The Formation of Modern Sichuan Opera Sound Tunes Music

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Abstract. The Sichuan opera music which we see now is a synthesis of local opera art formed at the beginning of the 20th century, belonging to "modern Sichuan opera music," which is essentially different from the "Sichuan tune" and "Sichuan opera" before the 20th century. In fact, at the end of the 1930s, there was no proper term for "Sichuan opera," only "Sichuan tune," "Sichuan clapper" and other appellations of single tune, which did not have the significance of drama. Modern Sichuan opera music has come into being under the influence of "Drama Improvement" movement in the early 20th century directly because of the establishment of "Sanqing Club."

The Basis of Modern Sichuan Opera Sound Tunes Music Form

In the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, the class contradictions and ethnic contradictions in Sichuan were intricate and fierce, in which the long-term melee between the Ming army, the Qing army, the peasant insurgents and the landlords led to the collapse of the Dujiangyan Irrigation System, and floods, droughts, plagues and famines occurred in successive years. According to The History of Sichuan in the Qing Dynasty which is compiled by Wang gang, the population of Sichuan province in the 18th year of Qing dynasty when Emperor Shun Zhi ruled over the country was only 300,000 to 500,000, equivalent to 2.6% of the 6th year in Wanli period of Ming dynasty. The surviving "remains" were called "indigenous people" during the Qian long and Jiaqing period, which not only seriously damaged Sichuan's politics and economy, but also caused great differences in social life from the central and eastern regions. For example, at that time, the "Ming Legend," which was indispensable in the cultural life of the domestic people, did not see any records circulating in Sichuan. Regarding the relevant information about Sichuan opera art, the only documents that can be seen at present are the “Sichuan opera” that Chen Yu saw in Nanjing and the original “Duan Gong drama” that Sichuanese prayed for from Buddha. During this period, Sichuan opera art was basically in a blank state.

The continuation of the Sichuan opera art proceeded after the unification of the Qing Dynasty where the imperial court brought the opportunity of “Immigrants filling Sichuan” because of the lack of manpower and the barren fields in Sichuan. According to relevant statistics, during the 70 years from the 14th year of Emperor Qianlong (1749) to the 24th year of Emperor Jiaqing (1819), the population of Sichuan increased from more than 2.5 million to 25.6 million, and to the 30th year of Daoguang (1850), the Sichuan whose population exceeded Jiangsu’s has become the leading province in the country. Besides from 1840 to 1911, the population of Sichuan climbed from 26 million to 43.44 million, holding the lead all the time. Once Tong shiying in The preface Chengdu of Kangxi said: "Among hundreds of Qin, Jin (Shanxi), Chu, Yuzhong (the center of Henan), indigenous people are only one or two people." It was also said among folks that there are a lot of Chu people in Sichuan and Sichuanese is either Qin or Chu. Therefore, Sichuan in the Qing Dynasty was indeed an “immigration province.”

The changes in the main body of Sichuan have changed the original humanistic tradition of Sichuan. Immigrants and indigenous people live in all parts of the provinces and regions, maintaining the characteristics of "integration of all kinds of customs." In the first volume of The General annals of Sichuan which was compiled in Yongzheng period, it said that there are many indigenous people in Chengdu during the period of Kangxi and Yongzheng and also great differences existing in trade, customs and temperament between Chengdu and other regions such as
Hunan, Hubei, Shanxi, Jiangxi, Guangdong, etc. The annals of Daxian County in Jiaqing period showed that except soldiers, there are rare indigenous people with still the higher rate of people who occupy this place, compared with Shaanxi, Hunan, Hubei and Jiangxi. In the meantime, because the trade and business were carried out in the five parties, the integration of traditions and customs is inevitable. The annals of Nanchong County recorded that since the beginning of the country, there were very few indigenous people and most of them immigrated from Wu, Chu, Min, Guangdong, Yunnan, Guizhou, Shanxi, and Gansu where the marriage and funeral sacrifices were based on the their own customs and cannot be assimilated, from which the Sichuan residents at that time inherited the customs of the originality in terms of sacrifices, weddings and funerals, language, food, clothing, etc. and passed on and maintained through the activities of the hall. During the Qianlong period, there was a situation appeared in Sichuan that “the guild hall was luxurious” with great number of halls and the luxury of decoration, which came the top in the country. In the halls, people greet the gods, gather together in parties, praise the chivalrous deed, sing the nostalgia, do regularly rituals, act in operas and repay Buddha with money, to form a cultural circle based on the guild hall and connected by nostalgia and customs. This diversified and compatible situation continued until the middle and later period of Qing Dynasty.

