

A Study on the Aesthetic Value and Innovation of Zhoushan Dialect Folk Songs

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Abstract—From time immemorial, the south of the Yangtze is renowned as the land of fish and rice. Moreover, the language popularly spoke at this area, Wu dialect, featuring with primitive, elegant and exquisite, has a long history of culture. Based on Wu dialect, folk songs in the south of the Yangtze play a crucial role in the family of Chinese folk songs. As one branch of Wu dialect folk songs, traditional Zhoushan folk songs own extraordinarily distinctive characteristics, with Zhoushan fishermen's songs and work chanty as their typical representatives. Contemporarily, during the protection, inheritance, and promotion of these precious intangible cultural heritage, it would be a favorable way to grasp the essence of folk songs in the south of the Yangtze, bring the Wu dialect's superiority into full play, and re-create as an elegant art.

Keywords—Wu dialect, aesthetics, folk songs, innovation

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional Zhoushan folk songs are a major component of the marine culture of Zhoushan Archipelago, embodying the colorful physical and mental life of traditional Zhoushan fishers. One of the vital characteristics of traditional Zhoushan folk songs is that singing performances are performed via the local dialect. From the perspective of dialectological division, Zhoushan dialect belongs to Wu dialect. Contemporarily, the art performers make ample contributions to the development of modern Zhoushan folk songs. There are a lot of successful examples presented in different styles, elements, and contents which could be appreciated by both experts and the public. In this study, the starting point is the aesthetic features of Wu dialect and folk songs in the south of the Yangtze. The research core is to re-create them as a kind of elegant art based on their uniqueness, thus, to explore a new pathway for the innovation of Zhoushan folk songs.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF ZHOUSHAN DIALECT

A. *Geographic Distribution of Zhoushan Dialect in Wu Dialect*

According to the general geographic distribution of Wu dialect, Zhoushan dialect originates from the Wu dialect, which is spoken around Taihu Lake and Yong River. Migration, business exchange, and labor activity are the reasons for the influx of Ningbo and Zhoushan people into Shanghai. After a complex infusion, the modern Shanghai

dialect also includes the pronunciation, intonation, and vocabulary of Ningbo-Zhoushan dialect.

B. *Main Characteristics of Wu dialect*

As one of the components of the Wu dialect system, Zhoushan dialect is basically understandable with other Wu dialect forms around Taihu Lake. Also, their voices reflect the various characteristics of Wu dialect.

Firstly, primitive and elegant. During the long course of history, there have been numerous national migrations, among which, the southward migration of the nationalities in the Central Plains has been the most representative one. The southward migration brought quite a lot of ancient Chinese elements into the southern region, which merged into the original Wu and Yue Kingdoms' culture. Besides, since the ancient time, Wu Kingdom has been pleasant in climate and rich in production, allowing the public to live a relatively rich and moist life in this area, thus benefiting the development of culture and art to a large extent. Some of the vocabulary and phrases of Wu dialect can be traced back to ancient Chinese, classical Chinese and even in today's written language.

Secondly, gentle and exquisite. As is known to Chinese people, Ruan (softness), Nuo (glutinous), and Rou (gentleness) are the most recognizable characteristics in Wu dialect. Since antiquity, people in the Wu Kingdom have lived near rivers or lakes, north to Jiangsu Province and south to Fujian Province, where are famous for abundant natural resources and humid climate. People in the Wu Kingdom prefer rice, aquatic product, and other less greasy food. These citizens have a distinct disposition of "aquatic culture," which is soft but sturdy, meticulous and patient [1]. Additionally, during the Song Dynasty, the Ci poem writers were keen to compose under the background of Wu Kingdom and the south of Yangtze in order to stimulate their inspiration, merge local customs, practices, as well as language characteristics. Therefore, the trace of written expression of Wu dialect can frequently be discovered in ancient poetry; as a result, to testify the characteristics of primitive and elegant.

Thirdly, bountiful vocabulary. Due to the long history of Wu dialect and a large amount of population, plenty of traditional Chinese words and letters have remained. Some words are even kept at a relatively high usage rate in Wu dialect, however, which are no longer spoken that much in Mandarin. Wu dialect not only has a significant

contribution to study of the pronunciation, grammar, and origin of traditional Chinese, but also enrich the vocabulary of modern Chinese, providing rich resources as a vast “cultural gene pool.”

