

Shall We Dance?

I can honestly say that I have dabbled in everything Chinese. Obviously, there is the food I eat and the language I speak. Then there is art, the body of cultural nuances without which a culture would not be a culture at all. I've tried calligraphy; I've tried brush painting; I've even tried guzheng. However, first in my heart is dance.

Like most other kids who start an activity at a young age, I did not step into the small karate dojo that passed for a dance studio completely of my own accord. My parents invoked the allure of beautiful costumes and a glamorous stage life to entice me into the bare room, where my short, chubby body attempted pliés, arabesques, splits, and jumps, and my round face grimaced from the exertion. The teacher was stern. She berated me for bad posture—Back straight! Don't slouch! Suck in your stomach!—and coaxed my legs into ever more painful configurations.

After a couple of years, it was time for my first performance. With it, came my first dabs of stage makeup and most importantly, my first *costume*. It itched, it pinched, the seams dug in, and it was *radiant*. Finally, I got to taste that glamour and glitz. I ceased to be a mortal being on stage: I was a fantastical creature, something the audience could only gaze wonderingly upon. In the space of a few hours, my friends and I assumed the guises of animals, dolls, and mythological figures.

Over the years, my repertoire has only expanded. We've been ethereal lotus fairies, flying goddesses come to life from cave walls, graceful ladies with parasols that seemingly glide across rainy avenues, and so much more. And the best part about donning so many faces is the sheer amount of history behind each dance. Thousands of hands refined the multiple gestures.

Thousands of needles codified the costume designs. Thousands of pairs of feet trod the same

steps our worn dance slippers do today. Over thousands of years, Chinese folk dance has evolved, and I've learned to appreciate and respect this great human achievement.

I would have never escaped the couch and hypnotic glow of electronics without all of it. In addition to a general appreciation for the humanities, something more applicable I've gained is discipline and better physical health. Specifically, dance brought forth the culture which I had taken for granted, previously manifested in mundane holidays and social mores, and rightfully reconciled me with my heritage. In the end, Chinese folk dance has contributed immensely to my growth as a thinking being, invigorating me, not vegetating me.