

A Research Review of Yuan Poetic Drama

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Abstract—As a mature form in the development of Chinese drama, Yuan poetic drama has accumulated rich experience in the fields of drama art, actor division and performance programs, and has formed a fusion of poetry, music, and rap in the Yuan Dynasty and the literary style of "first-rate literature"¹ with the main feature of moving and acting stories. There are many researchers in the study of Yuan poetic drama, and the research results are endless. Especially since the reform and opening up, with the continuous improvement of China's cultural and technological level, the relevant research results are quite fruitful and the research level has been significantly improved.

Keywords—Yuan poetic drama; research review; Wang Guowei; Wu Mei

I. INTRODUCTION

The research on Yuan poetic drama has been more than 700 years since the Yuan Dynasty. This paper intends to discuss the situation of Yuan poetic drama from three aspects: Chinese and foreign research on Yuan poetic drama and related comparative research.

II. CHINESE YUAN POETIC DRAMA RESEARCH SITUATION

As a literary form that opened the era of the times, since the beginning of the Yuan poetic drama, the ancients began to record, sort and comment on it. With the prosperity of Yuan poetic drama, from the middle of the Yuan Dynasty to the early Ming Dynasty, it set off the first climax of the Yuan poetic drama study. Regarding the study of the Yuan poetic drama before the Republic of China, Wang Guowei once made such a comment:

Only Yuan Qu, because of the generation of the times, compared with poetry, its genre is slightly humble. The historical annals of the Yuan and Ming dynasties and the collection of the "Four Kinds of Classics" in the Qing Dynasty have not been included, and later Confucian scholars regard it as the final study. Here no comments will be given. Researchers who have been involved in Yuan Qu are mostly academically unsuccessful. Even if there are a few well-known scholars who are occasionally involved,

they have not studied in depth and cannot explore the mystery.²

In another article, he also pointed out:

Compared with poetry, Yuan Qu's genre is slightly humble, and the age was relatively close. In history, there are few researchers in the scholarship. In the Ming Dynasty, Wang Yuanmei's "Quzao"(a book of discussions on operas) made some appreciation work; Hu Yuanrui's "Writings" (a book of differences among the novels in different periods) was also made some research. Although Zang Jinshu and He Yuanlang both claimed to be Yuan Qu companions, their remarks did not have much reference value.³

It should be said that Wang Guowei's comments are not objective and comprehensive, and to a certain extent, they have obliterated the extraordinary contributions of the ancient Yuan poetic drama researcher Zhong Sicheng and others.

Although the ancient Yuan poetic drama researchers were influenced by factors such as feudal social ideology, many studies still stayed at the stage of textual research and tasting, but their collation and research work had important historical value and objectively provided valuable literary historical materials for future generations. The research achievements of the Yuan poetic drama before the Republic of China were mainly concentrated in two areas:

First, the examinations of writers, scripts, and actors related materials, among which the outstanding achievements, which were later regarded by the later researchers as the "Luguibu" (a book of biographies for actors) of Zhong Yucheng, as the first historical work for the actors, which included 152 Yuan poetic drama writers and more than 400 plays. Zhong Sicheng, on the basis of writings and research methods laid down by literary criticisms such as "Comments on the Literary Mind that Can Carve Dragons" and "Comments on the Poetry", innovated and developed the writings and research methods, such as imitating "Comments on the Poetry" to divide the poet into upper, middle and lower three styles, and to summarize the content of the repertoire to divide the Yuan poetic drama writers into seven categories. In addition to the ingenuity of the human writings, the author of the play, he discussed the biography and the

² See Wang Guowei's Preface of Opera History of Song and Yuan Dynasties, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1998.

³ Wang Guowei, Wang Guowei's Discussion on Drama, China Theatre Press, 2010, Nov. ver. 1. p175.

¹ Hu Shi, Hu Shi's Collection of Classical Literature (Vol. 1), Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2003, Jan. ver. 1. p11.

dramas of the playwrights one by one, and then he highly praised the playwrights who were declined to be commented on the history because of "the humble, poor position". As he stated in the preface to the "Luguibu", the purpose of his book is to "make the dead and undead ghosts can be passed as the ghost of immortality."⁴ Later Jia Zhongming imitated the "Luguibu" style, compiled the "Re-recorded Luguibu." Other influential research works of Yuan poetic drama include Xia Tingfang's "Qinglou Collection", Xi Jizi's "The Collection of Ancient and Modern Poetic Drama" and the Maiwang Pavilion's "The Ancient and Modern Poetic Drama". These works provide valuable first-hand information for future generations to study Yuan poetic drama.

