konstantina Orlandatou, 2017).

### **4. The Analysis of Emotional Intervention under the Aspect of Laban Movement Analysis**

Laban Movement Analysis came up with the German dancer Rudolf Laban in

1928. It is a system to observe and describe the form of physical activity, and it can explain the movement of the human movement that includes BODY, SPACE, EFFORT, and SHAPE.

According to the research of Shafir and other people in 2016, most of the compositions of emotions are EFFORT and SHAPE. Promoting effort and shape changes can theoretically affect mood, making it easier for people to develop emotional resilience and develop the ability to make motor decisions to better regulate emotions (Tsachor & Shafir, 2017).

The EFFORT of movements consists of four parts: Space, Time, Weight, and Flow, and each element have two ways to express. There are two segments in Space: Direct and Indirect. Direct means a direct focus of attention, while Indirect has multi-foci, which are flexible and agile. Direct is focusing on one thing; Indirect is weaving through multiple events. Also, time is compromised with two characteristics—Quick and Sustained that have a close relationship with people's decisions. Quick represents sudden and fast, which signifies resistance or "fight against time". Sustain includes slowing down, ceaseless, "yielding" or "indulging" in time. Weight has two elements that are Light and Strong. The unwavering resistance of a "strong" element to weight is called "resistance" to gravity whereas "Light" means weak or relaxed. Sharing the same situation, Flow has two elements: Free and Bound. Free is a state of unfettered liberation; Bound shows a state of restriction and limit.

Diverse movements in EFFORT have different meanings. If a person's movement has more Effort or other direct characteristics, it means he or she is more focused on a current event. On the other hand, if his or her action is more Indirect, it will promote distraction and transfer of attention between different events. In the aspects of Time, "quick" is usually associated with nervous and anxious feelings, while enjoyment and slowness are associated with persistent movement. In a psychological state, strong movement can be regarded to consist of his or her opinion, paying more attention to things. In contrast, light is more conform to relaxation and softness. In the psychological state of "Free" means unconstrained behavior, boldness, or fearlessness, which is hard to stop without being hindered. "Bond" is a state that is controlled or restrained, such as the uniform movement of marching posture.

Another aspect of LMA—SHAPE, can be defined as the relationship between actions and their adjacent environment. The SHAPE usually describes the body whether encloses, spreads, rises, sinks, advances, or retreats (Shafir, 2016), and it also shows diverse styles of the inner state of people. For example, retreating, condensing, enclosing, binding, or moving back can elicit fear; strong, sudden, advancing, or direct movements can elicit anger, whereas passive weight, bringing the arms to the upper body, such as the chest, shoulders, or face, sinking, or dropping the head can elicit sadness; happiness can be shown through jumping, rising, spreading, and free, light, upward, or rhythmic movements (Shafir, 2016). Chinese classical dance contains a great num-

ber of breaths, including both expansion and contraction which can increase the spread of SHAPE. Also, the movement in Chinese classical dance is mainly slow, containing fewer rapid movements which can stimulate the autonomic nervous system and achieve a relaxed state. What's more, Chinese classical dance emphasizes jumping and rising actions, increasing the frequencies to obtain happiness and positive feeling.

### **5. The Effectiveness of the Action Characteristics of Classical Chinese Dance on Emotional Intervention from the Aspect of Laban Movement Analysis**

Chinese classical dance is an art that is particular about paying attention to breathing and body rhyme, and its movements include plentiful changes in SHAPE and EFFORT. Chinese classical dance is widely appreciated and popularized in China, and both males and females of any age are familiar with it. Most people, especially females, can improvise with simple Chinese classical dance movements easily.

