

# Art, Medium and Metaphor—A China–Italy Intercultural Dialogue: Creative Movement in the Context of COVID-19

## 艺术、媒介与隐喻——中意跨文化对话:COVID-19 语境下的创意舞动

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### Abstract

Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) is changing people's lives in varying degrees. People's emotional experiences are increasingly diverse, as the impact of this major public event continues to expand. This paper explores how COVID-19 affects people's emotions through an analysis of creative movement projects in China and Italy and focuses on the educational value of dance. It takes a cross-cultural perspective using the qualitative research method of art-based inquiry. This study attaches importance to the characteristics of the arts and humanities and takes dance as an important medium to link emotional experience and personalized expression. Dance, poetry, and pictures are used to record participants' reflections on their emotional changes during the epidemic. Through the analysis of dance body language and participants' feedback, this study found that people's emotional experience caused by the epidemic can be expressed through dance. After analyzing dance language, we can further interpret this metaphorical process and make people's emotional experience concrete and apparent. Participants were drawn from different cultures; thus, they have different perceptions of the pandemic. Although the emotional experiences from Eastern and Western perspectives vary, the changing emotions of the participants in this study shared certain similarities, that is, from a mood of repression and struggle to a mood of release and tolerance.

**Keywords:** creative movement, intercultural dialogue, art-based inquiry, emotional experience, body language

### 摘要

当前,新冠疫情在不同程度上改变了人们的生活,随着这一重大公共事件的影响力不断扩大,人们的情感体验也日益多样化。本文通过在中国、意大利两个不同国家开展的创意舞动项目探讨了新冠疫情是如何影响人们的情绪,并通过艺术本位研究(art-based inquiry)的质性研究方法着重探讨了舞蹈艺术这一独特媒介在跨文化语境中的教育价值。本研究重视艺术与人文学科本身的特性,将艺术这一重要的表现手法作为链接情感体验和个性化表达的重要媒介,即通过创意舞动引导参与者反思自己在疫情下的情感变化过程,并使用舞蹈,诗歌和图画记录他们的反思。通过分析舞蹈身体语言和参与者的反馈,本研究发现:疫情给人们的诸多情感体验和个人经历能够用舞蹈的形式进行表达,通过分析舞蹈语言可以进一步了解这一隐喻性的过程,使人们的情感体验具象化、形象化。尽管在不同文化语境中,人们对于疫情的看法不同,东西方对于疫情的情感体验也有着较大的差异,而本研究参与者的情感变化过程具有一定的相似性,即从压抑和斗争的情绪扩展为一种释放与包容。

**关键词:** 创意舞动, 跨文化对话, 艺术本位研究, 情感体验, 身体语言

## Introduction

A large number of studies have shown that the public's emotional experience of public health events is influenced by its social environment and cultural background (Xiong et al., 2020). With the continuing development of globalization, public health emergencies affect many countries extremely quickly. For example, the Middle East respiratory syndrome caused a sudden, widespread, and serious epidemic in 2018, which caused the world health community to function on high alert. Such public health events not only threaten the life, health, and personal safety of patients, but may also cause adverse behaviors among members of the public and evolve into displays of irrational public behaviors (Yen & Syme, 1999).

At present, the world is still facing the threat of coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19). At the beginning of the epidemic, both China and Italy were hit hard. Limited medical resources, a rising number of infections, and inadequate quarantine policies added to the anxiety (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). As the epidemic has been brought under control with the successful development of multiple vaccines and continued public policy initiatives, attention has turned to other social and psychological effects of COVID-19. During the pandemic, people faced the challenges of fear, uncertainty, and loneliness, which had a profound impact on their inner emotional experience.

In this study, two creative movement teachers from China and Italy posed a question: "Do Chinese and Italian citizens have the same emotional experience in the context of the epidemic?" The teachers first agreed on this as a research question and then conducted an experimental study based on principles of art-based research. In this study, 24 participants were selected from China and Italy (12 from each country), and their emotional experience, in the context of the epidemic, was recorded through their participation in creative movement classes. The researchers analyzed and summarized the participants' works, and finally used various art forms and different media (such as dance, video, painting, poetry) to present the artistic achievements and research conclusions.