Second, regarding the study of the rules of the development of drama, such as song lyrics, scripts, etc., the more prominent works include Yan Nanzhi'an's "Opera and Music Theory", Zhu Quan's "Collections of Music Score", Wang Shizhen's "Quzao", Wang Jide's "Qulv" (a book of general discussion on the opera) and so on. In addition, the ancient literati's essays also involved drama reviews, such as Wang Yun and Tao Zongyi. At the end of the Yuan Dynasty and the early Ming Dynasty, Tao Zongyi's "Farming in Nan Village", as a notebook novel, preserved a large number of cultural and historical materials of the Song and Yuan Dynasties. "The content involves historical documents, cultural relics, paintings, clan official systems, dialects, operas, characters and rhyme, divination, cultural ancient books, history and dialectics and many other aspects."⁵ It is an important reference for future generations of Yuan poetic drama.

Since modern times, with the "introduction of western learning to the east", under the influence of Western academic thoughts, many scholars in the academic circles have begun to try to use Western scientific thinking methods to re-examine and study Yuan poetic drama, and opened up a new era of Yuan poetic drama. Among those who have achieved success are Wang Guowei and Wu Mei. In this regard, the famous literary historian Pu Jiangqing once said:

The most prominent of the modern academic circles on opera is the two scholars, Mr. Wang Jing'an and Mr. Wu. Mr. Jing'an is a pioneer in the history of modern opera studies in the field of the study of opera history. However, in the study of the laws of the opera itself, Mr. Qu'an should be unparalleled.⁶

Mr. Pu Jiangqing's evaluation is undoubtedly accurate and appropriate. As a study of the modern Yuan poetic drama, Wang Guowei first used the Western scientific method and the research method of the Qianjia School of the Qing Dynasty to open up a new way of studying Yuan poetic opera. From 1908 to 1912, he completed the "Qulv", "Notes

on Luguibu", "Drama Test Source", "Collections of Best Words", "Textual Research on Tang and Song Operas", "Textual Research on Characters of Ancient Plays", "Song Yuan Opera History" and other works, examining and discussing on the opera catalogue, actors, the origins of the opera and the role of the opera. As a scholar who combines the talents of drama creation and composing, Wu Mei has written a lot in his teaching. His works mainly include "Introduction to Chinese Opera", "Brief Musical Notation Southern and North Poems", and "Talks on Operas of Shemota Room", "Guquzhutan" (a book of opera ontology), "Annotation of Operas", "Yuan Opera Research ABC", "The New Operas of Taiping Yuefu: Emendation", "Rhythm Law of The Palace of Eternal Youth Legend". Other authors of the more accomplished Yuan poetic drama are Zheng Zhenduo, He Changqun, Feng Yuanjun, Sun Kaidi, Fu Xihua, Shao Zengqi, Wang Jilie, Zhao Jingshen, and Wang Jisi and so on.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, Yuan poetic drama has continued to develop in the depth direction on the basis of inheriting previous studies. In general, the study of Yuan poetic drama before the Cultural Revolution mainly focused on the compilation of the drama, the edition notes, and the evaluation of the history of the Yuan poetic drama. The more famous works include Zheng Zhenduo's "The Ancient Drama Series" and Fu Xihua's "Collection of Yuan Poetic Drama". Xu Qinjun's "Thirty Kinds of New Edition Yuan Poetic Drama", Cheng Qianfan's "History of the Yuan Dynasty Literature", and You Guo'en's "History of Chinese Literature".

