

Rating and Analysis of the Merits and Demerits for ‘Chinese Opera Reform’ in the History of Sichuan Opera Music Development and Reform

ShengdongYue, YawenMu

School of Music of Chengdu Normal University, Sichuan, China

Key words: "Chinese opera reform", Sichuan opera music, reform

Abstract.In this paper, with the help the analysis and discussion of the relevant research literature of ‘Chinese opera reform’, it has sorted out the long-term and far-reaching influence of ‘Chinese opera reform’ on Sichuan opera music development and reform, expounded the positive promoting function and negative function of ‘Chinese opera reform’ on the traditional opera artistic revolution, such as Sichuan opera, and taken conclusion and rethinking of the Sichuan opera reform.

Sichuan opera is the drama genre with the biggest impact and at the time of the establishment of New China, its distribution area has covered Sichuan province today, Chongqing province, Guizhou province, Yunnan province, Hubei province, even some regions of Taiwan, furthermore, it has intensive and in-depth mass base. Sichuan opera has the complex and abundant component and it almost is the epitome of Chinese opera tunes development history since the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, including the five types of Chinese opera tunes, like Kun opera, high-pitched tune, Huqin(one kind of Chinese opera tune), Tan opera(one kind of Chinese opera tune), Lantern opera(one kind of Chinese opera tune), which five types have their own system and take the high-pitched Chinese tune as the main part, besides, including the unique percussion music, namely, the Sichuan opera gong and drum music and including the accomplishment music, such as flute and Suona (a woodwind instrument) etc. accomplishment music. The structural form--combination of Bang(vocal accompaniment in some traditional Chinese operas), percussion music, singing and instrument playing of Sichuan opera high-pitched tune is the summit of Qupai(the names of the tunes to which qu are composed) style music development in the history of Chinese opera, besides, it has retained the singing ways of ancient male Chinese opera and ancient Yiyang opera and inherited the development form of traditional Chinese opera ‘QupaiLiantao’ (Names of the tunes to which Qupai are composed) and ‘Tunes Together’, finally formed the rich and self-contained systematical performance formula and skill form. The Sichuan opera high-pitched tune is the most representative and best-developed tune type of Sichuan opera art.

Music is the soul of Chinese opera, the so-called ‘flourishing opera depending on tune, widespread opera depending on tune’ refers to that the difference of Chinese opera types is not the difference in opera genre, but the difference in musical types and performance ways, therefore, music has landmark significance to the opera genre. Historically, taking the music as the breakthrough point of innovation is the only way for Chinese opera art reform and progress and each great development and changing of Chinese opera almost has had musical reform, which even has caused the changing of script writing, character setting, performance formula etc. other Chinese opera practical field. Before 1949, the action of taking reform on Chinese opera art basically is the spontaneous behavior of the practitioners, however after the establishment of New China, it is the action controlled totally by the government, promoted greatly by local governments

and practiced positively by artistic groups and it is the organized and planned large scale of congregate and conscious action. The establishment of New China has opened a new era of Chinese history and also has opened the new stage of Chinese opera art. The policy 'Let a hundred flowers bloom and new things emerge from the old' put forward by Mao Zedong is the fundamental principle guiding the inheritance, development, reform and innovation of modern Chinese opera art from beginning to end. Under the guidance of this policy, the Government Administration Council issued the 'Instruction About Chinese Opera Reform' in May 5th, 1951, and it concluded the laws of the rise and down, existence and death of Chinese opera in Chinese history, put forward the task of 'Human Reform, System Reform and Opera Reform', besides, under the leading of Central Chinese Opera Improvement Committee, build Chinese opera reform organizations across the country and under the leading of party committees and governments at all levels, develop planned, systematic and specific Chinese opera reform work based on the policy and unified cognition, so as to make the long-term Chinese opera art tradition combine with the socialist culture and serve for socialism and human. The issuing of this policy has pointed out the direction for modern Chinese opera art development.

