

## Development and Research of Chinese Folk Art Forms

### - Inheritance, Popularization and Development of “Ningxia Seated Singing”

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**Abstract:** “Ningxia seated singing” is served as a beautiful flower in the artistic treasure house of Chinese folk music. With characteristic forms of artistic presentation, “Ningxia seated singing” is rooted in “southern frontier” – beautiful Ningxia. It is also renowned the Chinese operatic circle with the feature of holding “splendor” and picking “peony”. “Ningxia seated singing” created a pioneer for Chinese folk art forms at local regions of Ningxia to move towards China. Just because of this excellent local folk art form, however, its survival and development is also confronted with serious impacts and challenges, the same as Chinese folk art forms in other places. Therefore, how to realize the inheritance, popularization and development of “Ningxia seated singing” are an impending practical issue as well as an innovative issue.

**Key words:** local folk art forms, Ningxia seated singing, inheritance, popularization and development

“Ningxia seated singing” was sourced from “Ningxia storytelling”, “Ningxia ditty”, “Ningxia song” and other folk art forms. It has distinct characteristics in the speaker and accompanying parties. It can be said that “Ningxia seated singing” directly inherited the form of artistic presentation of Ningxia storytelling in the early period.

“Ningxia seated singing” belongs to a native-born folk art form in Ningxia. Upon exploration and arrangement and long-term creation by Xu Mingzhi from Yinchuan Art Theatre over the years, “Ningxia seated singing” gradually formed its performance artistic style and characteristics. In 1981, Xu Mingzhi carried his work *Run into Relatives* to participate into the performance of excellent programs of Chinese (northern) folk art forms in Tianjin. This folk art form was officially renamed as “Ningxia seated singing”.

In more than 30 years since the performance of the first song titled as “Ningxia seated singing” - *A Young Father* performed by Xu Mingzhi, “Ningxia seated singing” has already been performed on both sides of the Changjiang River, including Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Wuhan and Chengtu. All audiences were astonished by “Ningxia seated singing”: Ningxia unexpectedly has such pleasant folk art form! More audiences highly appreciated the contents of “Ningxia seated singing”. In local places of Ningxia, “Ningxia seated singing” is widely known. All seats were occupied as long as there was “Ningxia seated singing” on the evening party. Just as said by an audience, “it is just like a neighboring grandpa or grandma telling jokes, with some enlightenment in laughter.”

Since its birth, the form of “Ningxia seated singing” has made fascinating results. In 1997,

“Ningxia seated singing” - *Baizijing* won the “Splendor Award” and became the first winner of “Splendor Award” in the category of Chinese folk art forms after its birth. In 2006, “Ningxia seated singing” - *Fish Grandma Returns Home* even won the highest prize in the category of Chinese folk art forms – “Peony Award”. In 2007, “Ningxia seated singing” - *New Beautiful Village* won the first prize of the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Minority Exhibition and Performance of Chinese Folk Art Forms. In 2011, “Ningxia seated singing” – *Biaozhenxian* won the excellence award in the 7<sup>th</sup> China Festival of Chinese Folk Art Forms held in Shaoxing of Zhejiang. In October, 2013, Ningxia seated singing - *Livelihood Projects for People’s Livelihood* created by Xu Mingzhi and assisted in performance by Xu Chen and Xu Mingzhi participated into the rematch and the final match of the 10<sup>th</sup> China Art Festival held by the Ministry of Culture, China Federation of Literary and Art Circles and Chinese Ballad Singers Association. Finally, it stood out from 160 excellent Quyi programs selected by various places in China and won the “Galaxy Award”. In December, 2013, Ningxia seated singing - *Full-scale Drama Everyday in Urban and Rural Areas* created and mainly performed by Xu Chen and Xu Mingzhi participated into the 5<sup>th</sup> National Minority Exhibition and Performance of Chinese Folk Art Forms held by China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, State Ethnic Affairs Commission and Chinese Ballad Singers Association. Upon competition against 34 Chinese folk art programs from 28 minorities from various places in China, it finally won the first prize. The protagonist Xu Chen won the “best new act award”.

