
EXPLORING THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPACT OF TAIJIQUAN IN MALAYSIA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Taijiquan, which originated from ancient Chinese martial arts, has evolved into a globally recognized practice and serves as both a method for fitness and self-cultivation. In Malaysia, a country renowned for its ethnic and cultural diversity, Taijiquan is viewed as a means of physical and mental regulation, acting as a cultural bridge that fosters harmonious interactions among different races and cultures. This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, utilizing semi-structured interviews with professionals who have been deeply involved in Taijiquan in Malaysia for many years. Through qualitative analysis and the use of NVivo software, thematic and content analyses were conducted to examine the development and dissemination of Taijiquan in Malaysia. The findings indicate that experts hold diverse views on balancing cultural preservation with innovation, highlighting the importance of maintaining Taijiquan's traditional essence while adapting to the demands of modern society. The promotion of Taijiquan in Malaysia is shaped by several factors, including limited government support, a shortage of qualified instructors, and the challenges posed by contemporary lifestyles.

Keywords: Taijiquan, Malaysia, Development and Impact, Qualitative Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Taijiquan, also known as Tai Chi, is a traditional Chinese martial art that embodies the harmonious integration of culture, health, and martial arts. Rooted in centuries-old practices, it reflects the cultural essence of the Chinese nation, offering both a physical regimen and a philosophical framework. Scholars such as Huang and Yang (2023) and Guo and Ma (2012) have highlighted how Taijiquan transcends mere physical activity, serving as a cultural artifact that conveys the spirit of ancient Eastern practices to a global audience. Through its slow, deliberate movements and emphasis on inner balance, Taijiquan fosters a unique connection between body and mind, aligning with broader cultural and philosophical principles.

In the Malaysian context, Taijiquan holds a particularly esteemed position, appreciated for its multifaceted contributions to individual and societal well-being. Beyond its recognized benefits in regulating physical and mental health, it has emerged as a significant cultural bridge in Malaysia's

diverse, multicultural society. According to Li, Yang, and Wang (2011), Taijiquan has played an instrumental role in fostering racial harmony and cultural exchange. By bringing together individuals from various ethnic backgrounds, this ancient practice promotes mutual respect, understanding, and shared appreciation for cultural diversity, thereby contributing to social cohesion in Malaysia.

This study employs a qualitative analysis approach to examine the current state of Taijiquan development in Malaysia, focusing on the insights of Taijiquan professionals. The investigation seeks to uncover their perspectives on the challenges faced in sustaining and advancing this traditional practice, as well as their visions for its future. By exploring these views, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of Taijiquan's role and potential in Malaysia, shedding light on how this ancient art can continue to thrive in a modern, multicultural context while preserving its cultural significance and adapting to contemporary demands.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study selected seven highly experienced Taijiquan professionals in Malaysia, including two experts, three coaches, and two athletes. Each participant has over 20 years of experience in Taijiquan, making their expertise highly representative of Taijiquan's transmission and development. Many participants have competed in international Taijiquan competitions and participated in exchange events, with some holding key leadership positions in the Malaysian Taijiquan community. These individuals were chosen not only for their expertise in Taijiquan but also for the unique and valuable perspectives they offer regarding its development in both Malaysia and the global context.

Study Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, utilizing in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore participants' experiences and challenges in cultural, technical, and dissemination aspects of Taijiquan.

Measures

Before conducting the interviews, we provided participants with a detailed explanation of the research topic to ensure their understanding of the discussion. The interviews are semi-structured, which allows us to guide the conversation around core themes while giving participants the freedom to express their own views and experiences. Each interview is scheduled to last between 60 and 90 minutes and is audio-recorded to facilitate a thorough exploration of all relevant topics. After the interviews, all audio recordings are transcribed verbatim, providing a solid foundation for subsequent data analysis (Allsop, Chelladurai, Kimball, Marks & Hendricks, 2022).

Procedure

This study obtained approval from the Sultan Idris Education University Research Ethics Committee (2024-0032-01, ensuring compliance with ethical standards, particularly regarding participant confidentiality and voluntary participation. All participants provided informed consent prior to their involvement, acknowledging that the interviews would be recorded and analyzed, with all data treated with strict confidentiality.

