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The Value of the "Unity of Man and Nature" (Tianrenheyi) Thought in College Dancesport Teaching: A Case Study of Weight Transfer and Movement Continuity in Latin Dance

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Abstract: The Chinese philosophical concept of "Unity of Man and Nature" (Tianrenheyi) foregrounds body-mind integration and the consonance between human beings and the natural world, a sensibility long embodied in traditional body cultures such as Taiji. Within the current shift toward core-competency-oriented physical education, college Latin dance instruction still leaves many students struggling with unstable weight transfer and fragmented movement. Reading weight transfer as the hinge of dance quality, the analysis recasts "internal-external cultivation" as the union of technique and musical expression, "harmony" as the relaxation of confrontation in partner lead and follow, and "people-orientation" as differentiated, student-centered guidance. A "mind-body integration" account traces weight transfer through continuous core engagement, weight shift, and limb extension, while a harmony-oriented pedagogy—one that treats harmonious teacher-student and partner interaction as the precondition for technical gain—translates these ideas into a teachable unit design. Grounded in an indigenous cultural frame rather than the prevalent Western, technique-centered model, this line of inquiry shows how dance sport teaching can knit cultural inheritance together with measurable gains in movement continuity.

Keywords: Unity of Man and Nature; Dancesport; Latin dance; Weight transfer; Movement continuity; Teaching value

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1. Introduction

College Dancesport (including Latin dance), as a public physical education and specialized elective course, has seen a continuous rise in its popularity among university students owing to its dual value of fitness and artistic expression. Dancesport centers on partner cooperation, musical rhythm, and bodily movement, placing high demands on students' physical coordination, sense of rhythm, and expressive ability. However,

a pervasive and persistent pain point exists in teaching practice: when performing basic Latin steps and combinations, students frequently show unstable weight, fragmented movements, disconnection between upper and lower limbs, and "form without spirit" (xing wu shen, i.e., technically executed movement lacking musical and emotional expression). The core technical crux lies in the failure to master "weight transfer," which leads to insufficient movement continuity. This pain point is closely related to students' varied physical foundations, teaching that overweights technical specifications while neglecting music and expression, and tense classroom interactions.

In a typical Latin elective class of thirty to forty first- and second-year students, the difficulty presents itself in a recognizable sequence. Students who have learned the footwork of a rumba basic step still arrive at the end of each bar with their weight suspended between two feet; the step is counted correctly, yet the body arrives late, and the next movement must be restarted rather than continued. Teachers commonly respond by correcting the position of the feet, because the foot is the visible error, while the invisible error — the failure to let the supporting leg accept the body weight — remains untouched. Over a semester, this produces a characteristic profile: accurate positions, disconnected phrases, and a visible loss of confidence as soon as the music accelerates. Naming this profile is the first step toward changing it, and it is the profile that the remainder of this paper addresses.

Meanwhile, the current reform of college physical education takes "core competencies" (motor ability, healthy behavior, sportsmanship), "curriculum-based ideological and political education", and "the integration of sport and education" as its main threads, advocating "health first" and "student development as the center" [1–10].

Existing scholarship on Dancesport pedagogy has predominantly centered on technical decomposition, choreography, and competitive training, whereas the cultural-philosophical dimension of instruction remains comparatively under-explored. Few studies have examined whether an indigenous Chinese philosophical framework—rather than imported motor-learning models alone—can address the concrete difficulty of weight transfer. By bridging traditional Chinese body philosophy with a specific, measurable teaching problem in Latin dance, this study seeks to fill that gap and to demonstrate the operational value of "Unity of Man and Nature" for contemporary Dancesport pedagogy.

Specifically, this paper asks three questions. First, whether "Unity of Man and Nature" can supply concepts precise enough to describe what goes wrong when weight transfer fails. Second, whether those concepts can be translated into classroom operations without being emptied of their philosophical content. Third, whether the resulting unit design can be stated in terms that later permit empirical testing, the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 establishes the cultural ground shared by the Chinese philosophical tradition and by Dancesport as an art mediated by the body. Section 3 derives a teaching philosophy from three dimensions of that tradition. Section 4 converts the philosophy into a technical account of weight transfer and into a teachable unit with an action-research framework. Section 5 concludes and notes the limitations of the proposal.

