Oral History of Inheritor of Light Songs in Gongxian County

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Abstract—Gongxian County is a multi-ethnic area. The local "lights" song has a long history. It is a song having storyline and is mainly sung in traditional festivals with songs with storyline. The song is dominated by singing, accompanied by musical instruments and dance. The performance of "lights" songs is blended with local customs, with a wide range of subjects, novel forms of performance, and great local characteristics. The article takes the Han nationality's "lights" songs in the Gongxian area as the research object, and explores the customs, origins, classification, song singing, artistic features, etc. of the "singing lights", which has important inheritance significance for studying the development of local music culture.

Keywords—Gongxian; light; singing; inheritance and protection

I. INTRODUCTION

According to "Gongxian County Annals" (Old Records) in Qing dynasty Guangxu period, "Gong County" was originally the place where the ancient southwestern Yi was conquered. After Qin destroyed Kaiming, the Bo nationality lived here, and then it was called the Bo State," and Gongxian County in Yibin, Sichuan was degraded from state into county in the fourth year of Hongwu in the Ming Dynasty (1371), which is 600-odd years ago. Qin and the early Han Dynasty were southwestern Yi, and they were the land of ethnic minorities. Since the beginning of the Han Dynasty, they have been under the jurisdiction of the Central Dynasty. Hanwu emperor established Nanguang County in the sixth year of Jianyaun (135 years). In the fifth year of the Yuan Dynasty (139 years), the county governor moved from the vicinity of Zunyi, Guizhou Province, to Fujiaba, now Daigong County. Since then, the number of Han Chinese who moved in has increased. In the second year of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, Li Shi, the last emperor of the Han Dynasty, introduced the people from the ancestral hall into the Sichuan. The number of monks in Gongxian County also increased greatly. During the Han Dynasty Emperor Wu period (548), a large ethnic minority, Lexing, occupied Ningzhou. Then, the Gongxian County was abandoned, and then there were many "Wu Man" (also called Bo) enter Gongxian County. In the Song Dynasty, the Miao people slowly moved in and be called "Nan Guang Man". In this way, Gongxian became a place where Han, Miao, Yi, and Liao lived together. In the Ming Dynasty, there was a policy of "combating Man people", and later forced to implement the policy of national harmony, so some ethnic groups moved into other places, and some were integrated into other ethnic groups. At this time, the Miao nationality moved in from the Wenshan, Mangbu, Wumen, and Zhaxi in Yunnan Province and western Guizhou provinces. After that, the "Gongxian County" became the home of the Han and Miao ancestors. The population of Han people is large, and the total population of the county was 311,428. The Han population accounts for 298,444. The land has rich resources and rich terrain, and the farmland is mainly planted with silk, hemp and tea. The mine is mainly coal, sulfur, phosphorus and iron. The hardworking and simple people of Gongxian lived and prospered here and established their homes. The multi-ethnic cultures blended with each other, making the Han nationality music culture one of the unique regional music cultures while extracting the local minority music - lights tune songs in Gongxian County.

This article selects the Han nationality "lights" songs in the Gongxian area as the research object, combined with the current situation, customs, singing, etc. of the development of the songs in the Gongxian area, and interviewed several local folk songs inheritors, and went deep into the field to collect lights songs. During this period, the author actively participated in relevant performances and competitions, conducted research and investigations, recorded effective information by means of audio and video recording, investigated the origins and customs of local lighting songs in Gongxian County, made exploration about song classification, song singing and artistic features, which not only help audience understand the local music culture, but also to expand the horizon to a certain extent, so as to better serve the society.

II. HAN NATIONALITY'S "LIGHT SONGS" AND "CUSTOMS OF PLAYING LIGHTS" IN GONGXIAN AREA

A. The Origin of Han People's "Light Songs" in Gongxian County

The "lights" song is a general term for songs and dances that are sung in traditional festivals. Generally, during the Spring Festival and Lantern Festival (light festival), local civic organizations knocked on the drums in the form of "playing" lion lights, dragon lights, cattle lights, lights, lanterns, and walked around the streets and towns. They hit the red stickers one by one to invite the house owners to
watch the singing of the songs when they are watching the lights. There are mainly traditional folk activities such as "playing the car", "playing the cow" and "playing flowers" in the county. The songs sung in these folk activities are called "lights songs" and are folk music with local characteristics. The local "lights" songs can be divided into: "car light", "bull light", "flower light" according to the form of expression and singing content. These various "lights" songs can not only reflect the local folk customs, also reflect the social background of local people's life indirectly, which has certain significance for studying local music, history and culture. Over the years, with the passage of time, the "lights" songs that reflect the local history and culture with local folk customs, have disappeared. There is no definitive conclusion as to the specificity of the custom of tracing the Lantern Festival. According to the locals, there is such a lyric about the origin of "car lights" in the county, as shown in "Fig. 1":

Fig. 1. Li Guiying.