According to its regional and cultural characteristics, “Ningxia seated singing” has already formed its characteristics in theme and form of art. “Ningxia seated singing” has distinct characteristics. Moreover, “Ningxia seated singing” has already formed its system at present. Viewed from its development prospect, however, it is extremely not optimistic. It is worrying for the living state of this local sort of Quyi loved by the masses. After ups and downs, “Ningxia seated singing” lacks theoretical guidance and favorable creation personnel due to inadequate funds. Moreover, it lacks worthy successors, making this art to step into a state between the beetle and the block. At present, there are only two performers in Ningxia capable of professional performance of “Ningxia seated singing” – Xu Mingzhi from Yinchuan Art Theatre and his son, Xu Chen. However, only Xu Mingzhi can make professional creation for “Ningxia seated singing”. However, there are a scanty few persons for theoretical research on and exploration for this new art form of “Ningxia seated singing”. This embarrassing situation brings forth unprecedented perplexity to the inheritance and development of “Ningxia seated singing”.

In recent years, “Ningxia seated singing” is the only local type of Quyi in Ningxia. Its survival and development receives more and more attention from all classes in the society, from the government to the folk, from scholars to ordinary people and from professional groups to mass organizations in counties and cities. They all appealed to rescue and protect this treasure of national art. All kinds of media also made follow-up reports. Although “Ningxia seated singing”

was listed as the intangible cultural heritage program at the city level of Yinchuan and the region level of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region respectively in 2009 and 2010, in-depth researches on and explorations for it were only resting on speaking. Up to now, real researches are less. This situation is mainly caused by stagnant development of local Chinese folk art forms and traditional operas in China. Throughout the country, most local Quyi and traditional operas similar to “Ningxia seated singing” are mostly in the declining state. Some are even gradually disappearing. As excellent national cultural inheritance, local Quyi and traditional operas should be inherited and protected. Thus, it is necessary for vast far-sighted persons to make further exploration, arrangement, research, application and promotion. This is a long-term and hard task as well as an urgent, enormous and complicated program. Undoubtedly, persistence in rescue, exploration, arrangement, research and inheritance of Chinese intangible cultural heritages has profound historical significance and practical significance for the inheritance and carrying forward of Huaxia culture.

According to the research condition of “Ningxia seated singing” in recent years, we can draw a conclusion as follows: the research on “Ningxia seated singing” is abundant in blank and blank in richness. Blank refers to the circumstance that the systematic and theoretical research on “Ningxia seated singing” is still in the period left without anybody to care for it since its birth. Richness refers to reference and research of lots of achievements for “Ningxia seated singing” in more than 30 years since its birth.

To make a good research on the inheritance of “Ningxia seated singing”, we must start with the following aspects: historical origin and dominating figures & events of “Ningxia seated singing”, formation, current development situation and representative figures of “Ningxia seated singing”, evolution of artistic forms of “Ningxia seated singing” and exploration for art forms, the status of “Ningxia seated singing” in ethnic arts and the inheritance and popularization of “Ningxia seated singing”. Moreover, we should also make a systematic and scientific summary of achievements of “Ningxia seated singing” over the past 30 years, so as to lay a solid theoretical foundation for the inheritance, popularization and improvement of “Ningxia seated singing”.

Through the historical research on the formation of “Ningxia seated singing”, evolution of its artistic forms as well as exploration for and arrangement of artistic forms and existing materials, theoretical basis was proposed, so as to enrich the connotation of historical origin, dominating figures & events, evolution of artistic forms and exploration of forms of “Ningxia seated singing”.

Through the research on the social nature of “Ningxia seated singing” and the definition of its status in national art, we defined the status of “Ningxia seated singing” in national art. Upon the current development situation and trend of Chinese social culture, we provided theoretical guidance and constructive recommendations for the inheritance and popularization of “Ningxia seated singing”. On this basis, we should lay emphasis on the research on artistic characteristics,

cultural values, social values, humanistic values, development conditions, inheritance approaches and important meanings of “Ningxia seated singing”.

As long as the following measures are properly realized, we can provide guarantee for the development, research, protection, inheritance, exploration, innovation, popularization and improvement of “Ningxia seated singing” and provide theoretical basis for the introduction of “Ningxia seated singing” into art education in Chinese universities for nationalities as soon as possible. Moreover, its research results and theories are of certain guidance significance for practical teaching and practice, which can be widely applied into teaching researches and practices.

Difficulties for the inheritance, popularization and development of “Ningxia seated singing” are mainly embodied in the following three aspects:

Firstly, how to analyze, classify and summarize various cultural infiltration phenomena of national music in “Ningxia seated singing” and the inheritance and popularization of “Ningxia seated singing” is the first question for settlement. Therefore, various cultural infiltration phenomena of national music in the development of “Ningxia seated singing” over the past 30 years and the comparative research on the inheritance and popularization of “Ningxia seated singing” should be carefully and radically explored and arranged.