Analysis

Before conducting the interviews, we provided participants with a detailed explanation of the study to ensure they understood the discussion. The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed us to guide the conversation around core themes while giving participants the freedom to express their own views

and experiences. Each interview was scheduled to last between 60 and 90 minutes and was audio-recorded to facilitate a thorough exploration of all relevant topics. After the interviews, all audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, providing a solid foundation for subsequent data analysis.

RESULTS

By using NVivo software to classify and organize the interview data, the researchers identified four main themes: culture, technique, dissemination, and development strategies. These themes were further divided into 13 sub-themes. The cultural theme includes three sub-themes: cultural background and characteristics, cultural inheritance and promotion, and cultural phenomena and cross-cultural exchange. The technical theme is divided into four sub-themes: teaching techniques, traditional and competitive Taijiquan, technical schools, and physical and mental development. The dissemination theme comprises five sub-themes: current dissemination, dissemination methods, dissemination impact, dissemination obstacles, and scientific research. The development strategies theme focuses on one sub-theme, namely the vision and long-term development of Taijiquan. These classifications help to clearly organize and analyze the development path, challenges, and future outlook of Taijiquan in Malaysia.

Table 1: Themes and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-theme
Culture	Cultural background and characteristics Cultural Inheritance and Promotion Cultural Phenomena and Cross-Cultural Communication
Technology	Teaching techniques Traditional and Competitive Taijiquan Technical Schools Physical and mental development
Communication	Communication Status Communication Methods Communication Impact Communication Barriers Scientific Research
Development Strategies	Vision of Taijiquan itself and its long term development

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded using NVivo software to extract themes from the textual data. In the analysis, "Taijiquan" was set as the central node, and all related data were classified and organized to systematically analyze patterns and trends within the themes and sub-themes. The coding matrix analysis shows the frequency of references within the four themes. The coding generated reference counts within different categories, as shown in Table 1 and Figure 1. A bar chart of theme nodes was created (see Figure 1). The chart reflects the number of references for each participant across the four main themes and compares the frequency of discussions under different nodes. The X-axis represents the different interviewees (labeled A to G), and the Y-axis shows the number of reference points in each theme, ranging from 0 to 50.

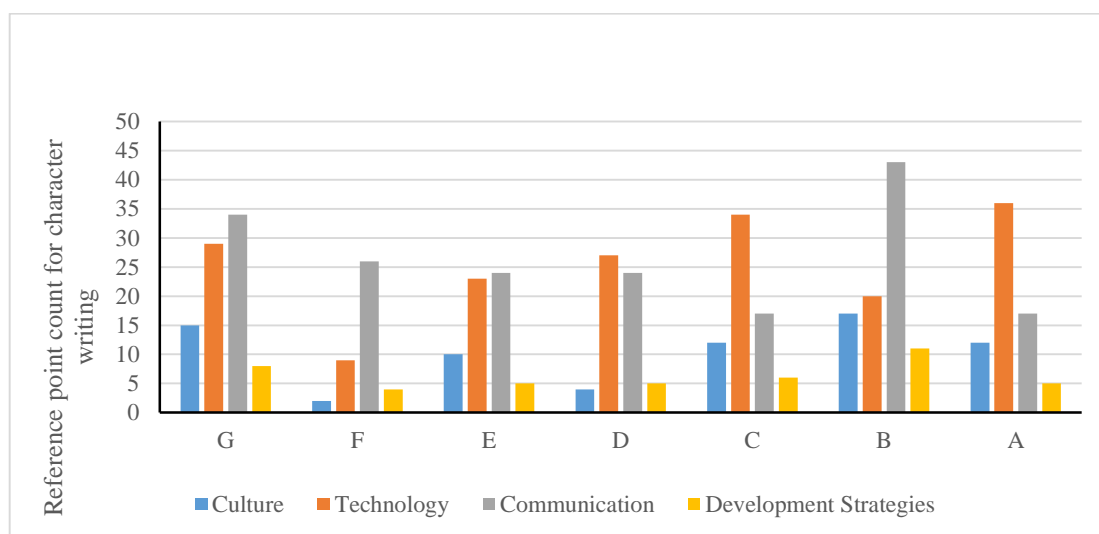


Figure 1: Histogram of the number of thematic nodes

Additionally, Table 2 presents the statistical summary of the reference counts for each thematic node, as detailed below:

Table 2: Cultural theme node count

Expert.	Culture	Technology	Communication	Development Strategies
G	15	29	34	8
F	2	9	26	4
E	10	23	24	5
D	4	27	24	5
C	12	34	17	6
B	17	20	43	11
A	12	36	17	5

Table 2 Provides the specific number of cultural theme nodes mentioned by each interviewee. The statistical results in Table 2 show that discussions related to the cultural theme had relatively fewer reference points, particularly in node F with only 2 references. This suggests considerable room for further exploration in discussions related to culture, possibly because the respondents placed greater emphasis on the technical aspects. In the technical theme, nodes C and A stood out, with 34 and 36 references, respectively, indicating that the technical aspects are areas of high interest and focus for the respondents.

In the Communication theme, participant B made the most significant contribution, with 43 references, reflecting their deep insights into the methods and strategies for disseminating Taijiquan within society. Regarding the Development Strategies theme, although all experts offered perspectives on the future growth of Taijiquan, participant B provided notably extensive input. Participant B holds a forward-looking perspective on the long-term planning and strategic development of Taijiquan, underscoring their strong vision for the future of the practice.

Cultural

From the analysis in Table 2, Expert A views Tai Chi as more than a martial art, describing it as "a way of cultivating one's character." This suggests Tai Chi encompasses not only physical movements but also rich cultural and philosophical dimensions, aiding practitioners in maintaining mental peace and

balance amid the pressures of modern life. Expert C supports this view, highlighting Tai Chi's role in personal development and social harmony. In today's fast-paced and high-pressure society, Tai Chi can help individuals relax, enhance patience, and manage emotions effectively.

In Malaysia, Taijiquan transmission primarily relies on the traditional master-apprentice system, which has played a critical role in preserving its spirit and techniques. Expert E emphasizes, "The master-apprentice relationship is the core of Taijiquan culture and a vital means of preserving its spirit." Nonetheless, as societal demands evolve, so must the methods of transmission. Interviewee B argues the integration of modern communication tools, such as social media and public performances, could broaden Taijiquan's influence and attract younger generations. Expert C adds that promoting Taijiquan culture more widely will enhance public understanding of Chinese cultural heritage.

Taijiquan's development in Malaysia reflects multiculturalism and inclusivity. Interviewee D highlights, "The development of Taijiquan in Malaysia reflects the characteristics of multiculturalism and inclusivity." This integration has enhanced Taijiquan's appeal and established it as a cultural bridge fostering social cohesion across different ethnic and cultural groups.

Despite this progress, several challenges remain. Expert A points to differences in cultural perceptions, societal influences, and the lack of policy support as key obstacles to Taijiquan's wider dissemination. Among younger generations, Tai Chi is often perceived as too slow to fit modern, fast-paced lifestyles. Expert F stresses the importance of governmental support in promoting Taijiquan, suggesting its inclusion in school sports curricula would enhance its transmission and popularization.

In conclusion, while the traditional master-apprentice model remains central to Taijiquan's transmission in Malaysia, modernization is necessary to expand its appeal. With innovative communication strategies and policy support, Taijiquan can thrive in Malaysia's multicultural society, fostering social harmony and cultural integration.

Technology

The technical development of Taijiquan in Malaysia reflects both the inheritance of traditional martial arts skills and the establishment of a more systematic and diversified technical system through modern teaching and promotional methods. By examining teaching techniques, the coexistence of traditional and competitive Taijiquan, the diversity of technical schools, and the focus on physical and mental development, we can better understand the unique trajectory of Taijiquan's growth in Malaysia.

Table 2 highlights the critical role of teaching techniques in transmitting Taijiquan in Malaysia. Learners from diverse age groups and backgrounds are taught through individualized methods, which not only enhance their technical training but also allow them to experience the philosophical essence of Taijiquan. Expert E noted, "Teaching Tai Chi is not just about imparting physical techniques, but about guiding students to regulate their body and mind through Tai Chi principles." This approach ensures that learners integrate Taijiquan philosophy into their lives, improving both health and well-being. Expert B emphasized, "For younger students, I focus on making training engaging and interactive, while for older adults, I emphasize relaxation and breathing techniques." This flexibility in teaching methods is vital for promoting Taijiquan across various demographics.

