THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GUANGXI WENCHANG PERFORMING ARTS
IN GUILIN CITY, GUANGXI PROVINCE, CHINA

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ABSTRACT
This article project entitled “On the characteristics of Guangxi Wenchang Performing Arts in Guilin City, Guangxi Province, China” aimed to 1) study the performance forms of Guangxi Wenchang; 2) study the music characteristics of Guangxi Wenchang. The study employed the qualitative research methodology, documentary studies and field studies in Guilin city Guangxi province to collect the data of the Guangxi Wenchang. The study suggested that Guangxi Wenchang belongs to the category of “Singing Drama” in "Quyi (Chinese folk art forms)". However, due to the changing social conditions and values, Guangxi Wenchang is disappearing from the ways of life of the young people. To create a guideline for its conservation is necessary.

Keywords: Performance Forms; Guangxi Wenchang; Guilin City

I. INTRODUCTION

Guangxi Wenchang is a form of folk music performance that existed since the Qing Dynasty. It has a history of more than 200 years. On June, 2008, it was listed in The second batch of national intangible cultural heritage list published by the State Council of China (Serial number and project name: V-87 Guangxi Wenchang). It belongs to the category of "Singing Drama" in "Quyi (Chinese folk art forms)". The reason is that in the beginning, Guangxi Wenchang was performed by one or several blind artists. They didn't have dramatic body performance. They mainly relied on singing and playing to show a certain story plot part in a drama. Quyi is the general name of all kinds of "Speaking and Singing Art" of the Chinese nation. It is a unique art form formed by the long-term development of folk oral literature and singing art.

Nowadays, human society has entered a new stage of cultural development. With the rapid development of information technology, our cultural life has become more and more diversified. Movies, television and the Internet have attracted more and more people's audio-visual activities. People's amateur cultural life has become increasingly rich. Guangxi Wenchang has long been no longer the main media for people to relax and entertainment. In this era, our emotions become more and more diverse and complex. Just as words are the symbols of language, music is the symbol of human emotions. The music symbol of an era is just marking the human emotion of an era. The human emotion of an era is also reflected by the music of that era. Ernst Cassirer's book said that, "Symbolic thinking and symbolic behavior are the most representative characteristics in human life, and the whole development of human culture depends on these conditions, which is indisputable." The life style of contemporary people is quite different from that of people in agricultural society. The emotional form of contemporary people must be different from that of people in agricultural society. The traditional Guangxi
Wenchang music is difficult to express the complex and diverse emotions of contemporary people, and it is difficult to get the recognition of contemporary people.

**Objectives**

1. To study the performance forms of Guangxi Wenchang.
2. To study the music characteristics of Guangxi Wenchang.

**II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative research study employed the data collected from documents, field studies, surveys, observations and interviews.

**Research Procedure**

1. **Collect data from related documents.** Such as articles, books and historical documents related to the introduction of Guangxi Wenchang.

2. **Conduct field studies** by collecting data based on interviews with one key informant, three casual informant and one general informant who know about Guangxi Wenchang in Guilin city, Guangxi province, China.

**Key Informant:**

Mrs. He Hongyu was born in 1941 in Lipu County, Guilin City, Guangxi Province, China. She started study Guangxi Wenchang in 1959. She engaged in performing Guangxi Wenchang in 1961.

**Casual informant:**

Mr. Su Junmin was born in 1967 in Guilin City, Guangxi Province, China. He started study the Guangxi Wenchang in 1972. He engaged in performing Guangxi Wenchang in 1973.

Mr. Pang Jianning was born in 1975 in Guilin City, Guangxi Province, China. He started study Guangxi Wenchang in 1991. He engaged in performing Guangxi Wenchang in 1994.

Mr. Gong Yi was a staff member of Lingchuan County Sports Bureau, and he is now retired. He is an amateur in Guilin local opera and Quyi.

**General Informant:**

Mrs. Li Meimei was born in 1945 in Guilin City, Guangxi Province, China. She graduated from the Guangxi Arts University.