At that time, under the leading of Education Department of the Southwest Military and Political Commission, Cultural Undertakings Authority of Sichuan Province etc. governmental agencies, the 'Chinese opera reform' work has been developed like a raging fire in Sichuan province. After the series of practical activities, such as 'China's First National Traditional (Chinese) Opera Festival', 'Southwest opera and Chinese Folk Art Forms Festival', 'Public Performance by Southwest Sichuan Opera Theaters in Shanghai etc. Cities', 'Qualification Performance of Sichuan Opera Traditional Plays', 'Joint Conference of Public-operated and Private-operated Chinese Opera Troupes', the problems of Sichuan opera music reform have been put onto the work schedule. Willow Tree Biography (name of one Chinese opera play) in 1952 is the first Chinese opera of Sichuan opera experimental reform, from which, the Sichuan opera musical reform has started. From the basic policy of Chinese opera reform put forward by central government in the early period of establishment of New China, to the starting of 'vigorous advocating of modern Chinese opera' in 1956, to the 'eight hundred million people, eight Chinese operas' in the the Cultural Revolution period, even to the 'revitalization upsurge' across the country driven by the slogan of 'revitalization of Sichuan opera' since the Reform and Opening-up all have made the Chinese opera art reform be one great event in the national social cultural life. More than half of a century to today, the 'Chinese opera reform' has a great number of personnel participating, great reform intensity and far-reaching influence, which is cannot be ignored.

The developed 'Chinese opera reform' across the whole country has turned the Chinese opera from the role of jugglery for pastime to the main carrier of promoting ideology for new political power, which has great significance for the issues that how to rebuild the national construction concept? how to take the political and cultural systematical reform? how to rebuild the concept of people's social life, morality and ethics? The 'Chinese opera reform' under the unified leading of Party and government has promoted the the Chinese opera art development and reform of every region come onto a similar road. In the work *From Lahun Air to Liuqin Drama* written by Kong Peipei, it has displayed the inheritance and changing process of one local opera popular in the regions of Jiangsu province and Shandong province in the middle period of 20th. The author's opinion is that since the 'Chinese opera reform', the transformation of Liuqin drama from curtain-table system to director system and music-making system actually is the completion of the all-around 'immobilization' and 'normalization' of script, performance and music for local operas, furthermore, it has promoted the changing of internal organization and social function for Liuqin

opera troupe and then the brand-new performance main part and inheriting system have come into being. The macro-control of literary and artistic policies, the concrete guidance of new music work and the accelerated catalysis of all previous performance are the main power promoting this transformation. In the work *Study of the He'nan Opera Art Reform and Development in 20th Century* written by Chen Guohua, it has discussed the influence of national cultural policy about vigorously advocating modern opera in 'Chinese opera reform' on local opera art. It also has put forward that it is outstanding for He'nan opera to express the features of modern life, besides, the creation of modern operas has ran through the over 50 years' development history of He'nan opera, which is due to the requirement that 'only the art presenting the modern life has realistic educational significance' and 'combination of modern operas and politics' put forward in 'Chinese opera reform' and it has reflected the method that the opera formed under one cultural background in particular historical period masters the reality.

Then, how the 'small-difference' road of local opera art make its way forward? Liu Yanhui has pointed out in the work *Study of Shanghai HuaiOpera* that, although the 'Chinese opera reform' governed by Party is eager to attribute the Chinese opera to the whole socialist system, make one-sided understanding of the relation between literary art and politics and often regard the Chinese opera as the political solicitation tool, the Chinese opera art is not totally controlled by politics. Conversely, the Chinese opera art, as the main carrier of 'folk cultural pattern', has developed the rebound invisibly, for example, using the method suiting the local cultural psychology of aesthetics to develop the narration, using the music full of local features to affect the audience, so that to conform to people's aesthetic structure, which forms and is settled in long-term Chinese opera edification, besides, dilute the political preach of content and get the works obtain aesthetic value.

As the concentrated display of 'Chinese opera reform' result, the two time of National Traditional (Chinese) Opera Festivals in 1952 and 1964 can be regarded the unprecedentedly grand occasion, which has set the model and benchmarking for the development and reform of local Chinese opera art and has pointed out the nationally recognized development direction. The ideology strategy and operation method of 'Chinese opera reform' has a long-term and far-reaching influence on the local Chinese opera development, especially on the modern Chinese opera creation field. In the process of composing 'State Myth', the theme, content and pattern etc. aspects almost are totally mixed into the national ideology, however, the innovative performance and evaluation generated through disciplining artistic work by administrative power has led to bad results. Wangzhe, in the *Investigation and Study of China's First National Traditional (Chinese) Opera Festival*, has pointed out that the 'Chinese opera reform' has changed from the quantitative change of abandoning the traditional opera and programming modern Chinese opera to the qualitative change of only modern Chinese opera and no traditional Chinese opera, which has turn the Chinese opera to the tools for political solicitation. The prosperity of Chinese opera in early period of New China and the decline of Chinese opera after the Cultural Revolution have formed a striking contrast, which situation has led to that the masses who lost the selection right have begun to forget the joy and excitement brought by Chinese opera art unknowingly. The 'Chinese opera reform' has not provided the environment for Chinese traditional cultural accumulation and deposits and then it has led to that the traditional Chinese opera lost the important audience and caused the disconnection of traditional Chinese opera inheritance, which situation has led to the lost of traditional cultural education for the adolescent born in 60 s-70 s.