2. The cultural integration of "Unity of Man and Nature" and dancesport

2.1. The common origin of traditional "Unity of Man and Nature / Integration of Form and Spirit" and the "Mind-Body Unity" in dance

"Unity of Man and Nature," as a fundamental spirit of traditional Chinese philosophy, asserts the interpenetration and unity between the way of heaven and the way of humanity, between nature and human

affairs. In its view of the body, it is manifested as "integration of form and spirit" (xing shen jian bei) and "unity of body and mind" — form is the dwelling of spirit, and spirit is the master of form; neither can be neglected. This view of the body resonates deeply with the essence of dance as an art: dance is never mere limb movement but an expression of mind-body integration. Chinese classical aesthetics emphasizes "vivid vitality through spirit and rhythm" (qi yun sheng dong), which is precisely the outward manifestation of mind-body integration. Although Dancesport originated in the West, as an art "mediated by the body," it equally requires the unity of the dancer's technical movement (form) with inner emotion and musical understanding (spirit). Therefore, the mind-body integration embedded in "Unity of Man and Nature" provides an indigenous philosophical foundation for understanding the teaching objective of "integration of form and spirit" in Dancesport: teaching should not merely train the "form" (step specifications, weight position) but should also cultivate the "spirit" (rhythm perception, musical expression, emotional communication).

Historically, the idea never remained a single formula. Mencius spoke of knowing one's nature and thereby knowing heaven; Zhuangzi wrote of the equality of heaven and humanity; and Zhang Zai gave the classical statement that heaven and earth are the parents of the human being, who therefore stands within rather than outside the order of nature. What unites these formulations is the refusal to treat the body as a machine operated by a separate mind. This contrasts with the dualism that underlies much technique-centered pedagogy, in which the body is first trained, and the mind is subsequently invited to add expression. The Chinese tradition assumes instead that form and spirit are given together: training the form already shapes the spirit, and attending to the spirit already reorganizes the form. Dance, which has no instrument other than the person, is the clearest test of that assumption, and it is also the place where the assumption can be put to pedagogical use.

2.2. The dialogue between Latin dance (Western) and the Chinese regimen culture of "Conforming to Nature and Balancing Yin and Yang"

Latin dances (cha-cha, rumba, samba, etc.) are characterized by bright rhythms and outward energy, emphasizing bodily explosion and extension; in contrast, traditional Chinese regimen culture (such as Taiji and Qigong) stresses "conforming to nature" (shun ying zi ran, i.e., respecting individual bodily rhythms and progressive loading), "balancing yin and yang" (tiao he yin yang), and "relaxation and naturalness" (song jing zi ran). Although seemingly heterogeneous, the two can form a complementary dialogue in Dancesport teaching: first, "conforming to nature" can be extended to following the laws of human movement and individual bodily rhythms, opposing forced training that violates physiological load, which is consistent with the progressive principle of modern sports science; second, "balancing yin and yang" can be understood as the coordination of firmness and softness between partners, and of leading and following (lead-follow), rather than confrontation and competition. This cultural integration of Chinese and Western sports in Dancesport demonstrates that "Unity of Man and Nature" is not a closed legacy of agrarian civilization but a living tradition capable of providing methodological enlightenment for contemporary Dancesport teaching.

For the practitioner, this means that a Latin dance lesson can deliberately alternate between energetic projection and recovered relaxation, training students not only to "do" the movement but to regulate their own bodily tension—a skill that directly serves the fluidity of weight transfer. The dialogic relation reframes the Western emphasis on external output as one pole of a larger rhythm, balanced by the Chinese emphasis on internal attunement.

The dialogue also operates at the level of technique. Rumba, with its slow count and sustained transfer, rewards patience in accepting weight; cha-cha, with its syncopated accents, punishes any transfer that has not been completed before the next accent arrives; samba, with its continuous bounce, exposes a core that has not been engaged. Read through the vocabulary of yin and yang, these are not three unrelated dances but three distributions of firm and soft: the slow acceptance of rumba is the soft pole, the sharp accent of cha-cha is the firm pole, and the elasticity of samba is their alternation. Students taught only to add energy meet the firm half of the demand; teaching them to recover, settle, and listen completes the other half. The cultural dialogue thus carries direct technical consequences rather than remaining an act of interpretation.