Mrs. Li Meimei was admitted to the fine arts department of guangxi university of arts in 1960. In 1964, she worked as the director and designer of guilin fine arts mirror factory.

**III. RESEARCH RESULTS**

Guangxi Wenchang used to be an indispensable folk art in people's life in Guilin, Guangxi Province. For example, about the old people's birthday parties, wedding ceremonies and funerals in the past, they would hire Guangxi Wenchang troupe to perform in their own homes. This is a custom, but now this custom has long disappeared in the city.
Guangxi Wenchang is the most representative form of traditional folk music performance in Guilin City, Guangxi Province, China, and its performance form is an important part of its artistic expression. According to the information from Mrs. He Hongyu, there are four performance forms of Guangxi Wenchang: "Zuo Chang (Zuo means sitting, Chang means singing)", "Li Chang (Li means standing, Chang means singing)", "Zou Chang (Zou means walking, Chang means singing)" and "Wenchang Xi (means Wenchang Opera)".

1. The Performance Forms of Guangxi Wenchang

1.1) "Zuo Chang (Sitting Singing)"

Previously, most of the performers in Guangxi Wenchang were blind people. Because of their physical defects, they could only "Sitting Singing", that is, sit to sing and perform. Mrs. He Hongyu said that, "Each performer plays a role, each performer plays an instrument. 'Zuo Chang (Zuo means sitting; Chang means singing)' attaches great importance to performers' singing skills. For a performer, if he (she) has a high level singing skill, than he (she) even can perform a play just by himself (herself)." (Interview Time: on June 2th, 2019) (As shown in Figure 1)

![Figure 1: "Zuo Chang (Sitting Singing)"](https://m.bilibili.com/video/av413008275?bsource=sogou&fr=seo.bilibili.com)

1.2) "Li Chang (Standing Singing)"

Mrs. He Hongyu said that, "The performers mainly to sing and merge simple body movements to perform, it's called 'Li Chang (Li means standing; Chang means singing)'. One type is that several people play musical instruments and only one people singing. Another type is that several people playing musical instruments, two or three people singing. After the 1950s and 1960s, as Guangxi Wenchang entered the theatre to perform, the form of performance began to change. The performers performed with play 'Yun Ban (Yun means cloud; Ban means board)' or 'Diezi (means dish)' rhythmically and sing, and accompanied by small bands, and dancing." (Interview Time: on June 2th, 2019) (As shown in Figure 2)
1.3) "Zou Chang (Walking Singing)"

According to the information from Mrs. He Hongyu, the "Zou Chang (Zou means walking; Chang means singing)" is a form of performance in which performers wear costumes to perform, and accompany and dance while singing, i.e. "Zou Chang (Walking Singing)" is a combination of singing and doing (singing and moving). "Zou Chang (Walking Singing)" requires not only good singing skills, but also good body movements. This form greatly enriches the performance of Guangxi Wenchang and lays the foundation for the later "Wenchang Xi (Wenchang Opera)". (As shown in Figure 3)

Figure 3: "Zou Chang (Walking Singing)", retrieved from https://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMjYxMjIwMDE0OA==.html?x&sharefrom=android&sharekey=000cb7db467031a87f7866aa32a5b7c30
1.4) "Wenchang Xi (Wenchang Opera)"

"Wenchang Xi (Wenchang Opera)" is based on the characteristics of the characters to make up and wear costumes to perform. (As shown in Figure 4) It is also called "Wenchang Gua Yi (Gua means hanging; Yi means clothing/costumes, here the meaning is wear costume to perform)". Mr. Pang Jianning said that "The 'Wenchang Xi (Wenchang Opera)' is developed on the basis of 'Zuo Chang (Sitting Singing)'. 'Wenchang Opera' is immature traditional opera. The makeup and dress of 'Wenchang Opera' is reference Yue opera to do. Previously, the accompaniment instruments of 'Wenchang Opera' did not use percussion instruments. Later, cause of imitated Gui opera, then gongs and drums percussion instruments were added. It was formed between the end of Guangxu period and Xuantong period in the Qing Dynasty (1908-1911). In 1908, Guangxi Wenchang amateurs began to put on costumes to perform, thus forming 'Wenchang Opera'. 'Wenchang Opera' is mainly performed by the well-off amateurs, who just want to entertain themselves." (Interview Time: on June 6th, 2019)