Fourthly, numerous schools. As mentioned before, Wu dialect is divided according to geographic distribution. According to it, the Taihu Lake district can be further divided into various areas. The pronunciation and intonation between districts and areas can differ from each other. Example like the same sound but with entirely different or reverse meaning like homophones also happens.

To sum up, Wu dialect sounds like gentle, pleasant and cadenced, has an old but exquisite literary grace, which is deserved to be regarded as one of the critical art treasure houses of Chinese language.

C. Unique Position of Zhoushan Dialect

Nevertheless, owing to the exceptional location, customs, and practices of Zhoushan, the Zhoushan dialect presents its unique style and characteristics.

First of all, the diverse accents and regional difference are distinguishable. Zhoushan Archipelago consists of 1,390 islands, governing Dinghai District, Putuo District, Daishan County, and Shengsi County. The archipelago is spotted with an inner island area around 1,371 km². However, if the maritime area is count in, its total area would reach up to 22,200 km², surpassing any other city in Zhejiang Province. The vast territory, the comparatively inconvenient inter-land transportation, and separate residence cause the convergence and solidification of pronunciation more easily. Besides, in the history of Zhoushan, the maritime embargo was carried out, and residents were repeatedly forced to migrant into inner land, bringing the Ningbo dialect into the diversity of Zhoushan dialect during daily contact, fusion, communication and other complex changes [2]. Henceforward, Zhoushan dialect presents a collection of distinctive features.

Secondly, Zhoushan Dialect is soft and sturdy. Firstly, differ from the completely softness and glutinous of Suzhou dialect, the dialect around Yong River adopts a large amount of entering tone and plosive, laying a basis for the sonorous pronunciation. Next, the sound length of dialect around Yong River is relatively short with rapid speed and rhyme, leading to the auditory variation between dialects. In addition, plenty of people lived in Zhoushan and Ningbo participated in fishery and its related industry, which creates a working environment requiring louder and briefer vocal expression during communication. For example, being part of the fishery industry requires a high volume to issue orders, so that production orders could be received clearly under the ocean noise. Likewise, the emergency happens a lot in the maritime industry; brief, clear and explicit orders are valid for fishers to react instantly. Last but not least, fishery production is full of heavy physical labor, which also injects the worker’s

masculinity and heroic spirit into Ningbo and Zhoushan dialect. Therefore, even if Wu dialect is famous for its softness and gentleness, particular history background, labor and production style made up the unique branch, the Wu dialect around Taihu Lake and Yong River, the soft but sturdy one.

III. AESTHETIC CHARACTERISTICS OF TRADITIONAL ZHOUSHAN FOLK SONGS

After clarifying the base concept of the whole Wu dialect and main characteristics of Zhoushan dialect, it brings out the concept the Wu dialect folk songs naturally. Defining the geographic nature of traditional Zhoushan folk songs is also necessary to benefit the study of its inheritance and development.

Wu dialect folk songs are also called as Jiangnan folk songs, which means the songs carried out by Wu dialect with Jiangnan rhyme. The distribution area mainly includes the Middle-Lower Yangtze plains and coastal area in the South of China, especially the Wu dialect spoken area represented by Shanghai, Taihu Lake area in the north and east of Zhejiang, and the south of Jiangsu province. The history of Wu folk songs can be articulated as complex and intertwined as the river system in Zhejiang and Jiangsu Province along with ample branches [3].

As part of the folk songs of the Han nationality, Wu folk songs have Wu dialect as its carrier and Jiangnan rhyme as its melody. From the aspect of intonation, Jiangnan folk songs adopt the pentatonic mode of the Han nationality, featuring the typical style of “tone according to the word,” which asks for clear and precise pronunciation. This attribute can be embodied incisively and vividly in Shaoxing Opera which is performed mainly in Wu dialect. From the aspect of melody, Wu folk songs rarely use semi tone like F and B, even less the sharp interval or tendency of the semitone. In the interim, Wu folk songs prefer circumlocutory melody in some sentences, which characterizes it as pleasant, gorgeous and incredible.