The main content of the story is that Tang Minghuang Li Longji launched the historical "Tanglong Coup" against Princess Taiping in order to win the throne. After hardships, the Wei Group was conquered, and Tang Minghuang won the political power, and when the people of the whole country lived a happy life, Tang Guihuang's most beloved sister, Princess Li Guiying, was unfortunately seriously ill and died after being cured. For this reason, Tang Minghuang and the officials deeply regretted the pity, and the ministers proposed to carry out a memorial service for the mourning of the princess. With the support of the emperor, the ministers ordered the craftsman carefully shape a statue similar to the princess's appearance, carefully crafted a chic float, and ordered the float of the princess statue to slowly walk in the palace with the palace guards, squats, etc.. In order to make the scene more spectacular, the princess's float is often accompanied by beautiful women dressed in singing and dancing, cymbals, drums and other instrumental music playing in the form, expressing their grief and nostalgia towards the early death of princess. Immediately, this new form of practice spread in many prosperous places outside the palace. Many places began to follow the practice of the court. It has suddenly evolved into a national folk entertainment activity. During the Spring Festival every year, local people began to "play the lights" for fun. On the one hand: in order to pray for a good harvest in the New Year for farmers, a prosperous business for the merchants, and a harmony family, there will be a local group go door-to-door to "play the lights" during the day; on the other hand, it is also a joy to "make" the New Year through adding a red sticker to each household. According to the local folk singers, the "leading role" for the light song of the early years: "singing lights" — "Che Yao Gu", "Dou Che Ren", and "Deng Shou" dressed simple. Car and cattle often use rags as a decoration. The person responsible for the lamp (protagonist): "Pa zi jiang", "Che yao gu", "Che xin", "Zuo che jiang", "Fang niu jiang", and their appearances and performances determine whether the car and the cowlight show can succeed. In order to show its important position in singing and performing, its decoration is very unique, enchanting, often wearing more colorful clothes, wearing a corolla, holding a crepe, Pu Fan, etc. During the performance, with the melody of the song, the content combined with the "Dou che ren" to sway the answer, flirt, funny, and each "dou che ren" is decorated with ornaments, make-up, hand-picking the small satin color regardless of men, women and children. They interspersed and twisted before and after the car to activate the atmosphere. The "light head" is also called the "lighting head", they take the portable "horse light" as the team's command to coordinate the scene and remind the beginning and ending of speaking, singing, music, and dancing. The music is mainly accompanied by gongs and drums. After finishing each period, they will beat gongs and drums to rendering the atmosphere. The scene is very spectacular. At this time, the "lights" lifted the "horse light" to indicate the end of the song, and then sang the next paragraph. In the past custom, women are not suitable for appearances outside. Therefore, "pa zi jiang" are often performed by men, a variety of more exaggerated performances are full of the stage, and because some of the
lyrics are more vulgar, often mixed in singing a variety of funny and noisy scenes, women often do not reach the state of male singing.

With the development of society, the custom of "playing lights" has undergone certain changes in the form and content of singing. The venue is no longer limited to the local market. The performance time is not limited to the traditional Lantern Festival. The singing time is also increased from night to day and night. The location of the concert is gradually moving from the street to stage. In the early years, the "playing lights" activity was mainly sung in the villages and towns. In recent years, this custom has often appeared in local weddings, building houses, exams, and birthday. The locals invite folk organizations to perform their performances for lucky and happiness; in terms of singing content, they also include historical allusions, folktales, love between men and women, to promote the spirit of the new era, and to criticize social malpractices. It is worth mentioning that there is an elderly team in the county of Gongxian. In order to continue this interesting form of "playing lights", they insist on rehearsing the lights for the songs. On the one hand, they are very fond of the singing and performance of the songs, and in order to promote the essence, they actively participate in it; on the other hand, under the encouragement and promotion of the local government, the singing and performance of the songs have become a paid performance, and provided a certain guarantee for the inheritance of local music culture. It can be seen that the custom of "playing lights" has begun to receive attention from local governments and civil organizations in recent years.