Figure 4: "Wenchang Xi (Wenchang Opera)", retrieved from https://m.bilibili.com/video/av413008275?bsource=sogou&fr=seo.bilibili.com

1.5) Classification of Performing Role

Mrs. He Hongyu said that, "The performance of Guangxi Wenchang is mainly composed of singing and playing, in which there will be a part of speaking, which is a folk 'Speaking and Singing' art. The number of performers is determined according to the characters in the song book, and each person assumes a role. The role types of Guangxi Wenchang can be divided into 'Sheng', 'Dan', 'Jing' and 'Chou'." (Interview Time: on June 2th, 2019) Mr. Pang Jianning said in an interview that "Except the 'Wenchang Xi (Wenchang Opera)' makeup style used was based on Yue Opera. The 'Zuo Chang (Sitting Singing)', 'Li Chang (Standing Singing)' and 'Zou Chang (Walking Singing)' are all use ordinary makeup style." (Interview Time: on June 6th, 2019)

1.6) The Sects of Guangxi Wenchang

There are two sects in Guangxi Wenchang, one is the "Xia Pai (Xia means blind; Pai means sect)", the other one is the "Guang Pai (Guang means light)". The repertoire is the same between the two sects, but their singing styles are also different. The difference between the two is shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Sects of Guangxi Wenchang</th>
<th>&quot;Xia Pai (blind sect)&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Guang Pai (light sect)&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actors/Actress Status</td>
<td>The poor person or the poor blind person.</td>
<td>People with affluent families, noble children with certain cultural accomplishments, officials with certain social</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Purpose of Performance

In order to survive, they as position professional performers to perform Guangxi Wenchang. Out of their interests, hobbies and entertainment, they formed a team to perform Guangxi Wenchang.

Performance Form

"Zuo Chang (Sitting Singing)" (the main form of performance for blind performers), "Li Chang (Standing Singing)" and "Zou Chang (Walking Singing)". Professional performers can sing and play musical instruments. Most of them perform in the form of "Wenchang Xi (Wenchang Opera)".

Singing Characteristics

The male performer 's timbre is thick and the whole timbre is relatively uniform. The female performer's timbre is delicate, bright and high-pitched. The singing skills are difficult. The performer 's timbre is soft and their singing skills are not very difficult.

Accompaniment Instrument

Yangqin (dulcimer, the main instrument of Guangxi Wenchang), Pipa (lute), San Xian (San means 'three', Xian means 'string'), Erhu (urheen) and bamboo flute and so on. Instruments are very all in readiness and good, even more complete and meticulous than professional teams. For example, "Pipa" has never been used in the accompaniment instruments of blind performers.

Once the "Xia Pai (blind sect)" of Guangxi Wenchang showed the superb singing skills of Guangxi Wenchang incisively and vividly. Mr. Pang Jianning said in an interview that "In the past, Guangxi Wenchang artists had high singing skills. Some artists could even sing high C, and no matter of them were male and female.". (Interview Time: on June 6, 2019) Unfortunately, due to social changes, contemporary people are no longer keen on traditional art, so the number of actors and actresses of Guangxi Wenchang is decreasing year by year. At the same time, the market of Guangxi Wenchang is depressed, and the income of the actors and actresses is not high, which leads to the decrease of the enthusiasm of the existing actors and actresses for the study and practice of singing skill.

IV. THE MUSIC CHARACTERISTICS OF GUANGXI WENCHANG

Guangxi Wenchang belongs to "Lian Qu Ti". Most of the singing and playing music in traditional Chinese opera belongs to the "Lian Qu Ti". The so-called "Lian Qu Ti (Lian refers to connect, Qu means tune or melody, refers to form)" is to connect all kinds of individual pieces of tunes and songs selectively and skillfully, and to filling the lyrics, and then to sing and perform.