Since the reform and opening up, with the rapid development of modern science and technology, the various disciplines in the academic world have blended, infiltrated and integrated. Yuan poetic drama's research gradually shows the trend of interdisciplinary and multi-perspective development. Interacting with anthropology, philosophy, sociology, history, and religion, it has opened up a new stage in the study of Yuan poetic drama and achieved remarkable research achievements.⁷ The meta-drama study at this stage presents three new changes compared to previous traditional studies. First, script compilation and version collation began to focus on the topical in-depth mining. Some focus on the type research of a certain kind of Yuan poetic drama, such as the Water Margin Opera, the Three Kingdoms Drama, and the Guan Gong Drama, while others focus on the special research of Guan Hanqing, Wang Shifu, Ma Zhiyuan and other writers. For example, Liang Jirong's "Water Margin Drama in the Yuan Poetic Drama"⁸ is an essay on six dramas in Yuan Dynasty of Kang Jinzhi's "The Liangshanbo Li Qui Carrying the Thorns", Li Wenwei's "Tongleyuan Yan Qing Gambling Fish", Gao Wenxiu's "Black Cyclone Double Dedication", Li Zhiyuan's "The Origin and Reason for Song Jiang Got in Prison", the Anonymous "Lu Zhishen Touring the Yellow Flower Valley Happily" and "The Three Tigers

⁴ Reference on Tao Zongyi's Preface of Farming in Nan Village, QiLu Press, 2007, July. ver. 1.

⁵ The above citations are all quoted from Zhong Sicheng etc. preface of Luguibu, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1978, April, ver. 1.

⁶ Quoted from Preface of Wu Mei Opera Collected Papers, China Theatre Press, 1983, May. ver. 1. p1.

⁷ According to incomplete statistics, in CNKI, there were 4,402 papers on the theme of Yuan poetic drama, and there were 1968 kinds of books on the theme of Yuan poetic drama.

⁸ In the third phase of Wang Guowei, Wang Shifu was listed as a former playwright.

Going Down the Mountain to Requite Favors". It analyzed and evaluated the themes and artistic achievements of these dramas. Second, the comprehensive cultural study of Yuan poetic drama on the cultural psychology, cultural background and cultural implication is a major feature of Yuan poetic drama in the new era. For example, Gao Yirong's book "Interpretation of the Cultural Spirit of Yuan Poetic Drama", from the conflicts and integration of nomadic culture and farming culture, the contradiction between the love drama and the human desire, and the cultural characteristics of the immortal Taoist drama, interprets the spirit in all directions. Third, the research on the development history of Yuan poetic drama has also shown a refinement trend since the new period. Representative of Li Xiusheng's "History of Yuan Poetic Drama", he has long been engaged in the study and teaching of opera, and has extensively collected and compiled relevant literature and materials, especially the newly unearthed materials of various operas. The Yuan poetic drama was divided into three new chapters, and based on this, combined with the writing of some works and the time of death of Wang Shifu, Wang Shifu was listed as a mid-term writer, quite insightful.⁹ In addition, there are "Ma Projects" and "History of Chinese Opera" written by the state for colleges and universities.

III. THE STUDY OF THE YUAN POETIC DRAMA IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES

From the perspective of foreign research, as early as the 18th century Yuan poetic drama was translated into Europe, the most widely spread and most influential was the "Orphan of Zhao", first translated into French by the French missionary Joseph de Prémare who came to China to do missionary work, and then translated into English, German, Italian and other various texts, even adapted by the French enlightenment thinker Voltaire as a drama. "There were many performances in various theaters in Paris and other places. The grand occasion was unprecedented, and it was a great success. It even sensationalized the whole Europe."¹⁰ Later, famous dramas such as "Dou E's Grievance", "Sorrow in the Han Palace", "The Son of the Old" and "The Romance of The West Chamber" were also translated into Europe, and related works of literature and drama history were published. However, in the world, the most advanced and most contributed to the translation and research of Yuan poetic drama is the study of many Japanese sinologists.

Under the influence of the Meiji Restoration Movement, Japan accepted the influence of Western scientific rational thinking earlier. Therefore, the study of Yuan poetic drama in modern Japanese scholars even preceded China. Aoki Masaru and Yoshikawa Kojiro, as representative scholars of the "Kyoto School" in the 20th century Japanese Chinese studies, are the masters of Japanese studies of Yuan poetic drama. One of the iconic achievements of Yoshikawa Kojiro was the pioneering research on Yuan opera, and edited