The movement characteristics of Chinese classical dance can be summarized by a few words “twisting, tilting, rounding, curving, tilting, turning and rolling” (Liu Xing, 2013, Research on the Basic Skills Training System of Chinese Classical Dance). It pays attention to the dynamic characteristics of circles, curves, and twists and to the way of exerting force. Start of actions that initially show opposite actions before the real actions also show in Chinese classical dance, such as if people want to behave a left side movement, he or they will move to the right at first to finish a start action. The flashing, turning, soaring, and moving in the techniques of Chinese classical dance, the endless changes in dance poses, the richness of temperament, image, and artistic conception, and the rhythm performance of rhythm, breath, and strength, all contain profound national cultural values and the background of the times, which conveys the “vivid” of national culture with the “shape” of its actions. The most direct visual reflection of people is shape resemblance, but the aesthetic impression left to the brain is spiritual resemblance (Yang Jun, 2011, Development Trend and Aesthetic Characteristics of Chinese Classical Dance)

Judging from the four elements of LMA's EFFORT, there are “movements and stills” in Chinese classical dance. The changes in TIME are rich, and contain both fast and slow movement, “body turning, flipping and leaping” can be summarized as the characteristics of indirect movement in SPACE with the features of shifting between different focus points in the space. The characteristics of “flowing clouds and flowing water” are more in line with the free characteristics in FLOW, and “movements change from soft and elegant to majestic” can be seen in the flexible changes between LIGHT and STRONG in Chinese classical dance in the Weight element.

Under the analysis of LMA's SHAPE, the start actions in Chinese classical dance are filled with the richness of its SHAPE changes, which not only own on

the level The left and right changes but also have the up and down changes in vertical and the before and after sagittal changes. What's more, the actions usually have the style of replying to each other which means all the movements in Chinese classical dance correspond together, which "rely on each other, open and close" are in line with the emotional expression of the contraction and expansion of the three dimensions of SHAPE.

It can be seen from the above analysis that the movement characteristics of Chinese classical dance are rich, and both elements of SHAPE and EFFORT are get involved. When people perform improvisational dances in the style of Chinese classical dance, it is easy for them to experience diverse and substantial emotions with the help of the richness of embodied movements, because different body expressions can stimulate and evoke different feelings In this way, it equates to increased emotional resilience and flows, rather than being stuck in feelings of loneliness and anxiety all the time.

Take the author herself as a practical example to further illustrate the function of improvisational Chinese classical dance. After a serious examination, the author decides to shuffle music to improvise dancing. Under the circumstance of playing traditional classical music, the body gradually becomes relaxed, starting to move slowly. The author noticed that through the movements of diverse actions, previously anxious, nervous, and depressed moods disappear through the dancing. The inner state of anxiety can be released through expansion of the legs and arms; nervous and impatient thoughts will not disturb the ease in the brain through stretching the upper extremities and chest cavity; jumping and rising actions are also included in the dancing, which can attain the happiness and sense of freedom. Though the space at home is limited, the basic dancing movements can still be achieved. Noticing the prominent influences after improvising at home, the author generalized this method to several friends, and all of them consider the influences prominent (**Table 1**).

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the large body of evidence cited earlier, improvisational dances in the Chinese classical dance style can be proved effective for loneliness and anxiety caused by home isolation during COVID-19 in China. It can be summarized in two effective ways: one way is to use the changes of EFFORT and SHAPE, which are rich in Chinese classical dance movement characteristics, to promote the richness and fluidity of emotions in a way of expanding the movement library and enhancing feelings, rather than staying for a long time in anxiety and loneliness. The second way is to inspire dancers to pay more attention to different life focuses, avoid focusing on the epidemic and the anxiety and panic it brings, and express freely and release feelings.

To sum up, it is worth promoting and advocating the way improvised dance is performed in the style of Chinese classical dance to intervene in the loneliness and anxiety caused by social isolation.

**Table 1.** The reports of using improvisational Chinese classical dance.

Attendance	The feelings before	Actions they use	The feelings after
A	Stress/impatient	Rising head sinking shoulder shocking hands Swing feet waist swinging	Relax comfortable confident
B	Gloomy/lonely	Closing& embracing hands raising head jumping circling the body	Proud pleased glad
C	Boring/worried	Turning head Pulling hand jumping expanding arms stretching leg	Relaxed delighted confident
D	Inquietude/bashful	Kicking jumping Shaking hands raising head swing	Confident joyful delighted

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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