3. The Enlightenment of "Unity of Man and Nature" for dancesport teaching philosophy

3.1. Internal-external cultivation: The value unity of technical training and artistic expression

The "internal-external cultivation" of "Unity of Man and Nature" points to the dual cultivation of physique and disposition. Mapped onto Dancesport teaching, it means the unity of technical training (external) and musicality and artistic cultivation (internal). For a long time, Dancesport teaching has shown a tendency to "emphasize technique over expression": teachers overfocus on external specifications such as steps, hand positions, and weight, while neglecting guidance on musical structure, emotional expression, and style, resulting in students who "can perform the movements but cannot dance." According to the scholarly proposition that physical education unifies "intrinsic value (physical-mental pleasure, aesthetic experience) and extrinsic value (physical enhancement, skill acquisition)" (echoing the humanistic view of sport [11]; see also the Chinese health-physical-education curriculum model and foundational pedagogy texts such as Zhou), Dancesport should pursue the unity of external skill and internal aesthetics [12–14]. In teaching, "listen to music — analyze structure — give expression" should run throughout, so that every weight transfer serves the musical phrase and emotional expression rather than being an isolated technical completion.

In practice, the tendency to emphasize technique over expression is reproduced by the assessment instruments teachers use. When an examination rewards step accuracy and penalizes deviation, students optimize for what is counted, while musical phrasing, which resists counting, is left untrained and eventually unheard. A student may execute a correct cha-cha lock while consistently landing behind the beat, and because the shape is right, the fault is never named. Reversing this requires that the criterion of a successful transfer include the phrase: the weight should arrive with the beat, not merely near it. Once that criterion is stated, the technical work — engaging the core, timing the supporting leg, releasing the free leg — acquires a purpose beyond correctness, and that purpose is exactly what the phrase "internal-external cultivation" names.

3.2. The harmony concept and teaching environment: Dissolving tension and confrontation in weight transfer

The "harmony" dimension of "Unity of Man and Nature" requires the harmony between human and nature, between human and others, and between body and mind. In the Dancesport classroom, this concept is concretized as the harmony of teacher-student relationships and the harmony of partner cooperation. Latin dance weight transfer depends on the lead and follow between partners: if both sides confront, compete,

and stiffen the body, the weight cannot transfer smoothly, and movement continuity will inevitably suffer. A teaching environment based on "harmony" emphasizes the teacher guiding rather than commanding, and partners sensing rather than controlling, enabling students to experience the flow of core engagement — weight shift — limb extension in a relaxed and trusting atmosphere. This directly responds to the teaching pain point: many students' fragmented movements are not due to insufficient ability but to the tension and confrontation in classroom interaction. Constructing a harmonious interactive environment is a prerequisite condition for improving movement continuity.

Operationally, a harmonious environment is built from small and deliberate choices. Instructions are phrased as invitations to perceive rather than commands to comply: "feel where the weight is now" instead of "put your weight here." Partner work begins with exercises in which the follower's task is to detect rather than to guess, so that the lead becomes a proposal instead of a push. Errors are treated as information about the interaction rather than as evidence of a student's incapacity. These choices are not sentimental; they lower the muscular guarding that blocks transfer. A student who expects to be corrected stiffens in advance, and a stiffened body cannot accept weight. Attention to the relational climate is therefore a technical measure and not a departure from technical work.

3.3. People-oriented, student-subject: Differentiated teaching

"Unity of Man and Nature" values the human and life, in the same line as the "people-oriented" educational philosophy. Dancesport students differ significantly in physical conditions (flexibility, coordination, musicality), sports foundations, and learning motivations. Taking the humanistic care advocated in Noddings and the educational-anthropology perspective of Wang as references, teaching should respect students' individual differences and implement differentiated guidance: for students with weak weight stability, use decomposed exercises first to build body awareness; for those lacking expressiveness, strengthen musical and emotional guidance [15–16]. Placing students at the center of the subject can stimulate their intrinsic motivation, truly returning the "human" of "Unity of Man and Nature" to the center of the classroom.