The evaluation made by academic circles about the far-reaching influence of 'Chinese opera reform' on the development of the whole Chinese opera art development has a different reputation.

Shang Changbao has pointed out in the work 'Chinese Opera Reform' and 'All Flowers Bloom Together' --Understanding of Chinese Opera Policies in 1950th, that the 'All Flowers Bloom Together', as the guiding policy of Chinese opera reform, is often endowed the idealized figure and regarded as the opposite side of 'Chinese opera reform' to be eulogized and spread, however, actually, the 'All Flowers Bloom Together' exists as the objective and means of 'rectification' in the context of 'Chinese opera reform'. The 'flower' can only be the fragrant flower, but not 'toxic grass' and the 'Bloom' can only be the 'bloom' of various fragrant flowers, but not the 'bloom' of various toxic grass, essentially, the 'All Flowers Bloom Together' is also the product of 'left' context besides, it is not what the people imagine, describe and look forward to and it is the free environment and status for literature and art of total and full significance. Wen Panya, has pointed out in the work Rethinking of 'Chinese Opera Reform' that, 'Chinese opera reform' is one principal line running through the whole history of modern Chinese opera, the systematization process for one opera to be accepted by the new mainstream ideology, the process for opera to come into the superstructure field and display the new function of removing the old so that to build the new and the process for the formed traditional Chinese opera profession survive and development mode with free competition meaning to have 'interrupt' and fundamental change. The government, through the concrete artistic behaviors of system transition, traditional repertoire transcription, new repertoire creation etc., to directly provide works keeping with the will of the people for the public, so as to change their appreciation taste, however, the Chinese opera that is featured with ideology not only cannot attract people's appreciation taste, also cannot achieve the goal of Chinese opera flourishing. Zhangli has pointed out in the work The Deduction Itinerary of Red State Myth that, take summary of the 'Chinese opera reform' without the political coloured spectacles, we can get that, the 'Chinese opera reform' not only has swept the ugly content and phenomena in previous Chinese operas, also achieved significant result in the aspects of strengthening compact stories, pinpoint the theme and perfecting the artistic creation. Nowadays, the 'Red Classics' with 'revolutionary opera' as the representative become popular again, which reflects the lost of ideal and the breakdown of belief, furthermore, it has made the people who are caught in consumption context lose confidence and get lost in the syndrome of hesitated excited desire and spirit depression under the state of being close to madness and being stimulated by material desire, faced by this situation, some people who hold on to ideal and faith have turned their eyes to 'Red Classics' and they hope to seek and extract revolutionary nutrition from it for their own use, furthermore, cheer up the dispirited and confusing common psychology and spiritual status that losing oneself, seeking for enjoyment and consumerism idea. Comparing with the present moral degeneration of only paying attention to benefit and ignoring friendship, only staring at the gains but ignoring the pains, we cherish the noble and touching revolutionary relation, optimistic and dedication spirit of the past revolutionary fighters and socialist activists, and the precious quality of loyalty, simplicity and interdependence between people. Wang Anqi has pointed out in the work Observation on the Effect of Chinese Mainland 'Chinese Opera Reform' and the Transition of Modern Chinese Opera Property that, the 'Chinese opera reform' has promoted the traditional Chinese opera with actors-centered pattern finish the transition to modern Chinese opera with editor(director)-centered pattern, however, the political factor is not the only reason and the 'Chinese opera reform' is not the pure political activity. This transition also originates from the inner requirement of Chinese opera art development and reform, for example, the influence of script literary creation ways and the dissolving function of Stanislavsky's System on the Schools art of Chinese operas etc.