The custom of "playing lights" has existed since ancient times. According to the literature, it originated in the Han Dynasty and prevailed in the Tang Dynasty. It was developed in the Song Dynasty and spread to the mass people. In the Song Dynasty, Chen Yuanzhang wrote "Sui Shi Guang Ji" and the Southern Song Dynasty Zhou Bida wrote "Pingyuan Xugao" and the "Da Ming Yi Tong Fu" in the Ming Dynasty, the ancient customs of the Lantern Festival and the lanterns were recorded. In the Ming Dynasty, a "Zhuzhi Ci" described this as "the silk surround all avenues and building, the songsingers on every house in the evening of spring. The red tree in front of the building is smashed and turned into a piece of red clouds." The meaning is that it is surrounded by beautiful lights among the wide roads and the gorgeous and beautiful pavilions. The songs are floating to thousands of families and competing for Chunhui. In front of the pavilion, the prosperous lights overlap and the lanterns turn into the red clouds flying in the air. In the Qing Dynasty, a "Zhuzhi Ci" wrote that "the light shed is ten miles long, and half of the silk is half-yellow, since the spring of Yanshan is early, the cold is the moon." The implication is that the ten-inch lamp shed like the light of the stars and the sky, slanting in the air, half like a silk, and half like gauze. It turned out that the spring of Yanshan came early, the first month is still cold, and the pear flower (sparkler) bloomed everywhere. Zhao Junlie's "Yanshan Dengzhu Zhuzhi Ci" wrote: "The riddle is a magical victory over the Heavenly Palace, and it does not hesitate to cherish the treasures and the wine. How many people compete for ecstasy, exaggerate the shortcomings and go all the way." What says here is that the riddle is ingenious and illusory, better than the heavenly palace where the gods live, and does not hesitate to exchange the strange and precious things with the fine wine for answer. Countless talented people compete for the splendid, arguing who is right and wrong in the light market in the hutong. These poems circulating in different eras reflect that the "lights and songs" have an important development process in the development of history. Therefore, the custom of "playing lights" and "watching lights" has been inherited throughout China since ancient times, inheriting and developing, and enjoying a profound cultural heritage.

It's unclear that when the "lights" songs in Gongxian County were originated. When researching the performance of the local "lighting custom" and "lights" songs, it's found that the local lights songs were sung and the custom of "playing lights" is constantly incorporating elements of the new era based on the continuing of the traditional customs of the ancestors. Therefore, to explore the cultural meaning of the "lights" songs is also to look at the local cultural folklore, customs, dialects, etc. from the other side, so that we can more clearly and comprehensively explain its significance. In excavating of the "lights" songs in the Gongxian area, it's obvious that the singing customs of the songs in the Gongxian area harmoniously coexist with that of other areas in China that have the custom of singing lights, such as the singing of "lights" songs in Hunan and Chongqing. They have a common artistic appreciation value, but also have a unique regional characteristic, showing a unique style of singing.

B. Customs of "Playing Lights"

During the annual lunar month, the "playing lights" team will prepare props in advance, look for participants and prepare files. On the one hand, the process of playing lights can be carried out in an orderly manner. On the other hand, there are many songs to be sung in the process of playing the lights. The process is complicated, and there are often many emergency situations. In addition to prepare the corresponding props, "Singing the Light Man" — "Che Yu Gu" also needs to reserve a sufficient catalogue of songs to prevent "coincidence" (referring to not repeating in the concert). What's more, they need to prepare some auspicious and pleasing languages, and it is called four words and eight sentences in the local area. Although the process of singing the lights is extremely impromptu, because the singing lights run through the process of "playing lights", there are so many vocabulary words needed, so it is necessary to prepare different types of lyrics in advance. The songs sung in the process of "playing lights" mostly follow the previous songs. The lyrics are mostly fixed, and the melody has certain rules to be found. There are many impromptu creations. Although the members have been performing in the local area for many years, they are mostly familiar with the whole process and the tracks. However, in order to avoid mistakes during the singing process, it is still necessary to rehearse the tune, lyrics and songs.
The performance time of the Han nationality "lights" songs in the Jixian area is generally held for about ten days, usually called the "lighting prep stage" during the Lunar New Year. Civil organizations began to prepare props in advance, such as floats, colored cows, lanterns, colored suits, backs, crepe, fans, accompaniment instruments, etc., and found a "car core" also known as "Panzi": four Drummers, teasers, a lamp, etc., the number of actors is not fixed. Then they went to the main house to set up a "single post", "single post" is divided into two situations: First, if there is a literate person in the team, they can write a good post to the main house, and the second: if there is no suitable one to write a post in the lamp organization, then they can only ask the door to door. Why do so? The local custom of playing lights has an unwritten rule that "there can be missed village, but never missed household", which means that in the process of playing the lights, it is better to miss a certain village without missing a certain family. There is such a saying in the locality: If the person receiving the post does not refuse the play, but the team that plays the lights did not go, the locals think this is a contemptuous act. The lights team cannot skip one house unless the main family refuses the play. Of course, not everyone in the local area can greet the team that plays the lights. Generally, people who receive a single post usually have the following conditions: the main house has a spacious yard, and it is necessary to have the conditions to entertain the members and audience, so that the house can entertain everyone to eat some small dishes and drink some wine after playing the lights at night.

