

# Blueprint for Constructing Courses of Regional Music Culture in Local Colleges and Universities

## A Case Study of "Quanfeng Lantern Opera"

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### ABSTRACT

With the advancing of overall social culture development, the inheritance of traditional music culture has been attracting more and more attentions around the nation. For ordinary local undergraduate colleges and universities in China, the music education is generally restricted by a series of factors like local economic and political conditions. However, the places where the colleges and universities located in are regions with rich resources of local music culture. In this paper, "Quanfeng Lantern Opera", which is a state-level non-intangible culture heritage in Quanfeng Town, Jiujiang City, Jiangxi Province of China, was taken as the object to construct a regional music culture course while putting the regional advantages of the colleges and universities into full play, improving their own music education level, forming their respective education characteristics, thereby achieving the goals of characteristic talent educating, and course construction of regional traditional music culture.

**Keywords:** local colleges and universities, regional music culture course, Quanfeng Lantern Opera, talent educating

### I. INTRODUCTION

After implementing the reform and opening up policies and higher education reform for more than 4 decades, the inheritance and development of the traditional music culture of China has been attracting more and more attentions, and become an urgent and important hotspot under current circumstances. Local colleges and universities are featured in distinctive regional environments and comparatively lagged-behind economic conditions compared to central developed cities, which both restrict their culture development to some certain extent. These regions, however, have profound and splendid cultural heritages. So, how to carry out educational reforms and improve the quality and level of teaching effectively in the environment with relatively backward economic conditions, weak educational foundations, and reality that educational needs cannot be met, has become the issue for educators to consider and study for a long time.

### II. THEORETICAL BASIS FOR REGIONAL MUSIC COURSE CONSTRUCTION

#### A. Education is both the means and mode for carrying forward the traditional music culture

As a kind of cultural phenomenon, education seems like a bridge connecting practice and culture, and the main mode for human history development and cultural memory preservation. It is also a key way to maintain long-lasting glories of traditional cultures, playing a significant role in improving the soft culture power of a nation and a country. Traditional music is a composing part of culture. But due to the features of traditional music culture, such as values, aesthetic tastes, music forms, and the customs and habits on which music depends, traditional music cannot be preserved or carried forward by biological inheritance. Therefore, music education turns out to be an important means to carry forward the traditional music culture<sup>1</sup>.

One of the purposes of music education is to figure out outstanding traditional music by sorting out and studying them. As a matter of fact, the inheritance of traditional music contains a process to pick up the

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<sup>1</sup> Yu Qinghua. Integrating local music to music education in primary schools [J]. Modern Teaching Research, 2014.

essence ones from the sorting and studying on the massive scope of traditional music, and is actually achieved after this process. Colleges and universities are capable in culture sorting and studying, because they have professional personnel who can collect and sort out relative materials, conduct research and analysis scientifically on traditional music, summarize excellent traditional music knowledge, and compile corresponding teaching materials, thus to carry forward the traditional music methodically, forming the teaching system of traditional music that is in line with local characteristics finally. Besides, teachers can select from and create new works based on traditional music cultures to pass onto the next generation, and help them know and master the knowledge more efficiently. Actually, only the conscious and targeted teaching of well-sorted and well-studied traditional music to the students can guarantee the efficiency of traditional music culture inheritance. Music education carries traditional music forward during the development and creation process. Not all traditional music are excellent and in line with the requirements of the times. To make traditional music culture keep up with the pulse of the times, it is necessary to develop and re-create the parts that are not fully compliant with the times. Music education can provide a large number of talents with creative vitality and innovative spirits for the development and innovation of traditional music culture. That's because the colleges and universities are the places gathering a great number of creative students. Especially, the professional music creative talents cultivated in colleges and universities, are actually the main force for carrying traditional music forward.

#### *B. Integrating regional music culture course into music major education of colleges and universities*

According to the National Plan for School Art Education Development issued by the Ministry of Education P.R.C in 2002: "Art teachers should make full use of and develop the cultural education resources of their local regions and ethnic groups."<sup>2</sup> And the way to integrate regional music courses in music education of colleges and universities could: first, fully demonstrate the rich traditional cultural assets of various ethnic groups in China, thus to figure out more excellent music, make regional music cultures in various places known to the people, carry out inheritance and education of traditional music to following generations, accelerate the rise of traditional music, and accelerate the globalization of Chinese music; second, since the regional music is the key resources for music education practice and scientific research practice in colleges and universities, the in-depth study of regional music can produce more

scientific research findings, thereby further promoting the development of humanity and social sciences, and the inheritance and innovation of local cultures; third, the integration of regional music can enrich teaching contents, which would encourage teachers to study and make more progress continuously, conduct in-depth research on regional music culture, and improve all-round quality and ability of their own; fourth, by integrating regional music culture into music major education in colleges and universities, we can find more talented students in traditional music and local regional music, and cultivate more outstanding professional inheritors, which also plays a significant role in improving the overall quality of students.

