

Contestants give a street dance performance with high emotion on the TV show "Street Dance of China." — Photos/Ti Gong

Zhao Peng, a Shandong native, and Xiao Ao, originally from Anhui Province. Both were drawn to street dancing by the popularity of the genre in South Korea. The three friends have a common goal to create their own styles of dancing.

"My dancing is getting better and better," Zhao said. "I have developed my own style, which has to be perfected before others copy it."

Shanghai has become a popular venue for street dancers from abroad. Christian Wu, a Chinese-American dancer from California, came to the city to continue his dancing career.

"It was definitely intimidating in the beginning," he said. "Although I speak Chinese, I can't read it. Everything was so new to me and there was so much to learn. But people were helpful to me."

Wu, now a dancing teacher at a school called BodySoul, has been dancing for 12 years. He said he was first drawn to street dancing by the US TV show "America's Best Dance Crew."

"I watched the show and fell in love with a group called Jabbawockeez," he said. "They wear white masks, and I just love their style. So I started learning their choreography.

When I showed it to my friends, they said, 'Man, it's so cool!'"

But Wu realized he needed to move beyond mimicking and began to develop his own style. He has put in long, hard hours of training, and along the way, learned how to teach other people to dance.

He likened street dancing with "telling a story."

"If you read a book, you see the story through your own eyes," he explained. "If you hear a song, you are hearing it with your ears. I think dancing is putting the two together. You are hearing a story in the music, and you're seeing someone do a physical version of it."

Currently, the two largest local dancing studio chains are 5km and BodySoul. BodySoul has 14 branches in Shanghai, and 5km has 17 branches across the Yangtze River Delta region. They both provide street dancing classes and training in other variations such as Bounce and Dos Hop.

Those attending the classes include students, office workers and housewives.

### Fast movement

China's currently strongest dance style is called "locking."

It's a style of hip-hop based

on the idea of "locking," or freezing, a fast movement in a certain position and holding it for a short time, then resuming the same speed as before.

Dancer Xiao Jie won the locking world championship in 2019 at Juste Debout, an international street dance competition in France, TV director Lu said.

Chinese dancers have their own characteristics, he explained. They are good at expressing the theme of their work and bringing imagination to their steps.

While the influence of Japanese and Korean genres run deep, Chinese street dancers have evolved their own style of street dancing. It doesn't mean that the dancers have to wear national costumes, dance to the music of traditional instruments or mimic the movements of folk dancing, Lu said.

"In our program, we see many dancers expressing Chinese-style content with their own dance styles," Lu said. "The most important feature of street dancing is integration, which brings new ideas, no matter whether its elements are classical dance, folk dance or modern dance."

His TV show, in its fourth season, concluded in October.

It featured competitions with dancers from around the world. On YouTube, the show is subtitled in nine languages and has become a hot search on Twitter in Thailand, the Philippines and other countries.

"For dancers, inspiration comes from many sources — a song, a painting or a scene from life," Lu told Shanghai Daily. "The more things foreign dancers experience, the more inspiration they find. They are deeply interested in cultures that they have never been exposed to before."

The dance work "Poems," by Ma Xiaolong and Japanese dancer Acky, portrays a street-sweeping monk skilled in martial arts. Verses by the ancient poet Li Bai figure in the work.

Taiwanese dancer Zhang Zhanrong, 41, who started dancing at 18 and has been in Shanghai since 2016, said the "collision" of different culture creates new ideas for dance.

While Shanghai offers great opportunities for young dancers, Lu noted that its relatively high cost of living can be a drawback for out-of-towners. Therefore, young dancers who want to gain a foothold here must have great determination and understand that achieving success can take time.

## The History of

# Street Dancing in China

1984 ◀ "Breakin'"



The American movie introduced street dancing to young Chinese.

1988 ◀ "Rock Kids"



The style and moves of breakdancing are portrayed in the film, directed by Chinese filmmaker Tian Zhuangzhuang and starred dancer Tao Jin.

1980s ◀ Michael Jackson



Many young Chinese imitated Jackson's moves.

1990s



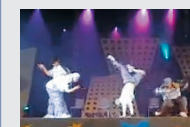
The boom of hip-hop culture hits Taiwan.

Mid-1990s



Street dancing was popular in three Chinese cities: Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou.

2003



The first national street dancing competition organized by CCTV.

2018



Many variety shows in the field of street dancing aired, including "Street Dance of China" and "Hot-blood Dance Crew."