The mode composition of Guangxi Wenchang belongs to the pentatonic mode of traditional Chinese music. Pentatonic mode, or pentatonic scale, is the scale of Chinese music. The five notes are named as: "宫 (Gong)."
"商" (Shang), "角" (Jue), "徵" (Zhi), "羽" (Yu). They are roughly equivalent to the roll-calls of Western music: "do", "re", "mi", "sol", "la".

On the basis of pentatonic scale, the fourth and seventh level notes similar to western music major scale occasionally appear in music, which are generally in an unimportant position or belong to passing notes.

The music types of Guangxi Wenchang consists of singing tune and instrumental tune. The singing tune of Guangxi Wenchang can be divided into two categories: "Da Diao (Da means big, Diao means tune)" and "Xiao Diao (Xiao means little/small, Diao means tune)". There are more than 20 instrumental music tunes of Guangxi Wenchang, which can be used as stage music, quiet music, prelude, character appearance music, interlude, dance music, solo music, accompaniment music, performance music, etc.

V. CONCLUSION

The results show that the performance form of Guangxi Wenchang is rich, and its music is unique. However, at present, most of the performers engaged in Guangxi Wenchang performances are older people or Middle-aged person. And the professional Guangxi Wenchang artists are almost eighty years old. With the growth of age, the older generation of Guangxi Wenchang artists have passed away one by one. It can be predicted that if there were no young people to take over Guangxi Wenchang, in the future, Guangxi Wenchang will only be a historical record, not a performing art. So we need more young people join in it. Therefore, the study of the artistic characteristics of Guangxi Wenchang is conducive to the popularization and transmission of Guangxi Wenchang.

The researcher thought, the local government departments, professional troupes and folk amateurs should work together to promote the dissemination and promotion of Guangxi Wenchang. For example:

1) They can make use of festival activities, exhibitions, observation, training, professional seminars, production of TV feature films and other forms, through mass media and Internet publicity, to deepen the public's understanding of Guangxi Wenchang and promote social sharing.

2) Regularly organize and hold an exhibition and forum of Guangxi Wenchang to form an institutionalized and standardized communication effect.

3) Guilin government implements the management function of Guangxi Wenchang, formulates and implements the work plan on the protection and development of Guangxi Wenchang every year, organizes creative classes, training classes, Guangxi Wenchang performances and various evaluations, supervises and inspects the performance of responsibilities and obligations of the inheritance base and inheritors, and does daily work well.

4) Government funding, and donations from all sectors of society, the establishment of Guangxi Wenchang base.

5) The government cooperates with the folk artists of Guangxi Wenchang to create the inheritance base and inheritor system of Guangxi Wenchang.

VI. DISCUSSION

Every kind of art has its own cultural soil, including the historical situation and realistic situation of culture. "Only when art activities are placed in the specific situation of social life can we understand the multi-faceted connotation of art, and only when people's aesthetic needs, aesthetic ability and aesthetic communication mode are placed in the overall background of their spiritual world, aesthetic view is regarded as a part of people's cultural map, and the cultural integration of aesthetic view as a cultural element is investigated Only the position and significance of
the construction form can we have a deeper understanding of people's aesthetic activities." (Wang Jie 王杰, 2004)

The formation of the artistic characteristics and cultural connotation of Guangxi Wenchang is directly or indirectly influenced by geography, geomorphic conditions, social environment, folk literature and art, folk customs and dialect tones. At the same time, art is an important symbol of culture, "Art is one of the most important symbolic systems in the cultural system. It is the symbolic expression of important concepts and things in culture. This kind of expression adopts a compressed way, that is, the object is transformed, abstracted and condensed to show, so as to highlight its basic characteristics." (Hai Libo 海力波, 2004) Guangxi Wenchang contains rich cultural connotation of Guilin, reflecting all aspects of Guilin people's life, including religious belief, geographical environment, folk customs, value orientation, mode of thinking, world outlook, aesthetic outlook and its unique cultural psychological structure. In a word, Guangxi Wenchang is closely related to Guilin regional culture. Only from the perspective of anthropology can researchers fully grasp the rich cultural and artistic implications contained in it.

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