Creative movement is a training method based on dance and music to explore people's inner world and creativity through impromptu expression (Exiner & Lloyd, 1974). Through improvised creative movement and physical expression, an exploration of their thinking or feeling can be further understood. This sense of reciprocity serves as a fulcrum for individuals to explore their creative potential, which has implications for families, groups, and society (Winnicott, 1994). Therefore, by using creative movement, these researchers gained some understanding of the emotional changes people might undergo in the context of the epidemic.

The use of creative movement in therapy is a psychotherapeutic framework that helps participants recover? may be heal? through creative movement practice (Meekums, 2002). After the 2016 earthquake in central Italy, the dance therapists in the research team used Maria Fux's creative movement method, which aims to allow participants to express their inner thoughts and show emotions words cannot. By enabling this, creative movement may play a role towards the healing of people's trauma after public emergencies. Unlocking a person's creative potential is key to activating this process by revealing the hidden inner experiences of the individual. Stimuli from both inside

and outside, like music, color, sound, poetry, and silence, activate the individual's body consciousness in similar ways to imagination or dreams (Fux, 1996, 2007). From this developing awareness can come improvised dance expression. Fux often uses color as stimulus, with abstract paintings and music as supplementary materials. Meanwhile, Fux (2009) also uses silent creative movement with deaf people for artistic healing. This research mainly follows the framework of Fux.

Art-based inquiry, also known as art-based educational research is a contemporary method in the field of art and humanities that focuses on the characteristics of art and humanities from the perspective of art itself (Schwandt, 2014). Art-based inquiry systematically uses art, organizes the process of expression by using a variety of different art forms, and uses this as the main way to understand and explore the experience of researchers and participating researchers (McNiff, 1998, 2015).

In this study, the art-based research methodological approach is used to guide participants to reflect on their emotional changes during the epidemic through the use of creative movement, which is considered an important form in art-based education research. Participants were guided to visualize and process their inner emotional experience by analyzing their dance body language using pictures and poems as a way of expressing and giving feedback concerning their experiences as dancers. Through various forms of artistic expression, the researchers were able to restore fragmented and non-linear modes of thinking and understand some of the emotional changes of participants.

The subjects of this research live in the context of COVID-19, but in two very different cultural contexts, one eastern, one western. Their emotional experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has its external cultural impact. Awareness of individual emotional experience can enhance understanding about how to face the reality of social development and change in the face of public emergency. Art therapy interventions can provide a methodological basis for designing a research approach.

## **Research Procedure**

### **Team Composition**

At very beginning, in the context of the epidemic, Jiaoyin Mei and Angela Fossa, two teachers from China and Italy, respectively, hoped to solve some realistic problems through teaching creative movement classes. Based on past experiences of cooperation and trust, it was agreed that a series of qualitative forms of analysis were needed to answer this question. They built a team that included researchers, observers, teachers, and students from China and Italy.

As the principal researchers, the two teachers discussed the current social situation, proposed the urgent question about whether participants in the two countries could conduct a self-exploration of emotional experience through dance classes in the face of the same epidemic, and made corresponding teaching plans. The team adopted an art-based research methodology to reflect participants' emotional experience during the creative movement class and to provoke them to think about their own life experiences. Subsequently, two teachers conducted a 3-hour creative movement class for each of

the 12 participants from China and Italy (for organizational reasons, the Italian class is a continuous online class, while the Chinese class is divided into 3 weeks of online classes, 1 hour per week).

## **Course Implementation**

In the creative movement class, the teachers first introduced ways for students to perceive their bodies in more detail, establish connections between environment and emotion, and to express the experience of emotional change through artistic means. This latter process is considered to involve a combination of multiple senses.

Next, the teacher discussed the current social situation of the epidemic and told the participants to perform their creative movement expressions in this context. Through their movement, participants were invited to reconstruct elements of their personal experience. The project was given the title, “An Emotional Journey during the Epidemic,” and included painting and dancing to express one’s feelings. Participants communicated their experiences through both dance and painting.

During the class, participants showed their work to each other and shared their personal experiences. Other participants reflected on their emotional journey and participated in the discussion, with teachers playing a supporting role in guiding them to understand the deeper meaning of these colors and behaviors. In the end, the teacher and three observers assumed the role of researchers, collecting the original material from the class, and interviewing participants after class to gather additional details not introduced in class. The Chinese language course was divided into three weeks (March 9–23), all online (Table 1). The course was held twice in Italy (March 7) in an offline classroom and a third online session at home (Table 2).