Differentiation can be organized on three practical levels. At the level of task, the same weight-transfer exercise is set with different tempos and amplitudes, so that a student with unstable balance works slowly and within a shortened range while a better-prepared student works at performance tempo. At the level of cueing, one student may need a spatial instruction, such as "the pelvis travels first," while another needs a musical one, such as "arrive with the drum." At the level of feedback, beginners receive a single correction per attempt, because simultaneous corrections overload attention and re-fragment the movement that the lesson is trying to connect. What makes this people-oriented in the Chinese sense is that difference is treated as the starting point of instruction rather than as an obstacle to a uniform standard: the standard remains, but the route toward it is allowed to differ.

3.4. A synthesized pedagogical logic

Read together, the three enlightenments—internal-external cultivation, harmony, and people-orientation—constitute a coherent pedagogical logic rather than a list of isolated principles. Internal-external cultivation defines the aim of teaching (what students should attain: unified skill and expression); harmony defines the relational environment (how teacher–student and partner interactions are structured); and people-orientation defines the subject (for and from whom teaching proceeds). Their convergence is precisely the point at which "Unity of Man and Nature" moves beyond decorative rhetoric and becomes operational in the Dancesport

classroom, translating a metaphysical ideal into a sequence of teachable, assessable moves.

4. Teaching transformation toward "Movement Continuity"

4.1. "Conforming to Nature" ↔ Progressive sports load and injury prevention

"Conforming to nature" requires respect for bodily rhythms. The high-intensity, repetitive weight transfer in Latin dance easily imposes loads on the knees, ankles, and lumbar spine; violating the progressive principle tends to cause injury. In teaching, one should act within the measure of "nature": arrange loads by stages according to students' fitness, first establishing correct motor patterns at slow speed before gradually increasing tempo; emphasize warm-up and core-strength preparation, and incorporate "injury prevention" into teaching objectives. This is both a philosophical constraint of "Unity of Man and Nature" on load arrangement and consistent with the scientific principles of sports training.

The risks are specific rather than general. Repetitive Latin transfer loads the knee in rotational flexion, the lumbar spine in repeated extension, and the ankle is stressed when landing occurs on a relaxed foot. Progressive arrangement therefore means more than slowing the tempo down: it means sequencing surfaces, footwear, and floor conditions before intensity is raised, establishing hip and trunk stability before asking for speed, and inserting recovery sessions after high-load weeks. Warm-up is not a formality but the first opportunity to rehearse the transfer pattern at low amplitude, when attention can be given to alignment without the interference of tempo. Treated in this way, "conforming to nature" functions as a constraint on program design: the rate at which the body adapts sets the schedule, and the syllabus follows it.

4.2. "Mind-Body Unity" ↔ The technical mechanism of weight transfer

The core teaching transformation of this paper is to explain the mechanism of Latin dance weight transfer through "mind-body integration." Weight transfer is not a mere movement of the foot, but a continuous process of "core engagement (consciousness commanding the body) → weight shift from one foot to the other via the supporting leg (flow of body weight) → limbs extending accordingly, extending onto the musical downbeat (form and spirit in concert)." When students practice in a state of "mind-body integration," consciousness (spirit) constantly guides the movement (form); the core is stable while the limbs are relaxed, so weight shift becomes naturally continuous and fragmented movement is dissolved. This explanation turns the abstract "Unity of Man and Nature" into teachable and perceptible technical language, truly transforming traditional cultural thought into a teaching handle.

Read through this mechanism, three typical errors can be diagnosed precisely. The first is transferring the foot before the weight: the student moves the leg and then chases it with the body, so the center arrives late, and every step has to be restarted. The second is a rigid trunk: the core is held rather than engaged, so the weight has nothing to travel through and the upper body remains a separate object carried above the legs. The third is premature extension: the free leg reaches for the next position before the supporting leg has accepted the weight, producing the visible disconnection between upper and lower limbs noted earlier. Each error is a break in the same chain — core engagement, weight shift, limb extension — and each has a corresponding cue. The chain image is therefore operational rather than decorative: it tells the teacher where to look and what to say.