Then enter the "playing lights" stage, the time to play the lights can be divided into the following: from the second day of first month to the fifteenth day of the first month, from the fifth day of the first month to the eighteenth day of the first month, the latest is from the thirteenth day of the first month to the 22th day of the first month. On the day of the "playing lights", the main house cleaned the courtyard early, and placed a candle at the door of the hall to prepare a "red sticker" to wait at home. The team that plays the lights beats the drums all the way. At this time, a lot of onlookers will gather with a burst of noise. When they arrive at the home, they will hear the sound of drums, and the main house will not open the door immediately. At this time, "Panzi jiang" or "fang niu jiang" began to sing the light at the door of the main house. The main family did not open the door first. At this time, the drummer began to knock on the drums, causing everyone to laugh. At this time, the person of the main lamp "Che Yao Gu" or "Pa Zi jiang" began to rap the light, as shown in "Fig. 2":

Spectrum 1-2:

![Spectrum 1-2](image-url)

Fig. 2. Twelve flowers.

This "Twelve Flowers" has a total of twelve lyrics, which are longer for singing. The "Che Yao Gu" is responsible for singing the most wonderful part, "Drums" echoed in a loud noise, and then the "lights" mentioned "Ma Lan" prompts the end of the singing, at this time the singing, drums, and help voices ended here. If the main house still does not open the door, then the "Pazi" will start singing songs again, and telling how difficult life is to "sing a lampman": such as "days are sunny, there are many ways to live. Ma Lanxuan put aside the pot, picked up the litre to get the rice, and asked the in-laws how much to get. Yesterday, there were many people and I got three liters of rice, squatting on the drums, drums relying on the shackles, and the daughter-in-law was dependent on the in-laws. Only the people who played the
lights had no support. Today, there are fewer than two liters.” At this time, the masses began to squat, and the main family could not stand the "Panzi’s" words. Then they opened the door and let the accompanying people and the lantern team enters the main courtyard. After entering the courtyard, they stood in front of the main entrance of the main house and started to sing the light. When the main family was happy, they began to type and let everyone guess the word--the local guessing game. At this time, a man in the "hands-on" and the "sister-in-the-shoulder" sang to each other as lovers. The scene, question and answer, as shown in “Fig. 3”, at this time, the onlookers who love to squat often help during this period, making the sound of the voice, the drums and the singing sound mixed together, the scene is lively and extraordinary.

Spectrum 1-3:

Fig. 3. Guessing words.

But if everyone can’t guess the answer, everyone has to admit defeat, using four sentences of words: "The first month, the first month, and the main house tonight to put a riddle to pick up the lights. We can’t guess on a few occasions, but we also hope that the main family will come out and break the four sentences.” At this time, the main family will give an answer. This is a riddle in the house, as well as a house riddle. If a team of lights has arrived at the door, the main house is not opening the door. There is a slogan in the door: “In the first month, it is the New Year, and the doorman listens to the reason. Do you know when Confucius is born?” Outside the door: If you don’t guess the right answer, the person in the main house will not speak. The "singer" will continue to guess until the main house is opened and the door will be connected. This is "the process of picking up the lights.” In the process of "lighting up", if the "playing lights" and "playing" are in the process of development, the main family will greet the tea to entertain. After setting up the tea, one of the main family came out to meet the lamp head for a few words, mainly to see "che yao gu". At this time, the "singer" will sing such a light word "Panzijiang was very good-looking, and the man dressed up as a girl." The enchanting dance step instigates group. Everything is cute. When you see it, you will laugh. Thank the Lord for bringing love, and worshiping Wuwu to take care of your money.” At this time, the main family will put the red color prepared in advance to the "che yao gu", in order to express gratitude to the main family, then the "singer" will sing a few words to express their gratitude (see "Fig. 4"): 

Spectrum 1-4:

Fig. 4. Thanks for your tea.
If you encounter a temple on the road of "playing lights", according to the local regulations of "leaking the village without leaking the house", they must go and check whether there is a host and incense in the room. If yes, they have to go to visit the shrine, and sing locally-famous "Bai Xiang Tune", as shown in "Fig. 5":

![Fig. 5. Praying.](image)

What if they encounter two teams of "playing lights" on the road and appear in the same room? According to local customs, it is necessary to decide which one to stay through the "bucket light" at this time. The so-called "bucket light" is also called "comic light". That is to say, deciding the winner by the number and content of the songs. The "bucket light" is essentially the consideration of the overall quality of the "playing lights" team. After some competition, the winners of the songs are left to sing and the loser leave to go to other homes. Of course, if the "bucket light" cannot determine the outcome, then the main family can only mediate. At this time, the main family said: "Hey, the drums are heavy, and the two teams are battling tonight. The two have their own ability, and their singers have talents. You have sung a long time, I cannot tell the difference, and several households are still waiting, waiting for you to play the lights. It is recommended that the two splashes pause and find another time to battle. How do you say about my suggestion?" At this time, after the main house sent the lights, the two teams went to different home, and at this time, the awkwardness of the bucket lights was solved. There are many awkward situations when playing the lights. For example, if there are two "sealings" (red envelopes) on the incense case of the main house, the "singer" should not take both. This is the meaning of the main family asking you to "give money." They can only take one of them to reward the lamp driver. At this time, the other one must be picked up by the lampman and returned to the owner's house with hands, meaning sending money, and sending good luck. At this time, for the wishes and gratitude of the main family, there will be many flattering words.

After the main house receiving the "lights", it is time to end, and the end time varies. In the local area, there is always a saying that "if the first month is not finished, the year is not over", so the time for "closing the lights" can be early, can be late. Usually the end time is around fifteenth of the first month of each year. There is a process of burning the lights when the lights are turned off. After the "playing lights" is over, all the props will be burned out, meaning "returning the old and welcoming the new, all things are good!" The locals have such a special emphasis on the burning lamps. When the lights are burned, the team will ride the fire with the onlookers, sing the auspicious lights, and pray in the heat of the next year. So the whole process is very lively and interesting.

C. "Light" Songs in Gongxian Area

The "lights songs" in the Gongxian area refers to singing songs with story plots and characters in the process of "playing lights". The local "light songs" are in line with local customs and integrate local music culture to form local "Lights songs" unique in artistic features and musical forms; their singing objects are fixed, tuned, tunes are similar, melody is smooth, and lyrics are rich. In the form of music, according to the different forms of song performance, the song is called "the car light", the song sung in the lantern performance is called "the lantern", and the song sung in the cow lamp performance is called "the cow light"; this kind of singing are common in the local area, and different forms of tracks and content are performed according to the different forms of performance. With the advancement of the times, these songs, which are passed down by word of mouth, have undergone great changes in the places, forms, and singing contents of "playing lights". Their exploration has important historical inheritance significance for studying local music.

III. CONCLUSION

Gongxian County is located in Yibin City, Sichuan Province. It has a superior geographical environment and abundant resources. It has always been known as a settlement of ethnic minorities. The multi-ethnic people have long lived here to form different cultural customs. In the long river of history, the people of all ethnic groups in the county have been adhering to their own traditional culture. The characteristics of diversified development of music culture in Gongxian County are developed. However, with the development of society, these traditional "playing lights" customs and songs sung in the process of playing the lights are slowly being overwhelmed, many seniors who sang the "lights" song has slowly passed away, so the research on this has certain practical significance:

There have always been "Bo people" living in the county, and the powerful "Bo people" have flourished here, leaving much precious cultural wealth influential to this day. In addition, the county has always been a place where ethnic
minorities live together, so the local Han people’s “lights” song is combined with these rich historical cultures to form the local "lights" songs with unique singing style and local characteristics.

The local government of Gongxian County attaches great importance to the popularization of local folk music culture, and puts forward the call of "passing on and popularizing national folk culture and enhancing the influence of local culture", and actively carrying out various "local folklore" cultural performances and encouraging local folk music to invest in the collection of music materials and music creation. In order to better popularize the "lights" songs, the government funded the establishment of folk song training classes, and actively carried out folk songs in some schools, which plays an important role in exploring the historical life of local people and promoting the Han nationality lamp songs.

The lamp songs of the Han nationality in Gongxian County are the "witnesses" of the development of local history and culture. The music is baptized and edified by time. The text of the song is in line with the status quo of social development. It has certain artistic appreciation value. With novel singing form and unique vocal, its rich artistic features can be widely used and learned.

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