Nonetheless, unlike Jiangnan folk songs in inland, Zhoushan fishermen’s songs are a crucial part of the marine cultural in Zhoushan Archipelago with unique aesthetic features, owing to the extraordinary geography, culture, transportation, labor, and lifestyles. Scholars concluded it as “vivid and extensive fishery content, an obstinate pursuit for happiness, intensive aesthetic form and resolute spiritual connotation” [4]. In addition, in Zhoushan fishermen’s work chanty, more vivid fishery production characteristics in the pre-industry era are exemplified, which has a close relationship with Zhoushan fishermen’s songs. As a result, comparing with Jiangnan folk songs, Zhoushan fishermen’s song and work chanty have more personal aesthetic traits, such as the heroic masculinity, the vigorous and firm strength, the cooperation and unity, as well as quick and speedy rhyme.

Meanwhile, traditional Zhoushan folk music is far more than merely “masculinity” and “heroic.” Just like the

traditional Zhoushan culture does not only cover fishery culture. Even under the extensive fishery cultural content, people still need to get abroad to relax, vocation and to repair production tools. It cannot be denied that fisherman also calls for life and joy, emotional communication, happiness and bitterness, and other complex and dynamic life. One thing that needs to be noticed is that traditional Zhoushan folk songs still belongs to the family of Wu dialect and Jiangnan folk songs. Apart from its performance carrier, Zhoushan dialect around Taihu Lake and Yong River is exactly originated from Wu dialect. The music melody also expresses the features of Wu dialect folk songs, sending the audience the message of “from the same root” or “belong to the same category.” Just like the circumlocutory melody that both Zhoushan fishermen’s songs and Jiangnan folk songs would adopt in quantity.

IV. THE POSSIBILITY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF RE-CREATING TRADITIONAL ZHOUSHAN FOLK SONGS AS ELEGANT ART

Regarding the inheritance of traditional Zhoushan folk songs, the writer recommends “a multi-pronged approach suitable for both refined and popular tastes.” This study mainly focuses on the refined perspective in re-creation.

To begin with, Wu dialect folk songs have a solid foundation and potential of re-creation as elegant art. As mentioned before, Wu dialect has the language features of primitive, elegant, gentle, refined and bountiful vocabulary, remaining an extremely abundant Chinese language culture gene. Additionally, comparatively few words input of northern dialect shaped the Wu dialect as a relatively “pure” Chinese. Hence, from the aspect of language and culture, Zhoushan dialect as one of Wu dialects has great composition potential for creation as classic art.

What is more, elegant art is the strong backing of cultural inheritance. As a stereoscopic and richly-layered rather than a separate system, the culture and art is a holistic concept itself, referring to more than highbrow art and literature, but also popular ones. Consequently, the inheritance and development of culture and tradition art should either be single-minded on refined art on the altar, and thoroughly refuse popular art, or sank into the popular art and refuse the elegant art with excuses like “unable to appreciate” and “cannot understand.” The latter has a particularly negative impact on the inheritance of culture and art.

Furthermore, there are successful examples of the re-creation of traditional folk songs at all times and in all over the world. Take the Jiangnan folk songs as an example, “Beauty of Taihu Lake” and “Scenery of Wuxi” are correspondingly eulogizing the attractiveness of Taihu Lake and Wuxi city. Again, the interlude “Ballads of Four Seasons” in TV series, “Romance of Three Kingdoms” is composed based on the poem lyrics by ancient Ballad Bureau.

Subsequently, with Wu dialect as the carrier, Jiangnan tone as melody (but of course not limited to it), the

composition of classic music has not only the soil naturally but also successful precedents in plenty. Therefore, it can be regarded as conditions are ripe, and success is assured.

V. IDEA EXPLORATION OF RE-CREATING ZHOUSHAN FOLK SONGS AS ELEGANT ART

A. *Illustrate the Beauty of Lyrics through Music*

During the composition, the organic combination between lyrics and melody is the creator’s full pursuit. No matter in ancient and modern China or foreign countries, whether it is popular or ethnic art, opera, drama or in other fields, masterpieces often emphasize the illustration function of music melody on the lyrics and phonology. Melody changes in line with articulation, enunciation, and even voice features of words, meanwhile, melody also adjust the length, volume, and tone of lyrics through flexible and stunning modifications at suffix, root, and affix. It not only makes the melody pleasant and enjoyable to hear but also stands out the beauty of lyrics, which especially embodied in local music creation.

