

# *The Current Situation and Therapeutic Principles of Dance/Movement Therapy in China*

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**Abstract:** Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT), born at the intersection of the development of dance art and psychology, has become relatively mature in Western countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany. While in China, the profession is still in a period of vigorous development after a long period of understanding and introduction to the theoretical and practical aspects of Western DMT. This paper mainly analyzes the current development status of DMT in China, as well as the principles that need to be followed during its development. The goal is to establish the discipline of DMT in China and improve its construction so that it can bring benefits to more patients.

## **1. Establishing the Discipline of Dance/Movement Therapy**

Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT) emerged at the intersection of the development of dance art and psychology. Marian Chace (1896-1970) and Mary Whitehouse (1911-1979) were the pioneers of DMT, each initiating the practice in the 1930s and 1950s, respectively. Chace, the first president of the American Dance Therapy Association, was also known as the “Mother of Dance/Movement Therapy”, playing a foundational role in establishing DMT as a profession in the United States. The formation of the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) in 1966 marked the recognition of the professional status of DMT [1]. During the development of DMT, Rudolf LABan introduced scientific dance concepts and techniques into DMT. His theories, including Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) [2], as well as Judith Kestenberg’s Kestenberg Movement Profile (KMP) [3], greatly enriched and guided the development of DMT, making it an increasingly recognized independent discipline.

## **2. The Concept of Dance/Movement Therapy**

The English definition of Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT) is as follows: In 1972, The American Dance Therapy Association defined DMT as “the psychotherapeutic use of movement and dance to promote emotional, cognitive, physical, and social integration of individuals.” The definition emphasizes the use of movement, creativity, and the interplay between various conditions, environments, and movements as an integrated process in DMT [4].

Movement is the fundamental element of DMT

DMT utilizes movement to establish relationships, analyze movements, and intervene in a series of activities. In the process of DMT, movement goes beyond the limitations and defenses of

language, helping the client express their inner feelings in a more profound, truthful, and authentic way. Through movement, they can have a deeper understanding of their innermost feelings. Although movement is vital in DMT, it does not mean that we can neglect the function of language. In fact, language plays a significant complementary role in the process of DMT. It can help clients clarify their goals and accurately describe their psychological responses after making movements. Furthermore, language enables clients to have timely conversations with therapists about the various real situations that arise during the process of movement, record clients' true physical and mental responses, and provide feedback on the process and results of movements.

Creativity is a prominent characteristic of DMT.

Because the actual situations of each client are different, we cannot use standardized treatment and intervention methods in the process of DMT. Instead, suitable DMT methods and techniques must be employed, tailored to the exigencies of each client's particular circumstances. In this way, DMT can be conjoined with other art forms, such as music, fine art, drama, poetry, recitation, and an array of material objects that can be interacted with. Consequently, the therapeutic process is imbued with an abundance of possibilities, everything remaining indeterminate, an imminent abeyance. It is only in this way that the process of DMT becomes infused with the unexpected - by fostering receptiveness to an array of unknowns, namely, the potential revelation of new body movements and forms, or alternatively, the unlocking of new possibilities through the use of innovative props or other objects of exploration. These occurrences grant the process a further layer of creativity and unpredictability, as clients and practitioners alike open themselves to the full development of unknown potentialities.

Integrative relationship.

DMT entails not only the relationship between individuals, but can also extend to the relationship between individuals and objects. Indeed, as individuals are inextricably bound to their social environment, complex relationships between people and objects are inevitable. In this context, DMT must necessarily address and reconcile both domains, and cannot disentangle one from the other.

### 3. Status of Development of Dance/Movement Therapy in China

Germination stage (1994-2005)

The first person in DMT in China, Fuxi Yulan, fused the principles and techniques of DMT with Chinese culture, and introduced the concept of DMT to China for the first time. In May and June of 1994, Fuxi Yulan delivered a series of lectures entitled *Psychological and Movement Analysis, and Dance Psychotherapy* at institutions of higher education such as Beijing Dance Academy and Beijing Normal University. It was during this time that the concept of "Dance/Movement Therapy" was first proposed in China [5].

Seedling stage (2005-2010)

In 2005, Zvika was invited to China to conduct workshops on DMT. During his visit, he traveled to more than 40 cities in China, spreading knowledge and theories related to DMT and attracting the attention of more Chinese scholars to this field of study.

Growth stage (2010-2020)

On September 27, 2010, the Dance Department of Taiwan Sport University invited a delegation from the China Dancers Association to participate in a six-day exchange event entitled "New Perspectives on Dance Education - Dance Therapy, the Current Situation and Prospects of Cross-Strait Dance Education". This was the first official group organized from China [5], and it opened the door for DMT development in both sides of the Taiwan Strait. The DMT profession has since flourished in this region.