In the 19th century, due to the "Immigration filling Sichuan and Five parties living together," the structure of the residents in Sichuan Province was gradually stabilized, while the opera arts of Kunshan, Yiyang, Huqin and Qinxiang followed the immigrants from all directions into Sichuan, presenting a situation of mixed tunes and flamboyant competitions, which has brought prosperity to the vacant Sichuan opera art, and has presented the perennial mass activities and competitions about repaying Buddha with money in the halls or temples. In Sichuan, the guild halls or general temples, ancestral halls, palaces and Daoist temples were mostly enshrined by Buddha or sages of the original worship of the inhabitants, and the "drama stage" and "entertainment buildings" built next to each other by the residents provided dramas during the worship. Every time such a building was newly completed, an "opening" ceremony of Buddha would be held, and the hometown troupes would be invited to "step on the stage" and perform a Buddha-repaying performance. Every year, such as in spring sacrifices, autumn sacrifices, the birthdays of Buddha and festivals, we also invite hometown troupes to perform. Chengdu Greenish Willows, written by an elder man who cut firewood in Dingjinyan made a description of "the majority of the guild halls in Shanxi and the Qin clapper ringing high and low." Yang Xie said, in Jincheng Greenish Willows that the Eight Banner People hunter around here and they could enjoy themselves in guild halls because of a large number of dramas, as well as that the new temple was built in the light of the Buddha with the bell ringing and incense spreading after troupes prepared food, changed their clothes, ate only vegetables for a few days, then dressed as the statue of Buddha and be welcomed by the mass who played drums. This shows that the Sichuan Opera in the late Qing Dynasty has prospered and enriched the performances of the hometown dramas by the immigrants in various places.

The Process of Modern Sichuan Opera Sound Tunes Music Form

In the late 19th century, along with the development of economy and culture, the living habits and aesthetic tastes of immigrants in Sichuan gradually integrated with each other and frequent mutual interaction gradually diminished the original local features. In the same time, with the change of social life, the situation of "mixed tunes and flamboyant competitions" are deconstructed, and the language of the people in Sichuan and the folk art have been integrated and evolved, showing the increasingly obvious "locality" of Sichuan. According to statistics from the period of Yongzheng to Xuantong, there were about 80 famous troupes in Sichuan. Since the beginning of the Daoguang period, the troupe gradually moved from villages to the cities, and even during the Xianfeng period, some troupes have been transferred to large and medium cities. After Sichuan became the semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, most of the troupes used townships as a base for the establishment of science and technology and training of talents, to accelerate the gathering of central cities such as Chengdu and Chongqing. During this period, the competition and exchanges between the troupes were gradually strengthened, and the deconstructed “kinds of tunes and dramas”
showed new local characteristics of Sichuan where Kunqu opera of Sichuan replaced Kunqu opera of Suzhou; Yiyang tune was called “high tune” or “Sichuan tune;” “Huqin tune” was called “Silk string” or “Huqin of Sichuan;” “Qin tune” was renamed “Sichuan clapper,” “Drama-playing” or “covering board” and the light plays gradually evolved from the “plays with lights” to the folk playset of "plays without lights" by separating “lights show.” The guild hall had not only included the performance of "hometown drama," but also the performances of "two-in-one class" and "three-in-one class" or the 'two-pot' and 'three-pot' singing forms on the stage and the music floor. Since the Sichuan opera art at that time was in a chaotic state of deconstruction and reorganization, people do not distinguish Sichuan opera by "sound tunes," but the troupe as the carrier of inheritance. Besides, mainly in accordance with the popular areas of the troupe and according to the main vocal voice, performance characteristics, the common practice repertoire were classified as “Four Riverways”—the dam of western Sichuan, the downstream of eastern Sichuan, the river of northern Sichuan and Ziyang River.