## **Research Analysis**

### **Chinese participants experience**

#### ***The Paintings***

After collecting paintings from the 12 participants, researchers found that participants’ emotional experiences, as conveyed by these pictures, can be roughly divided into three categories.

The first type of emotional experience can be described as a gradual transition from anxiety and desire for freedom to inner peace. According to Harvey et al (2018), this emotion is often expressed by undulating images of rivers or mountains, conveying personal emotions in a metaphorical way (Harvey, Zhou, Kelly, & Wittig, 2018). This process can be interpreted and summarized as the following: at first, the participants’ emotions are anxious and nervous. Gradually, the content of the pictures changes, the patterns rise and fall, and peace and relief gradually emerge. In this study, 50% of the participants expressed this tendency.

The second emotional experience is that the anger generated during the epidemic turns to a yearning for a better life. Compared with the first type of response, participants

**TABLE 1** | Classroom Procedures in China

<b>Class content</b>	<b>Classroom procedures</b>
First week: expression and emotional exploration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Preparation               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Step 1: Look for awareness through deep breathing and scan the body.</li> <li>Step 2: Scan the whole body again, stop at painful places and record and express them.</li> <li>Step 3: Participants imitate the facial expressions; then, restore own facial expression and separate emotion from the body.</li> <li>Step 4: Record emotions.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Theme exploration               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Step 1: Breathe and scan the body.</li> <li>Step 2: Observe the discomfort reaction in the body and mark the emotion.</li> <li>Step 3: Imagine its positive emotions then change expression.</li> <li>Step 4: Record the exploration process with painting and color; name it.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Share the feelings in the process of exploration               <p>Participants share their feelings, including their emotional changes and reasons for creative dancing.</p> </li> </ol>
Second week: silk scarf dancing and emotional exploration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Warming up               <p>Relax your body.</p> </li> <li>2. Theme Exploration               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Step 1: Take the silk scarf as a continuation of the skin and dance with your body in a relaxed way.</li> <li>Step 2: Scan the body, find the negative points, name the emotion, take it out, and place it around the body.</li> <li>Step 3: Turn emotions into scarves and interact with scarves.</li> <li>Step 4: Select a piece of music, dance with silk scarves, and record a video.</li> <li>Step 5: After watching the video, give the dance a name.</li> <li>Step 6: Record the whole process of exploration, and then choose your music.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Share the feelings in the process of exploration</li> </ol>
Third week: dance of sound and emotional exploration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Warming up               <p>Perform physical relaxation exercise.</p> </li> <li>2. Theme Exploration               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Step 1: Say “A, O, E, I, U” with your body. The sound size is positively related to the movement size.</li> <li>Step 2: Explore “Paura,” “Pa,” “Gioia,” and “Le” with different rhythms.</li> <li>Step 3: Stimulate your emotions with sound and create a dance.</li> <li>Step 4: Recall the process of dancing and the feeling of sound, and write a poem.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Share the feelings in the process of exploration</li> </ol>

expressed more optimistic expectations about the future, often based in memories of good relationships with others, such as meeting friends, hanging out together, etc. Many images of hope, such as bonfires, stars, the moon, and dancing in circles, were used to convey this emotional experience. The works of these participants are often colorful and informative, with titles full of dramatic tension, such as Figure 1.