The coexistence of traditional and competitive Taijiquan is another key feature in Malaysia. Traditional Taijiquan focuses on balancing internal and external cultivation, while competitive Taijiquan emphasizes standardization and aesthetics. Expert C explained, "Traditional Taijiquan emphasizes internal cultivation, while competitive Taijiquan focuses on aesthetics and precision. Both have room for growth in Malaysia." The dual approach preserves Taijiquan's cultural foundation while catering to modern sports competition. Competitive events, such as "push hands" tournaments, have helped standardize Taijiquan, enhancing its entertainment value and practical applications. Expert D commented, "Competitions showcase the competitive and powerful aspects of Taijiquan, raising public awareness and improving practitioners' skills."

Taijiquan in Malaysia also features a diverse range of technical schools, fostering mutual learning among them. Chen-style, Yang-style, and other schools are widely practiced, contributing to the rich technical landscape. Expert D stated, "Taijiquan in Malaysia includes multiple styles such as Chen, Yang, and Wu, each with distinct training methods and technical characteristics. This integration

enriches our understanding of Taijiquan." The coexistence of these styles encourages cross-pollination, creating a more open and inclusive cultural environment for Taijiquan practice.

The holistic nature of Taijiquan's physical and mental development is a distinguishing feature in Malaysia. Taijiquan benefits not only physical health but also emotional regulation and mental well-being. Expert A observed, "Taijiquan is not just exercise; it is a spiritual practice. Through coordinating breathing and movements, practitioners achieve psychological balance." In today's fast-paced society, Taijiquan offers practitioners a way to integrate body and mind, reducing stress and promoting inner peace. Expert E further emphasized, "Taijiquan practice helps people focus, enabling them to detach from daily busyness and improve both physical and mental health."

The development of Taijiquan in Malaysia reflects a blend of traditional inheritance and modern innovation. Systematic teaching, the integration of multiple styles, and an emphasis on both physical and mental well-being contribute to its growth. The insights from experts suggest that Taijiquan in Malaysia maintains the purity of traditional techniques while expanding its influence through modern promotional methods and competitive events. The mutual learning between different styles enriches the technical diversity of Taijiquan, and the focus on holistic development has made it an important practice for health and self-cultivation.

As modern society increasingly values both physical and mental well-being, Taijiquan's technical attributes continue to attract new learners. Whether through teaching methods, competitive events, or the diversity of styles, Taijiquan demonstrates a strong ability to adapt and thrive. With increased societal understanding and support, Taijiquan's cultural and technical development in Malaysia is positioned for broader growth and promotion in the future.

Communication

Table 2 emphasizes the pivotal role of teaching techniques in the dissemination of Taijiquan in Malaysia. The technical development of Taijiquan in the country reflects not only the inheritance of traditional martial arts skills but also the establishment of a more systematic and diversified system through modernized teaching and promotional strategies. By analyzing teaching approaches, the coexistence of traditional and competitive Taijiquan, the diversity of technical schools, and the emphasis on physical and mental well-being, a comprehensive understanding of Taijiquan's unique trajectory in Malaysia is achieved.

Learners from diverse age groups and backgrounds are taught through personalized methods that not only enhance their technical abilities but also help them grasp the philosophical essence of Taijiquan. Expert E noted, "Teaching Taijiquan is not just about imparting techniques but also guiding students in regulating their body and mind through its principles." This approach ensures that learners integrate Taijiquan's philosophy into their daily lives, improving both health and overall well-being. Expert B emphasized, "For younger students, training must be interactive and engaging, while for older students, focus shifts to relaxation and breathing techniques." The adaptability of these teaching methods is critical for Taijiquan's promotion across different demographics.

The coexistence of traditional and competitive Taijiquan is another significant aspect of its development in Malaysia. Traditional Taijiquan emphasizes the cultivation of internal and external balance, while competitive Taijiquan prioritizes the precision and aesthetics of movements. As Expert C observed, "Traditional Taijiquan focuses on internal cultivation, whereas competitive Taijiquan emphasizes aesthetics and precision. Both have significant potential for growth in Malaysia." This dual aspect preserves Taijiquan's cultural foundation while addressing modern competitive demands. Events such as "push hands" competitions have introduced standardized systems that enhance the entertainment value and technical application of Taijiquan. Expert D remarked, "Competitions showcase the power and competitive nature of Taijiquan, raising public awareness and improving participants' skills."