Secondly, the research on “Ningxia seated singing” has no result for reference up to now. At present, there are only scattered materials and works, with certain operational difficulties. We are faced with the practical issue of how to make a systematic and scientific summary of “Ningxia seated singing”. Thus, it is necessary for us to use our wisdom and creativity for settlement and perfection.

Thirdly, for practical protection and inheritance of Chinese intangible cultural heritage, we are also faced with another major issue of how to introduce local Quyi into the art education system in colleges and universities and how to apply research results into practical art education activities. Undoubtedly, it is about innovation of “Ningxia seated singing” from folk art into the classroom in colleges and universities. Actually, it is even a challenge.

Society is composed of three parts: politics, economy and culture. The three parts are served as an organic whole. If particular emphasis is laid to any part, it will develop in a deformed way. Nowadays, “Ningxia seated singing” may be not that important in the background of the whole social politics, economy and culture. If we failed to make timely rescue, exploration, arrangement, research and inheritance of Chinese intangible cultural heritage, it is probable that precious cultural heritage left by our ancestors may be lost. The reason is that cultural development will naturally be of great importance after politics and economy of the whole society developed to a certain degree. This is law. At that time, it is too late to mend. Therefore, it is urgent for the rescue, exploration, arrangement, research, inheritance and protection of excellent Chinese national cultural heritage.

“Ningxia seated singing” is simple in props, positive in pattern, rich in contents and easy for

communication. It is suitable for deepening into the folk for performance. “Ningxia seated singing” is precious heritage of Chinese national culture as well as a rare artistic form. It is the obligatory responsibility of all Chinese people to persist in the rescue, exploration, arrangement, research, inheritance and protection of Chinese intangible cultural heritage as well as the fundamental element for continuous development of excellent national culture.

Special region of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region makes ancient “Yellow River culture”, “Western Xia culture” and “Islam culture of Hui nationality” to gather together at one place. However, our university is only one established in the minority autonomous region by the State Ethnic Affairs Commission. It is worthy discussion and even necessary for how to inherit and carry forward these excellent cultures. Therefore, it is of great importance for the development of theoretical researches on local art forms like “Ningxia seated singing” and making it to enter the art education system in colleges and universities for minorities. It is a kind of innovation to the inheritance and development of excellent art of Chinese national culture. It plays a certain role in promoting the inheritance, development, protection and improvement of Chinese arts of natural culture. Moreover, it is also an integral part of political, economic and cultural construction in China Western Development.

Seen from the outside, the survival and development of local Quyi art is a kind of social conduct. Essentially, it is a kind of cultural phenomenon. Therefore, the review for “Ningxia seated singing” under the environment of cultural history is helpful for us to recognize numerous issues, such as its essence, task, approach, function, variation and development. Colleges and universities for nationalities can review the local Quyi art from two perspectives: to observe from the longitudinal cultural development or review from horizontal cultural section. The longitudinal observation can enable us to recognize its inheritance, change and development course from the historical evolution tracks of Quyi art. The horizontal comparison is beneficial for us to recognize stable law and guidance nature in social and cultural life. Colleges and universities for nationalities should do the above things, because we review new conditions and new issues of local Quyi artistic theory in contemporary cultural environment in China.

Therefore, Beifang University of Nationalities established a study base for local Quyi artistic theory, so as to fill up the blank research and teaching of local Quyi artistic theory in China. To establish new Quyi artistic disciplines represents the general trend of the overall disciplinary construction and development in our college and university. It even represents the general trend of disciplinary construction and development for colleges and universities in this region.

We must adhere to the guideline of scientific development and sustainable development and chase after the step of modern art education and art practice with unprecedented, scientific and rigorous attitudes. Moreover, we should also establish the research system and teaching system of local Quyi art theory and form unique local Quyi artistic disciplines. This is based on the heavy historical mission, the sense of responsibility for the inheritance of excellent culture and

the urgent feeling of reality of its survival and great-leap-forward development. It is obligatory responsibility of colleges and universities for nationalities to develop high level research and teaching of local Quyi art theory, establish unique local Quyi artistic disciplines with territoriality, national character, culture and art, track and lead the local Quyi artistic theory of national culture artistic development trend and cultivate high-level successors of natural culture and art. Thus, our teaching and research can advance with the times and be more beneficial for the development of local Quyi artistic theory, the heritage and carrying forward of local Quyi artistic theory, the disciplinary construction and development of colleges and universities for nationalities and the construction of economic culture and spiritual civilization in minority areas.

#### **Acknowledgments**

**This paper is the national social science fund cultivation project of Beifang University of Nationalities (No.: 2013QSYP02).**

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