**TABLE 2** | Classroom Procedures in Italy

<b>Class content</b>	<b>Classroom procedures</b>
First lesson: silk scarf dancing and emotional exploration 1	<p>Preparation Step 1: Take a trip inside the body with conscious breathing.</p> <p>New relationship with space</p> <p>Step 1: Explore and fill space with movement by drawing points, lines, shapes, changing levels and direction. (music: R. Aubry)</p> <p>Step 2: Walk freely (relaxing music) without perceiving anyone, then with direct gaze.</p> <p>Step 3: Sudden break by the teacher: delivery to wear facial masks (first time). Resume walking.</p> <p>Step 4: Explore the feelings and share emotions in the change.</p> <p>The Butho theme: “Metamorphosis of the witch”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The teacher shows this theme and invited participants to dance with it, emphasizing the contrast between evil and good.</li> <li>2. Record the connection between negative and positive emotions with the face, limbs, and body in change.</li> </ol> <p>Silent dance</p> <p>Step 1: The teacher invited participants to express emotions explored until then.</p> <p>Step 2: Internal reworking time.</p> <p>Step 3: Short warming up to release any tension.</p> <p>Step 4: Everyone shares his or her emotions through dancing.</p> <p>Graphic language</p> <p>Step 1: The teacher invited the participants to express their emotions through a color drawing, connecting them with one’s daily environment, family, and social environment.</p> <p>Step 2: Choose a name.</p>
Second lesson: silk scarf dancing and emotional exploration 2	<p>Warming up and relaxing your body</p> <p>Remote dialogue paired with silk 2</p> <p>Step 1: Experience freely how the shawl can help you communicate.</p> <p>Step 2: Record how you interacted with emotions related to the presence of the other and the impossibility of a meeting.</p> <p>Step 3: Share the emotional change process and compare it with that of the partner.</p> <p>Step 4: The teacher explains the close relationship among sound, graphic form, and semantic content.</p> <p>Step 5: First practical exercise: emphatic pronunciation of individual letters, with the congruent gesture suggested by the sound.</p>
Third lesson (everyone at home): dance of sound and emotional exploration Poetic composition	<p>Words take shape</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Warming up: conscious breathing</li> </ol> <p>Step 1: Pronounce the vowel sounds “A E I O U.”</p> <p>Step 2: Say in the same manner the names of some emotions felt during previous activities. Check how the sound evokes meaning.</p> <p>Step 3: Play by varying rhythm, intensity, and duration for each the word.</p>



TABLE 2 | (continued)

Class content	Classroom procedures
	<p>Step 4: Emphasizing the dance movement changes for different sense of the words.</p> <p>Step 5: Share how sound drives body movements under emotional changes.</p> <p>2. From the body to the word</p> <p>Step 1: Recall all the emotions experienced and write a poetic composition.</p> <p>Step 2: Read the individual compositions and comment.</p> <p>3. Share the feeling in the process of exploration</p>

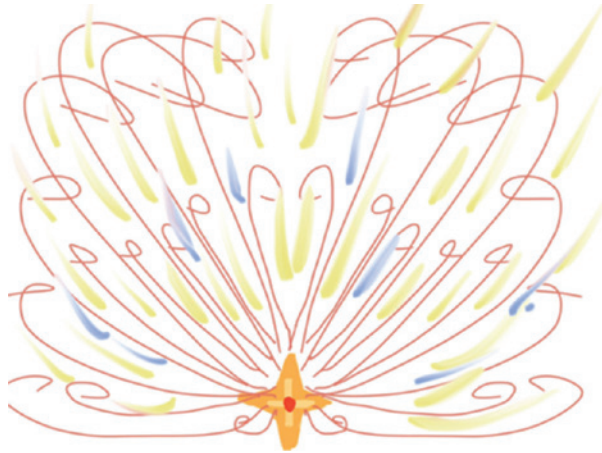


FIGURE 1 | Dance!

The third type of emotional experience can be described as the following: suppressed anger over the epidemic is released in hopping or erupting figures. It metaphorically emphasizes the need of rebuilding the relationship between self and the environment. This emotional experience is often demonstrated as curved, colorful lines and images with specific meanings, such as cross symbols, equinox flower, etc. For example, the figure “the flowering of pituitary gland” shows that extrinsic stimuli and participants’ self-perception produced creative synesthesia (Figure 2). This emotional response was clear in both dance and painting gave it its synesthetic quality.

Changes from anxiety and anger to positive emotions often came from participants<sup>1</sup> who shared similar socioeconomic backgrounds, including participants’ personal life experiences or objective social circumstances. The fact that students with similar

<sup>1</sup> Before the activity, participants were informed of the overall process and basic intention of the activity, thus they had a clear understanding of the activity. The descriptions of participants’ emotions presented in this section are based on post-activity interviews.



**FIGURE 2** | Artistic response from a Chinese student: “The Flowering of Pituitary Gland”.

backgrounds produced similar results suggests both that those results are a genuine response by those individuals to their social experience and that they share positive expectations concerning the developing social situation (Gordon, 2017).

At the start, when the pandemic was not fully under control, there were usually negative emotions. Participants were frustrated by negative news. They felt powerless. During the process of exploring emotions through creative movement, participants’ emotions were much disturbed by the negative impact of the epidemic and could not be adequately released. The continuous accumulation of negative emotions inevitably had an impact on people’s physical and mental health. At the same time, we held the view that to express emotions through a creative medium, whether through painting or other means, is a process of release. Emotions can be recognized and released in a personalized narrative.