Malaysia's Taijiquan scene also demonstrates a wide variety of technical schools, encouraging mutual learning among different styles. Chen, Yang, and other styles are widely practiced, enriching the technical landscape. Expert D noted, "Taijiquan in Malaysia includes multiple styles such as Chen, Yang, and Wu, each with its unique methods and characteristics. This integration enhances our understanding of Taijiquan." The coexistence of these schools promotes diversity and inclusivity.

Additionally, the holistic integration of physical and mental development is a defining characteristic of Taijiquan in Malaysia. The practice supports not only physical health but also emotional regulation and psychological well-being. Expert A stated, “Taijiquan is a spiritual practice. Through coordinated breathing and movement, practitioners achieve psychological balance.” In a fast-paced society, Taijiquan provides a way to integrate body and mind, reducing stress and promoting inner peace. Expert E emphasized, “Taijiquan practice helps individuals focus, enabling them to detach from everyday busyness and improve overall health.”

In conclusion, the development of Taijiquan in Malaysia exemplifies the balance between traditional inheritance and modern innovation. Through systematic teaching, the integration of multiple styles, and a focus on physical and mental health, Taijiquan continues to grow. Experts suggest that Taijiquan, while maintaining its traditional purity, has successfully expanded its influence through modern methods and competitive events. With increased societal support, Taijiquan is poised to continue thriving, playing an essential role in promoting health and cultural integration.

Development

The analysis of Table 2 reveals prospects for the future development of Taijiquan in Malaysia, emphasizing the need to address current challenges and expand dissemination within the context of globalization. Expert A noted, “The popularity of Tai Chi in Malaysia will continue to grow,” particularly among middle-aged and elderly populations. Although younger generations currently show limited engagement, innovative promotion and modern elements could attract younger generations in the future. Expert E stressed the importance of evolving with societal changes, stating, “We need to ensure Tai Chi continuously innovates to meet modern needs.”

The integration of technology is seen as essential for expanding Taijiquan’s reach. Expert D highlighted the potential of online courses and social media to attract younger audiences. Instructors are also experimenting with technological tools such as motion tracking and biomechanics to improve training. Expert C noted, “Technology helps students master Taijiquan techniques more quickly and accurately,” blending tradition with innovation to enhance both teaching and understanding.

Culturally, Taijiquan serves as a bridge in Malaysia’s multicultural society, promoting exchange and cooperation. Expert B stated, “Taijiquan promotes cultural exchange between ethnic groups through cultural dissemination.” Additionally, Taijiquan’s internationalization is crucial for its growth. Expert E emphasized the role of international competitions and exchanges in promoting Taijiquan globally, allowing Malaysian practitioners to engage with the world. As part of UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage, Taijiquan’s cultural and health benefits is expected to gain further global recognition.

In conclusion, Taijiquan’s future in Malaysia hinges on technological innovation, cultural integration, and international promotion. By adapting to modern societal needs and leveraging global platforms, Taijiquan can expand its influence, serving as a tool for health promotion, cultural exchange, and social cohesion.

DISCUSSIONS

The development of Taijiquan in Malaysia has been shaped by the integration of cultural heritage, technological advancements, innovative dissemination methods, and future prospects. These elements collectively contribute to its sustained influence and promising growth in the region. As a martial art rich in cultural significance, Taijiquan not only holds a prominent position within the local martial arts community but has also gradually permeated daily life, social interactions, and cross-cultural exchanges due to its unique cultural and health values (Xiujie, Jennings & Brown, 2022).