The “Four Riverways” reflect the characteristics of its distribution: when the policy of “salt transport from Sichuan to other regions” appeared in the Xianfeng period, “Ziyang River” has been popular of high tunes, which was generally called “Sichuan tunes;” “the dam of western Sichuan” which was greatly affected by the Xipi and Erhuang tunes was called “provincial tunes” during the Guangxu period, in which Huqin was authentic; “the river of northern Sichuan” was adjacent to Shaanxi and Gansu with Qin tune and light plays inundated; in the opening port of the upper reaches of the Yangtze River in “the downstream of eastern Sichuan” area of in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, music had the styles of “Sichuan opera mixed with Beijing, Shaanxi or Han.” In the areas of Youyang and Xiushan, which are bordered by Yunnan and Guizhou, there are frequent activities of light plays. In the early years of the Republic of China, the "Sichuan troupe opera" which was compatible with various kinds of tunes was regarded as an independent Sichuan local opera while the troupe that sang a certain "tune" gradually disappeared.

After the glory period of Daoguang, dramas and operas in rural towns and cities had obvious characteristics of "Sichuanization" and entered cities with the germination of capitalism. After the semi-feudalization and semi-colonization of Sichuan, the collapse of the Western capitalist economy and the crash of the small-scale peasant economy did not hinder the process of “Sichuanization” of the Sichuan opera art, but it became an opportunity for troupes to enter cities. Therefore, the trend of urbanization and commercialization of opera arts prompted the modern Sichuan opera art which has been in a gradual change for a long time to merge into the tide of citizen literature and art in the 20th century in the shout of “improving drama and assisting education.”

In the early 20th century, the Qing government implemented the "New Deal" to prepare for "making constitution" and the slogan of "improving drama and supporting social education" has been resounded throughout the country. Under such a social background, Zhou Xiaohuai, the chief of Sichuan Quanye Subdistrict Office, cooperated with the Chengdu General Business Association, the Department of Education and the General Administration of Police to file a case with the Governor’s Office in 1907, and established the first official organization in Sichuan’s history which defined the "Drama Improvement Association" with the purpose of "improving opera and assisting education." The establishment of the "Drama Improvement Association" marked that under the natural existence of the people, Sichuan opera art has become a "public welfare undertaking" organized by the government. Although the "guild" activity did not last long, its impact lasted for decades.

On the autumn of 1911, the Qing court sold the railway construction right, which led to the outbreak of the road protection movement in Sichuan. Because the Governor Zhao Erfeng ordered to shoot petitioners, causing the students to strike, the citizens to cease the trade, and the troupe to stop to perform. After the resumption of the market, the police still prohibited the troupe from performing in order to prevent the citizens from gathering, which caused many livelihoods difficult. In the first month of the following year, after repeating requests, the Yuelai Tea Garden was finally approved to resume the performance. As a result, Changle, Yile, Yanle, Cuihua, Caihua, Shuyi,
Taihong, Guichun and other troupes staying in Chengdu reached an agreement and decided to set up a group to perform in the Yuelai Tea Garden and renamed themselves “Chengdu Sanqing Drama Club,” also "Sanqing Club" in latter. After the birth of the "Sanqing Club," there has been a new situation in which the performances of the past troupes have developed from several kinds of tunes playing on their own to "Kunqu tune, High tune, Huqin, Drama-playing and Light plays" playing at the same time on the same stage. The troupes of Kunqu Opera, High tune, Huqin, and Drama-playing which originally were in competition with each other, were staged on the same stage of the “Sanqing Drama Club,” presenting an unprecedented “all kinds of tunes integrated in one” and “a variety of roles gathering together,” which laid the foundation of the “Five tunes coexisting” system and pattern for the modern Sichuan opera. After 1913, the “Sanqing Club” successively launched “Shengping School” and “Research Institute” to carry out talent training and art research, which enabled the club to gradually form an operational mechanism in which the performance, education and research were integrated into one and became a banner of the authentic Sichuan opera. Subsequently, Love Detective by Zhaoxi, the Error of Knife and Pen by Ran Qiaozi, Farewell to Swallow by Yin Zhongxi, Chai shijie and Jiangyou Pass by Huang Ji’an and so on, which represented a group of "improved script" of democracy and patriotism thoughts was staged on the stage of the "Sanqing Club" in succession. There were even some "new dramas" that reflected the social shortcomings and reflected the revolutionary activities, such as Wuchang Liberation and The Legend of the Heroine which was adapted according to stories of Qiu Jin who was a heroine in the period of the 1922 revolution in China.