### ***The Dances***

During the creative movement teaching process, participants reflected on their relationship with others and their environment. As part of their exploration-through-movement, participants were invited to dance interacting with a silk scarf. The researchers collected the silk scarf dance videos of the 12 participants and conducted collaborative exploration through interviews. As part of the interviews, participants were invited to name emotions and locate where in their bodies they experienced them.

During the emotion-labeling process, five participants found an emotional blockage in their feet or legs and knees. The participants explained that they felt as if their rights and freedoms had been restricted even though the epidemic had been brought under some control. They could not go out of the house and lacked ways to enjoy themselves with their friends. Other participants mentioned emotional blockage in the eye and hand area, which may be related to long-term eye use or typing because of the online courses (Kim et al., 2016).



When choosing spatial relationships with the silk scarf, participants generated several different states. Five participants showed a pattern of avoiding negative emotions before the interaction (Figure 3). To start, one participant turned his back on the scarf, slowly approached it, picked it up in his hand, waved it in the air as if to get rid of anxiety, and then threw it into the air. After many intense movements representing the struggle, some participants chose to wrap themselves in silk scarves, turning in circles, indicating that silk scarves had become expectations for the future and enveloped themselves in this hope. This is what the participants told when researchers interviewed them afterwards. Some participants chose to wear a scarf around their neck or move it around their body to show their ability and willingness to coexist with negative emotions. These participants found that stress was inevitable and that they needed to change their mental resilience in the face of unexpected events. In this process, the movement was constantly changing, which represented the process of emotional change from researchers' point of view. Three of the participants showed patterns ranging from calm to longing. At first, participants chose to use various parts of their body to interact with the scarf, allowing it to flow around their body, including making scarf flow between hands and legs, and then accelerating its movement to express their desire to end the epidemic and start a normal life. With the rise and fall of music, for some participants, their movement began to move away from negative states toward positive.

Dancers also shared with us that one of the most powerful parts of this self-exploration process was what they discovered when scanning their bodies for negative emotions. This process, through abstraction and metaphor, helped participants identify the source and development of their negative emotion, thus prompting them to think about ways of solving their problem. Through the creative movement process, participants learned how to express their negative emotions and reduce some of the social pressure caused by the epidemic.



**FIGURE 3** | Artistic response from a Chinese student: “Change” (Baidu Netdisk link: <https://pan.baidu.com/s/1QQ2vgWrAoNaucMgz9uTsNQ>, extraction code: 1234).

## ***The Poems***

A key element of the process of reflection and analysis was poetry, which can be defined as literature that evokes a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience or a specific emotional response (Nemerov, 2021) through the chosen language and is arranged for its meaning, sound, and rhythm. In terms of image selection, participants from China mostly adopted landscape, sunset, heaven and earth, clouds, animals (such as birds, eagle, earthworms, moles, etc.) and so on. The participants used these images to convey ideas such as the following: eager to divide the uncertainty in the natural habitat, the heart of hope is yearning, sending the mood gradually in natural, and so forth (summarized according to the participants feedback).

Onomatopoeia is a common element in poetry, such as Wu-hu, Huhu, AEOIU (vowels), etc. Onomatopoeia in poetry can be used to vividly show the characteristics of things, the mood of the characters, the state of action, so that readers generate associations or a feeling of being on the scene. It can also vividly depict a character's mood. In Chinese, onomatopoeia also plays the role of homophone pun, which makes the language interesting and lively.

There are many body-related dialogues in the poetic texts written by participants, such as ups and downs, falls, fingertips, sighs, left and right hands, etc. One participant wrote that “The fingertips, like a beak, pick up news from the outside world,” which expresses inner feeling by the body movement.

## **Italian participants experience**

### ***The Paintings***

After collecting the works of the 12 participants in the Italian group and analyzing their paintings, the researchers recognized that through the use of creative movement and painting, participants discovered ways to express negative emotions, reduce anxiety, and understand the need to face difficulties that came from many directions during the pandemic.

The Italian participants' painting styles were predominantly abstract but distinctly symbolic. For example, “Light” (Figure 4) is a number of concentric circles. The color



**FIGURE 4** | An Italian participant's artistic response work “Light” in the class.

of silk used as an auxiliary object during their dance had a great influence on the choices of color participants made while painting. Many chose bright colors. Studies have pointed out that such color choice is an expression of emotion (Guerra & Stefani, 2014). This reflects how the quality, color, and luster of silk affect people's subjective feelings and affect the dancer's experience. Participants felt the scarf was inviting them to touch it or stroke it. It is the intuitive and real experience of being encircled by silk that participants turned into an image of a circle of light—turning their feelings into paintings.