Viewing the history of Sichuan opera music development and reform since 'Chinese opera reform', from the Sichuan opera musical tradition recorded and sorted by 'new musicians' from

experienced artists the in the early period of New China, to the put forward of vocal cavity reform and emergence of accompaniment music instrumentation thought, to the modern Chinese opera reform under the guiding of ‘simultaneous three-measures’, to the great beginning of orchestral music big development in Sichuan opera musical history, which appeared in order to build the music matched with the ‘high, intensive and comprehensive image’, to the restoration and protection, inheritance and innovation, reform and development after the Cultural Revolution, the Sichuan opera has made great reform in the aspects of breaking through the limitation of Qupai plate type, designed cavity for specific scene, other music reference except for Sichuan opera music, musical instrument and band organization reform, compose and vocalizaitonal skills and learning from western countries, besides, it also has experienced the four long and tortuous stages of exploration, inheritance, reform and innovation. Under the historical background of alternation between turbulence and stability, collision between tradition and modern, contradiction between inheritance and development, the innovation pattern of Sichuan opera music has finished the transition from folk amateur creation to official professional creation and the innovation way has got rid of the tradition of type copying, which has strengthened the typicality of music and achieved the big transformation from labor-intensive type and experience-intensive type to technology-intensive type and theory-intensive type. From the perspective of musical reform, the force of this reform cannot be reached by the others in any historical period, especially the new-designed historical opera and modern opera, currently, there is almost no one opera that copies the traditional musical formula and does not write the complete music score. This reform process is not only the direct and indirect expression of ‘national will’ in the filed of Sichuan opera art field, also the force nature of local featured cultural psychology, furthermore, it is not only the communication and combination between Chinese and western culture in the filed of Sichuan opera, also the inevitable requirement of aesthetic taste changing brought by social development for the ancient art--Sichuan opera.

The fundamental transition of Sichuan opera music brought by ‘Chinese opera reform’ is the transition of writing ways, which has made the vocal music creation way cooperated by the folk artists and accompanist be replaced gradually by professional composing and the actors have stepped back to the position of re-creation, which has changed the disadvantage of slow development speed of traditional Chinese opera due to the limitation of creation mode and made the conscious activities that highlight the individuality and innovation gradually become the mainstream of musical creation in the new period. The ‘Chinese opera reform’ has taught us a profound lesson, that is before reforming the tradition, we have to know tradition very well and we need to know the dialectical relationship between traditional formula and new situation, repetition and change, indulge in self-admiration and appreciation on both the refined and the vulgar so that to master that the key of Sichuan opera music reform is ‘accomplishing a great task with little effort by clever maneuvers’ but not the total repudiation and replacing supersede.

Acknowledgements

Ministry of Education Humanities-Social Science Study Youth Fund Project ‘Formation, Development and Evolution Study of Modern Sichuan Opera’, Project No. : 15YJC760123

References

[1]Kong Peipei. From Lahun Air to LiuqinDrama[D].Beijing:Chinese National Academy of Arts,2007.

- [2]Chen Guohua.Study of the He'nan Opera Art Reform and Development in 20th Century[D].Shanghai:Shanghai Theatre Academy,2006.
- [3]Liu Yanhui.Study of Shanghai HuaiOpera[D].Shanghai:Shanghai Theatre Academy,2007.
- [4]Wangzhe.Investigation and Study of China's First National Traditional (Chinese) Opera Festival[D].Beijing:Chinese National Academy of Arts,2009.
- [5]Shang Changbao.'Chinese Opera Reform' and 'All Flowers Bloom Together' --Understanding of Chinese Opera Policies in 1950th[J]Chinese Opera Art, 2007,(3)
- [6]Wen Panya.Rethinking of 'Chinese Opera Reform'[J].Yue Haifeng,2007,(2)
- [7]Zhangli.The Deduction Itinerary of Red State Myth[D].Hangzhou:Zhejiang University,2009.
- [8]Wang Anqi.transition from 'Actors Theatre' to 'Scriptwriter Center'[J].Collected Papers of Chinese Culture and Philosophy Research,2001,(19)
- [9]Tan Zhaolong.Introduction from the Chinese Opera Characteristic of 'Opera Spread in Vocal Music, Audience Gathering in Vocal Music'[J].Huangzhong,1992,(3)
- [10]Huangqiong.Review and Rethinking of the Third Revolution of Chinese Opera Music[J].National Music, 2008,(6)