"Yuan Poetic Drama Research", "Dictionary of Yuan Opera" and the "Selected Interpretation of Yuan Opera" (two volumes). In "Yuan Poetic Drama Research", Yoshikawa Kojiro "tried to make sure of the audience of Yuan poetic drama, and examined more than 30 authors of Yuan poetic drama." ". "He focuses on the analysis of the art and style of Yuan poetic drama itself, and expounds the value of Yuan poetic drama in the history of Chinese literature from seven aspects."¹¹ Aoki Masaru is the author of "The History of Chinese Modern Opera" and "An Introduction to the Yuan People Poetic Drama". Among them, the book "An Introduction to the Yuan People Poetic Drama" describes the origin and faction of the Yuan poetic drama. "It is clear and easy to understand, but it is also a self-contained system."¹² And he focused on the introduction and criticism of the work, the criticism part of which became a major feature of this book. "This is barely mentioned in the works of Wang Xuewei and Wu Mei, the ancestors of Opera Theory."¹³ For example, when commenting on the Yuan poetic drama "Hutou Brand", he said:

The play is a comedy depicting the drunkenness of the drunkard and the strict military discipline. Because the plot seems a bit like a play, so it should be listed as a masterpiece, which was repeatedly considered at the time; but because the author Li Zhifu is a Jurchen, the story described is a Jurchen thing, which can also trigger curiosity. His tunes and lyrics show the simple character of Jurchen people. After reading it, it is difficult to give up, which is called the singularity in Yuan opera.¹⁴

This is quite different from the evaluations of many Chinese scholars who use "Hutou Brand" as the singer's protagonist Gongshan Shouma's strict law enforcement and personal morality. Other Japanese drama experts include Koda Hirota, Kano Naoki, Yangu Wen, Tanaka Kenji, and Kubo Tokuji, etc.

IV. A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF YUAN POETIC DRAMA AND OTHER OPERAS

From the time of the Republic of China, scholars began to try to compare the similarities and differences between Yuan poetic and other operas from the perspectives of the origin of the opera, cultural background and artistic features. Since the founding of the People's Republic, especially since the reform and opening up, with the gradual enrichment and expansion of research methods, research perspectives and research scope, relevant research results have also increased. For example, Hu Jiansheng's book "Comparative Study of Narrative Techniques Between Yuan Poetic Drama and Ancient Greek Drama" begins with four perspectives: "Stop Narrative", "Behind the Scenes", "Pre-narrative",

¹¹ Sun Zhejun, Yoshikawa Kojiro's Study, Zhonghua Book Company, 2004, Aug. ver. 1. p5.

¹² Reference on Aoki Masaru, Sui Shusen, trans. An Introduction to the Yuan People Poetic Drama, China Opera Press, 1957, July, ver. 1.

¹³ Quoted from Aoki Masaru, Sui Shusen, trans. An Introduction to the Yuan People Poetic Drama, China Opera Press, 1957, July, ver. 1.

¹⁴ Aoki Masaru, Sui Shusen, trans. An Introduction to the Yuan People Poetic Drama, China Opera Press, 1957, July, ver. 1. p78

⁹ DOI:10.16207/j.cnki.1001-5957.1983.02.002

¹⁰ Zhu Shaohua, Geng Liping, The Spread of Orphan of Zhao in Europe [J] Chinese Theatre, 2007, (4): 62 - 64.

"Discovery" and "Prominence". Taking the drama context as a reference, the author compares the narrative techniques of Yuan poetic drama and ancient Greek drama, and summarizes the regular characteristics of drama in the form of narrative.¹⁵ Judging from the comparative study of Yuan poetic drama in foreign countries, as early as in the Edo period in Japan, there were two famous scholars, Arai Hakuseki and Ogyu Sorai, who compared the Yuan poetic drama with the Japanese opera.

V. CONCLUSION

In summary, it can be seen that since the middle of the Yuan Dynasty, the study of Yuan poetic drama has experienced a research process from the beginning to the bottom, from the shallower to the deeper. There are many researchers and the research results are endless. It has every reason to be believed that in the new era of new media environment, with the joint efforts of the vast number of researchers, it will surely achieve new achievements and create new glories in the study and exploration of Yuan poetic drama theory.

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¹⁵ Hu Jiansheng, Comparative Study of Narrative Techniques Between Yuan Poetic Drama and Ancient Greek Drama, Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2014, April. ver. 1.