### ***The Dances***

The group in Rome, Italy, consisted of 12 participants, but only one participant had experience with Fux's creative movement methods. The first two classes, which were spread out over a single day, were offline classes to practice the creative Fux dancing method. The theme of this exploration, "the transformation of witch virus," was created by Yumiko Yoscioka. It is used as part of the methodology of Fux's creative movement approach. The main purpose of the creative movement experience is to explore, recognize, and accept emotions. If negative emotions dominate, the comparison of expressions is an effective approach. The use of stories is important, as stories reveal how new stories can be created from everyday life, for example, by observing a simple drop of water or a color.

The lesson enabled participants to encounter the deep release of negative emotions generated during this period. This process can be seen as connecting genuine emotion and physical expression. For example, the creative movement teachers believe that to relax the body can be experienced as a shift from tension to curiosity about, or longing for a new reality.

Most of what participants knew about the epidemic before the class began came from the news. Television showed scenes from hospitals every day, with more and more infections, but little else. After this initial phase of news, the participants began to await anxiously the government's release of new information about the outbreak. The excitement of waiting for catastrophic and inevitable events may have overcome the fear of events that had already begun.

After going through the warm-up process as well as wearing a mask during the movement, the participants felt their emotions, which they defined as the feeling of being unable to continue. Despite the teacher's instructions to resume walking, the participants' bodies seemed to be clearly blocked. At this point, the researchers observed an interesting expression on participants' faces and during the later process of feedback, participants said they had found it difficult to understand each other's emotions. However, they noticed that eye contact during interactive walking gradually gave them the possibility of understanding each other, especially when they sensed the change between their initial confusion and their final relief after smiling. This seemed to be a sign of their willingness to communicate at a deeper level. Two participants admitted it was the first time they had looked another person in the eye. The class also included individual dancing in silence, repetitive movements, using silk scarves and

sound games, and painting representations of emotional patterns experienced during the epidemic.

Everyone involved in the sharing process had feelings of fear, but the nuances were interesting. One group of people felt fear, but before the verbal comments, the main expressions were loss, emptiness, uncertainty, the feeling of living in a surreal experience, and loneliness. Others admitted they had feelings of fear and anxiety, but trusted their own spiritual resources, “like protecting my inner light,” a phrase written on one of the paintings or a title given to one of the paintings. One participant did not experience any type of fear, believing that this negative world event would eventually bring light, and thus change humanity, creating more respect for the earth. Most of the participants (seven) believed that the epidemic was an “Earth-nature” teaching, warning that the original harmony between the earth and the sky had been destroyed. The participants’ dance consisted of alternating impulses to rise and to fall to the ground, both of which strongly conveyed the human condition as a desire, as a spiritual act of faith, with gravity preventing the desire to rise and causing a heavy landing. One participant wanted to express the need to overcome this duality so as to create harmony between celestial and terrestrial ecosystems. Moreover, a series of quick turns on the ground of some participants expresses that tranquil life is under attack on earth. As the pandemic is continuing and evolving, fear and anxiety cannot be eliminated at the moment, as they are natural reactions, but the team believes the outbreak needs to serve as an education and a warning to the public about the importance of protecting the environment.

### **The Poems**

Participants from Italy are different from Chinese participants in their selection of images, and their natural images were mostly starry skies day and night, universe, stars, and light.

Italian participants were also more likely to use onomatopoeia. The experience of sound (Dogana, 1990) creates a sensuous atmosphere: for example, the prosodic pronunciation of vowels and the individual letters of some words used to name emotions, with all their free variations. Taking “fear-Pa (怕)” and projecting it through physical movements encourages vocal, physical, and emotional resonance. In Italian, the word *Gioia* produces the effect of a jump game, thanks to the sweet G, followed by the rise of the “I” after the “O” drops. The consonant “L” suggests free and fluid movement, and the sound of vowel E encouraged participants to explore horizontal directionality in the space.

In addition, the Italian participants described their “feeling of losing balance in silence.” Several chose to focus on their own breathing and steps to reflect.