B. *Symbolize Cultural Connotation through Lyrics*

Firstly, the lyrics symbolize accuracy. From the perspective of people using Mandarin as the native language, it is naturally almost impossible to understand Wu dialect as an entirely different dialect system. Some words and sentences seem hard to understand; however, counterparts can be accurately found in Chinese characters, for its longstanding history.

Moreover, the lyrics symbolize elegance. As discussed before, one of the major appearances of Wu dialect is elegance. Since ancient times, Zhejiang and Jiangsu Province have been the pivotal frontline of Chinese cultural exchange. There has been not only a large number of cultural celebrities but bountiful numbers of excellent cultural and musical masterwork from dynasty to dynasty. Numerous ancient Chinese genes were inherited in the process of inheriting Wu dialect culture and history for hundreds of years. Although complex variations exist in Wu dialect, as an old saying goes, “different accents in ten miles,” the cultural connotation in itself cannot be altered. As a result, if Zhoushan folk songs are going to re-create towards the direction of fine art, the cultural connotation and its elegance must be highlighted.

C. *Unleash the Limitation on Themes*

Based on the fishery industry and fisherman’s life content in the pre-industry era, the inheritances of traditional fishermen’s song and work chanty are inevitably insufficient regarding modern aesthetics and pace of life. Nevertheless, if the theme of re-creating Zhoushan folk songs is completely bundled on the fishery, it would be like thrown in jail with no hope. Besides, fishery culture is just one part of Zhoushan’s vivid and vibrant culture, which is neither unique nor integral. In fact, as an ancient city with thousands of years of history, no matter fishery culture, urban or rural culture, all of them have profound history

accumulation and considerable cultural context. Therefore, the inheritance and development of traditional Zhoushan music lead by fishery culture merely by catching a few points will ultimately get into a one-sided situation or even the wrong direction undoubtedly. The theme of re-creating traditional music would also be monotonous with limited inspiration. Hereafter, during the re-creation of traditional Zhoushan folk music, it is significant but always ignored that the limitation of “concerning fishery” needs to be broke down. The themes and inspirations need to be broadened with open minds as far as possible.

D. Integrate as a Whole and Emphasize the Specialty

It is known that Jiangnan folk songs in Wu dialect are the general category of folk songs in the south of Yangtze River. Subsequently, it should be an immense collection of various regional folk songs, rather than the sole form or isolated symbol. Traditional Zhoushan folk songs are one branch, school, and treasure of Wu dialect folk songs. Even though traditional Zhoushan folk songs, especially fishermen’s song and work chanty featured with sonorousness, masculinity, heroism, roughness, boldness and so forth. Its merits are not only restricted to these. The study of Zhoushan folk songs and traditional music should be implemented under the concept of Wu dialect folk songs. Only by clarifying these concepts and relations, can the re-creation of Zhoushan folk music have a bright direction.

First of all, integral consciousness is vital. Zhoushan dialect folk songs are originally an irreplaceable part of Wu dialect folk songs. When composing Zhoushan folk songs, we could take the initiative to draw lessons from the inheritance of the whole Wu dialect folk songs. Because of the similarity between dialects, resembling cultural background and aesthetic tastes in the Wu Kingdom, people can almost communicate smoothly without much

difficulty. Therefore, positioning the regional music back into the big picture is tremendously constructive to study the music origin and enrich the creating techniques.

Secondly, to highlight its specialty. The local specialty is the key to ensuring creativity and personality. As mentioned above, comparing with the mainstream characteristics of Wu dialect folk songs, traditional Zhoushan folk songs include so many distinctive regional traits that at least two intangible cultural heritages exist here. Hence, at the time when we re-create them, the particular local inspiration still needs to be kept. At present, Zhoushan local artists have already paid much attention to them during their re-creation work.

VI. CONCLUSION

In summary, traditional Zhoushan folk songs rely on the background of the linguistic aesthetics of Wu dialect, possessing tremendous composition potential and prerequisites of re-creation. The re-creation as elegant art of traditional Zhoushan folk songs is bound to be the starting point of the modernized cultural inheritance and development.

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