The establishment of the "Sanqing Club" was a milestone in the art history of "Sichuan Opera," which was generally considered to mark the formation of modern Sichuan opera art by the later generation. Its historical achievements mainly include the improvement and transformation of Sichuan Opera art in many aspects, such as management system and distribution methods, repertoire creation and artistic style, which laid the foundation for the initial formation and prosperity of modern Sichuan opera music. However, some researchers have verified that the proper term "Sichuan opera" appeared only after the 1920s and 1930s, and it was first seen in the verse. In 1921, after the death of Liu Zhimei, a famous female role in Chinese opera in "Sanqing Club," her friend Ran Qiaozi wrote such a verse in order to remember her: "She was expressive with sonorous tones, and in Farewell to Swallow, she could hold the laurel in all Sichuan operas.” In the literature that is now visible, the earliest phrase “Sichuan opera” appeared in 1937, in which Tang Youfeng published a book entitled the Initial Understanding of Sichuan Opera Characters, and made some evaluations and discussions on "Sichuan Opera" at that time. In 1944, he published another book, Sichuan Opera Hotchpotch, and pointed out in preface that his writing purpose was that this work was intended to introduce all aspects of Sichuan Opera.

Conclusion

Modern Sichuan opera music has come into being under the influence of "Drama Improvement" movement in the early 20th century directly because of the establishment of "Sanqing Club." In the process of exploring this history, I find that the generation and development of local opera art has no rules and patterns to follow. For example, the nourishment of local folk music and the spread of foreign music are just common factors in the formation of all traditional music, and the final formation of different dramas and music has many accidental factors. Taking Sichuan Opera as an example, the entering and combination of "Kunqu tune, High tune, Huqin, and Tanxi" in Sichuan have their own special social and historical reasons. Kunqu Opera entered Sichuan with the immigration and filling activities of more than one hundred years in the Qing Dynasty. When the whole Sichuan population was only 300,000 in the early Qing Dynasty, the entire social economy was in a state of stagnation, and the indigenous people’s livelihood was a problem. Therefore, the opera art obviously couldn’t be popular. The circulation of Kunqu Opera was in contact with not only the people of Jiangsu Province who came to Sichuan to perform in government, but also the forbidden of abolishing "home troupe" in Jiaqing period. The female people who perform Kunqu opera in Sichuan lost the support of the bureaucrats and had to enter the nongovernmental sector to
make a living, which led to the popularity of Kunqu in Sichuan. Although the High tune, Huqin and the Tanxi are all introduced from outside the province, they have formed their respective scope of influence due to the different geographical locations and routes. The High tune and Huqin are flown up from the Yangtze River waterway, so they reach eastern and southern Sichuan. Huqin and the Tanxi entered Sichuan from Tianshui, Gansu (ruling areas of First Emperor of Qin) through Sichuan Road at Jianmen and reach western Sichuan. In particular, the opportunity of "Five tunes integration" is paved by the social and economic trends of "urbanization" and "commercialization," based on the participation of famous performers, but the reason why the troupes who directly led to different tunes and the gathering of performers was a "banned order" by the authorities. At that time in Chengdu, only the “Yuelai Tea Garden” allowed the acting. In order to obtain the power of performance, the troupe of singing different tunes had no choice but to form “Sanqing Club,” which eventually led to the modern Sichuan opera of “Five tunes integration.” In the past, the theatrical circle believed that the phrase “Sichuan opera” which had at least 300 years of tradition actually appeared in poetry and literature in the 1930s. I has no intention of obliterating the inevitability of history and deliberately magnifies the contingency. However, through the analysis of this article, it seems that there are grounds for doubt: Does the long-established Sichuan Opera art belong to a kind of "invented tradition?"

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