

# UMD's Tianyi aims to breakdown cultural barriers through dancing

In their first major official showcase, University of Maryland's Tianyi Dance Team performed at Hoff Theatre April 5. More than 400 attendees witnessed a variety of performances such as Chinese ethnic dances, martial arts and hip-hop.

Tianyi literally means "art from Heaven." The dances have roots that are both spiritually and culturally significant in China.

The large turnout can be attributed to a sound advertising campaign. "I'm very happy with the turnout," said Takako Nishimura, a senior computer science and math major and member of Tianyi. "We put up posters in Chinese grocery stores and promoted on Facebook."

The 19-member dance group, founded in 2012, is comprised of "students who express their passion for Chinese culture through traditional Chinese dance," according to the group's [website](#). Their main goal is to break down cross-cultural barriers through the powerful language of dance.

Nishimura said most of the setup for the show was done by the group themselves. They started preparations in early November. "The past few months have been entirely dance," said Nishimura.

The first performance of the night was "Flying Kites," a Han-ethnic dance that pays homage to the yearly kite festivals in China. These festivals encourage artisans to create intricate, silk patterns in the sky.

Other ethnic dances included the Dai, Tibetan, Uyghur, Mongolian and Miao traditions.

The highlight of the night was the [TerpWushu](#) ("military art") performance. The martial arts group dazzled the audience with high kicks and acrobatics and their use of traditional Chinese weapons.

The group competes regularly at competitions in the area. "We were preparing our group sets for an upcoming competition," said Stephen Leung, a junior

marketing major and treasurer of TerpWushu. The group used the showcase as another way to tune up their skills before their next competition.

The near-capacity crowd remained energetic throughout the evening.

“The show was great,” said Abi Iluyomade, a junior public health major. “I loved that they combined Chinese culture and dance.”

Some attendees were familiar with the cultural significance of the dances.

“I know about some of the minority groups that inspired the dances about the Miao and the Dai,” said Brendan Cone, a senior Chinese and Japanese major.