4.3. "Harmony-oriented pedagogy" Unit design and action-research framework

To transform the aforementioned concepts into operable classroom practice, this paper proposes a "harmony-oriented pedagogy" (i.e., a teaching approach that prioritizes harmonious teacher-student and partner interaction as a precondition for technical improvement) unit design (using the Latin rumba/cha-cha "weight transfer" unit as an example) and provides an action-research framework for empirical teaching research:

Teaching objectives: while mastering the technical specifications of weight transfer, enhance movement continuity and musical expression (internal-external cultivation).

Teaching strategies: (1) music first — first discern rhythm and downbeats, then correspond weight; (2) lead-follow games — build harmonious cooperation through relaxed lead-follow practice; (3) mind-body cue language — use "core in, weight flows, limbs extend" instead of rigid commands; (4) differentiated tasks — group by weight stability.

A sixteen-week semester can be organized in three phases. Weeks one to four establish the pattern without tempo: slow rumba walks, supported acceptance of weight, and the cue vocabulary needed to talk about it, with the aim of making transfer conscious rather than incidental. Weeks five to ten apply the pattern inside musical phrases: cha-cha locks and rumba box steps at increasing tempo, lead-and-follow exercises, and peer observation structured by a short checklist. Weeks eleven to sixteen consolidate and assess: short combinations in which continuity rather than step count is the criterion, followed by the post-test. Each phase holds the same chain — core engagement, weight shift, limb extension — and changes only the conditions under which it must be produced, so that any improvement can be attributed to the pedagogy rather than to accumulated practice time alone.

Action-research design (suggested): subjects are college Dancesport elective classes (experimental and control groups of about 30 each); duration is one semester (16 weeks); intervention is that the experimental group adopts harmony-oriented pedagogy while the control group uses conventional technical teaching; measurements include weight stability (video movement analysis/expert scoring), movement continuity scale, self-assessment and peer assessment of musical expression, and learning-interest questionnaire; data analyzed by pre-post comparison and independent samples t-test.

Data collection is scheduled at week 1 (pre-test) and week 15 (post-test), with a formative mid-term assessment at week 8 to allow instructional adjustment. The movement-continuity scale and musicality rubric are piloted (n = 15) for internal consistency (Cronbach's α) prior to formal use. Informed consent is obtained from all participants; the control group receives the same total instructional hours to control for dosage, and expert scoring is conducted by raters blinded to group allocation to reduce assessment bias.

Note: The above measurement tools, sample sizes, and statistical methods constitute a research design framework; specific data must be collected by the course instructor in actual teaching. This paper proposes it as a theoretical construct and program suggestion, and empirical testing is a key link in follow-up research.

5. Conclusion

The "Unity of Man and Nature" thought provides a profound value reference for college Dancesport teaching: using "internal-external cultivation" to integrate technique and art, "harmony" to construct the interactive environment of teachers-students and partners, "people-oriented" to implement the student subject, and "mind-body integration" and "conforming to nature" to concretely transform the teaching improvement of weight transfer and movement continuity. This paper's discussion shows that traditional

philosophy is not a decoration of teaching but a living methodology that can point to real teaching pain points. In the future, it is necessary to test the effectiveness of "harmony-oriented pedagogy" through action research, so that Dancesport teaching achieves unity in cultural inheritance and educational outcomes.

Two contributions can be claimed. Conceptually, the paper shows that an indigenous philosophical tradition can generate technical vocabulary precise enough to guide correction inside a dance studio, rather than serving only as a cultural preface to imported training models. Pedagogically, it identifies a single mechanism — the chain of core engagement, weight shift, and limb extension — through which relational, musical, and technical instruction converge, and it sets out a unit in which that mechanism can be taught and, in principle, measured. If the framework proves transferable beyond Latin dance, Dancesport teaching will have gained a way of honoring its Chinese context while addressing a difficulty that has so far resisted purely technical remedies.

The present paper is a theoretical and programmatic proposal; its empirical claims await validation through the action-research design outlined above. Two limitations should be noted. First, the proposed measurement instruments require psychometric validation before cross-site application. Second, the framework is illustrated with Latin dance (rumba/cha-cha); its transferability to standard dances (waltz, tango) and to large compulsory physical-education classes remains to be examined. Future research should (a) conduct multi-site randomized trials, (b) incorporate objective motion-capture metrics of weight transfer, and (c) track the long-term retention of movement continuity beyond a single semester.

Disclosure statement

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