### Problems in the development of DMT in China

As the field of DMT continues to grow in China and attract more attention from scholars, several challenges persist in its development:

1) Establishing standardized academic programs for Dance/Movement Therapy remains insufficient. At present, few universities in China have instituted programs in this field, and only Beijing Normal University offers a master's degree in DMT.

2) The number of professionals in the field of DMT is relatively low, resulting in an uneven male-to-female ratio and a dearth of male practitioners.

3) Despite its potential significance in the field of mental health, DMT currently occupies a subordinate position in hospital psychology and psychiatry departments.

4) The absence of a unified set of professional standards among practitioners of DMT has resulted in considerable variation in their levels of expertise.

5) Critical areas for improvement include the theoretical understanding and practical skills of DMT practitioners, as well as advancements in research, certification standards, professional training, and practical implementation.

## 4. Basic Principles to Follow in DMT

In order to foster growth and innovation in the field of DMT in China, practitioners must adhere to the following fundamental principles during treatment:

The interplay between body and mind is constant, and changes in movement can affect other bodily functions [6].

Alterations in movement during DMT may exert a holistic influence, prompting significant changes in an individual's overall performance. DMT practitioners must remain invested in encouraging patients to explore their movement experiences and insights by combining language and movement knowledge.

Movement reactions may reveal deep-seated emotional or psychological patterns.

DMT practitioners leverage a repertoire of psychological theories and techniques to support the notion that movement reactions may offer a window into deeper emotional and psychological patterns. As such, practitioners must remain acutely attuned to patients' body language, including postures, gestures, eye movements, and other non-verbal cues that may reveal their genuine emotional responses. By detecting even the slightest changes in movement, posture or expression, and harnessing their professional knowledge and expertise, DMT practitioners can provide precise guidance and assistance to their patients.

### Therapeutic relation

DMT involves a form of nonverbal behavior regulation, which fosters effective interaction through the use of movement. The relationship formed between the therapist and the participant in DMT can facilitate change, which is in stark contrast to traditional forms of psychotherapy that rely heavily on verbal communication. Participants engage in repeated movements and respond to their therapist's movements, with no modifications from the therapist [7]. This implies that the relationship between participants and therapists is based on trust, requiring psychological acceptance and support from the therapist. This also indicates that DMT may not necessarily be effective for individuals with severe conditions. As a means of approaching unconscious emotions, DMT endeavors to use the body and, thus, is more effective for participants who exhibit strong defenses against verbal communication [8].

### Movement has symbolic functions.

The movement of the body encompasses unconscious behaviors such as drawing, dreaming, free association, and unrestrained imagination. Unconsciousness can be defined as soulful content that is nonexistent in the realm of conscious awareness, which includes suppressed or unexpressed thoughts, feelings, images, and other sensory impressions. The contents of the unconscious can be

viewed as the original, instinctive, or childlike concepts of the personality. These symbols are a necessary means of accessing the unconscious content of participants, making them consciously aware of their unconscious emotions. Thus, the process from movement to symbolism is a sign of therapeutic change that expresses the hidden processes of the unconscious mind [9].

Gaining creative therapeutic value through improvisational activities

The therapeutic value of creativity has accumulated from creative psychological theories, wherein the role of art is to meet unconscious needs that are not socially acceptable or cannot be fulfilled. Similar to dreams, art expresses these needs symbolically [10]. For instance, in DMT, the therapist may use storm imagery in dancing or walking in a storm to represent emotions such as anger and destructiveness. To symbolize lightning and storms, the therapist may use movements that exhibit strong or aggressive characteristics. The intense movements evoked by these stimuli help participants identify the source and emotions of their anger, providing them with a more effective way of dealing with these emotions [11]. These hypotheses about creativity as an unconscious source are essential to DMT. Moreover, creativity, viewed in this way, can foster the development of new relationships, meanings, and unforeseen associations that arise in a particular time or situation (Kastner 1988, Kubie 1958) [12].

DMT believes that movement and emotions are intertwined and mutually influential. Movement and dance enable people to objectify and visualize their inner world, which can be touched and observed. Every individual's movement is the most authentic monologue of their inner world.

## 5. Conclusions

DMT is currently experiencing a thriving period of development in China. With an increase in the standard of living, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic, individuals have become increasingly concerned about their physical and psychological well-being. Therefore, DMT is predicted to be in high demand in the future, and we must take action now. We must advance curricula development, establish professional standards, cultivate expertise, conduct disciplinary research, and publish academic journals to meet these burgeoning needs.

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