### **Reflection**

This study used creative movement for self-exploration to answer the original question: Did Chinese and Italian citizens have similar emotional experiences in the context of the pandemic? This study further explored personal emotional experience to the

pandemic and considered similarities and differences in cross-cultural contexts. At the same time, we hope that through this exploration in the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants and readers will continue to think about the relationship between individual lives and the social environment.

Using painting, participants in the two countries expressed their emotional experiences in specific images, revealing emotional experiences that were quite different. In Italy, for example, images of “Lights,” “Flowers,” and “Witches” expressed participants’ attitude towards the development of the epidemic and expressed their urgent desire for changes in the global situation. However, Chinese images from nature, such as “double flowers” and “stars,” are more expressive of the emotional journey of the pandemic, which was usually from sadness and panic to calm. The difference of these range of images may be related to the different forms of epidemic prevention and the control measures adopted by the two countries at that time. The selection of these images is also related to the cultural context in which participants are located. Cultural symbols such as “witch” and “cross” are more typical in Western culture and were the metaphors that Italian participants chose to use. For Chinese participants, the selection of natural images was more consistent with the Chinese way of thinking of “harmony between man and nature.” The interpretation of the author is that through the interaction between man and nature, participants believed they could better find their social value.

Through the silk dance, both groups attached great importance to the influence of music on their emotional resonance as artists, creating dances that reflected their inner experiences, including through the integration of voice during the third lesson (Figures 1 and 2). In the process of dance creation in these different cultural contexts, there were many different emotional experiences. The authors agreed that the Italian artists danced in a fighting mood, striving to overcome anxiety. The twisted scarf symbolized a sense of urgency to meet others, and frustration at not being able to do so. It is the interpretation of the authors that the Chinese artists’ dance more reflected a movement from depression to peace and the yearning for freedom. This also led to a new reflection that personal life experience is closely connected to the development of the environment, and that personal emotions are in fact responses to social trends.

In addition, we found that many participants had similar emotional experiences and shared reflections despite differing cultural contexts. These common reflections transcend cultural differences and have self-educational significance. Upon initial exposure to an outbreak filled with traumatic information, the public exhibits an emotional state of anxiety and panic. However, in the process of self-exploration, this life experience can bring much inspiration to the participants, suggesting how humans can maintain a harmonious relationship with the environment. At the same time, despite the differing social cultures of China and Italy, people pursue community connectedness, because Chinese and Italian people recognize that people are not isolated from society, but part of society.

The authors believe that if we can raise our psychological resilience in the face of social change, look for positive developments in our personal experiences, learn to let go of negative emotions, and view life experiences more positively, then we can change our own condition, and this change may in turn have an impact on social trends. In this art-based study, we found that the intervention of art had a positive effect

on participants, which allowed them to express themselves in new ways and release negative emotions in the face of unknown personal life challenges. Also, through these findings, we see the potential to understand how, when we adjust our view of things, or encounter a new perspective, we can understand things more concretely. Through dance, we can reexamine personal experiences, and after sorting and thinking using new forms of artistic exploration, we can express those experiences in new ways. Whether an emotion is positive or not, it can have critical value if explored through art-based expression. This suggests that we can integrate the negative emotions of social change rather than just avoiding them. Understanding and dealing with negative emotions may lead to deeper thinking and more possibilities.

Art-based inquiry can help us reflect on personal life experiences. When faced with a public health event that involves not only individuals but also the community of shared future, educators must first be aware of what they are dealing with and begin to explore the triggers for painful emotions. Then, with the help of art-based expression, a process of exploring the individual's own life experiences creativity can be carried out. Creativity may change someone's experience of their reality, and participants can explore it through multiple media and different forms of artistic expression. Creative movement is an easily accessible method as it does not require any special equipment: it helps participants understand their bodies and themselves. By understanding the structure of their bodies, the flexibility of their joints, the gravity and balance of their bodies, and each gesture and movement, participants can become more creative in their artistic narratives.

Through the exploration of this study, the researchers used creative movement to observe participants in different cultural contexts in the East and West, that is in China and Italy. In the face of the COVID-19 outbreak, people had a variety of emotional responses. Using creative movement, people came to better understand themselves and express their inner emotional experience in a more concrete way. The authors conclude that dance can be an effective tool that transcends language and can be used to bridge the gap between different cultures. It is worth noting that these explorations will continue as the pandemic progresses, dancers and researchers will continue to use a variety of artistic methods to explore valuable responses to changing societies.

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