From a cultural perspective, Taijiquan is not merely a fitness practice but a means of self-cultivation and mental-physical balance. Numerous studies have examined Taijiquan’s effects on various physiological and psychological variables across different populations, especially among patients, the elderly, and individuals with obesity, demonstrating its positive role in health interventions

(Qi, Soh, Mohd Nasiruddin & Mai, 2022). In Malaysia, Taijiquan practitioners benefit physically and mentally, achieving inner peace and spiritual growth through practice. Respondents frequently emphasized Taijiquan's role as a representative of Chinese traditional culture in Malaysia's multicultural environment, where it fosters cultural exchange and enhances community cohesion. Through these cultural practices, Taijiquan serves as a bridge connecting individuals and groups from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Technically, Taijiquan practice emphasizes both internal and external cultivation, with equal focus on physical movements and mental principles. The diversity of Taijiquan schools in Malaysia, ranging from traditional forms such as Chen and Yang styles to newer forms adapted for competitive environments, enriches the technical depth of Taijiquan (Guo, Qiu & Liu, 2014). This blending of traditional and modern elements allows Malaysian practitioners to grasp Taijiquan techniques from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, innovations in teaching methods have been key drivers of technical advancement. By integrating modern technologies, such as motion tracking and biomechanical analysis, Taijiquan instruction has become more systematic and precise, enhancing the learning efficiency of students and making technique dissemination more effective. For example, a 2003 study introduced a prototype of a full-body Taijiquan training program incorporating wireless virtual reality systems to enhance the teaching experience (Chua, Crivella, Daly, Hu, Schaaf, Ventura & Pausch, 2003).

The diversification of dissemination methods has opened new possibilities for promoting Taijiquan in Malaysia. Traditional offline channels, such as community activities, martial arts competitions, and group practice, remain crucial for attracting middle-aged and elderly populations. However, modern digital dissemination, particularly through social media, has significantly expanded Taijiquan's reach, especially among younger generations. Through instructional videos, online courses, and live streaming, Taijiquan has transcended geographical and temporal boundaries, reaching more potential practitioners. Nonetheless, certain obstacles persist in its dissemination, including the limited interest among younger individuals and insufficient government and societal support. As technology evolves and dissemination strategies are refined, these challenges are expected to be addressed.

Looking ahead, the prospects for promoting Taijiquan in Malaysia and globally are bright. First, the health benefits of Taijiquan have been validated by numerous scientific studies, providing a solid theoretical foundation for its promotion, particularly in elderly health maintenance and mental health improvement. For instance, reviews of research on Taijiquan have shown significant benefits in improving balance, mental health, and managing chronic diseases (Yang, Sabag, Hao, Zhang, Jia, Dai & Bensoussan, 2021). Additionally, the acceleration of globalization presents new opportunities for Taijiquan's international development. Through international competitions and cultural exchange activities, Malaysian Taijiquan practitioners can not only showcase their skills but also learn from and adapt techniques from other countries. This cross-cultural interaction will further enhance Taijiquan's global influence.

In summary, the development of Taijiquan in Malaysia is rooted in a strong cultural foundation and demonstrates immense potential through technological innovation, the application of modern dissemination methods, and future international promotion. Despite certain challenges, Taijiquan will continue to grow and spread in Malaysia and beyond, driven by its unique cultural value, health benefits, and social impact. It will remain an important force for connecting cultures, strengthening social cohesion, and promoting health worldwide.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the following policy recommendations are proposed: The government and relevant institutions should enhance support for Taijiquan cultural activities and educational programs, particularly targeting younger generations. Professional Taijiquan organizations should be encouraged to organize international exchange activities to foster global understanding through cross-cultural collaboration. Additionally, the integration of Taijiquan into school physical education curricula is recommended, highlighting its physical and mental health benefits. Professional training for teachers should also be provided to ensure proper instruction.

The research shows that Taijiquan in Malaysia has evolved from traditional to modern practices, adapting to contemporary needs through technological innovations and updated teaching methods. Despite challenges in engaging younger people, virtual courses and technological tools are gradually driving Taijiquan towards digitization. Further use of these innovations is recommended to attract younger generations and improve teaching efficiency. Moreover, international competitions and cross-cultural exchanges are crucial to enhancing Malaysia's global influence within the Taijiquan community.

Looking forward, Taijiquan's development in Malaysia should extend beyond preserving local heritage to fostering global influence through international cooperation. As a cross-cultural fitness practice, Taijiquan can promote health, social cohesion, and global cultural exchange. Future research should expand the sample to include diverse practitioners and conduct quantitative studies on its social health impact. Additionally, cross-cultural comparative studies, particularly in non-Asian contexts, can offer valuable insights for global promotion and further research.

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