### **III. BLUEPRINT FOR CONSTRUCTING CULTURE COURSES OF QUANFENG LANTERN OPERA<sup>3</sup> REGIONAL MUSIC**

#### *A. Concept of course construction*

In terms of regional music course construction, the basic concept that local colleges and universities hold is to adhere to "attaching equal importance between culture inheritance and characteristics, and between quality improvement and teacher cultivation". To construct the regional music culture courses, we shall uphold the attitude of learning advantages of others and exerting local advantages to make full uses of the resources and environment of the colleges and universities according to the practical situations, and construct courses for the most proper regional music. In addition to giving full play to local advantages, we shall also pay attention to overall improvement by taking other elements into account, including: basic music education and skill education, music knowledge teaching and teachers training, etc. We shall set up correct and scientific perspective on education of regional music inheritance, and put the concept of regional music inheritance into implementation. For the construction of regional music courses, we shall have long-term plan, make sure that students can learn essential knowledge therefrom, and improve their capability in appreciating, representing, and creating regional music culture through class teaching. The reason for us to construct regional music course is that, the music education in colleges and universities is one of the most important methods to carry forward traditional music. Traditional music culture is the root of the whole nation while the regional music culture is the root of local residents. The music culture is a kind of root culture closely related to our production, life, and customs. It is passed on to us from our ancestors, and is the soul of a nation or a region. Only when

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Education, P.R.C. National Plan for School Art Education Development (2001-2010) [Z]. 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Local art forms in Jiangxi Province of China, also called "Quanfeng Fancy Lantern \ Lantern Opera Drama".

traditional music is integrated and firmly rooted in music education can we talk about other types of music.

Jiujiang University of Jiangxi Province, based on massive studies on Quanfeng lantern Opera in the early stage, put forward the idea of offering courses of regional music culture centered on Quanfeng lanterns. It can be seen that Jiujiang University has been exploring on this topic and developing towards steady and concentrated direction. The first step for constructing a complete system of regional music culture course should be: making good use of all advantage resources to construct a unique and representative course on regional music culture, and practically carry forward local music culture. For example, we can integrate more courses into our required courses, such as "Music Culture and Field Collection in Northern Jiangxi Province", "Song and Dance Art of Quanfeng Lantern Opera ", and "Folk Songs and Dances of Northern Jiangxi Province", etc.; and integrate the "Theory and Practice of Regional Music and Dance Culture Fieldwork" into our selective courses. We shall, on one hand, pay attention to the accumulation of regional music and cultural knowledge, while on the other hand, focus more on the study and practice of fieldwork.

#### B. Ideas about course implementation

Teachers and students shall both come out from the classroom to conduct practice investigation and art collection, during which, they can learn the dialect of Quanfeng, know about the life of local residents there, and feel in person the humanistic environment and cultural background of Quanfeng Lantern Opera. By doing so, teachers and students of the university can acquire the first-hand information and master direct experience, thereby figuring out the essence of Quanfeng Lantern Opera culture. Besides, we shall encourage the students to engage in stage performance creation, through which, they can consolidate the knowledge learned from class teaching and apply in practice.

Local research experts, folk artists and inheritors shall be invited to give lectures and rehearsals. And famous cultural masters shall be invited to participate in class teaching and guide the art practice, and explain the artistic performance method of Quanfeng Lantern Opera. Actually, the art of Quanfeng Lantern Opera is a kind of local culture that is different from the Western music or Chinese folk music that are well known to the public. As a "grassroots" art culture, it needs to abstract "original" local contents from local inheritors and folk artists. Their participation would make the course be with more local characteristics, and make the course materials be more authentic and authoritative.

It is necessary to introduce excellent music teaching methods and folk music teaching methods at home and

abroad. A lot of successful national music education systems and teaching theories have been formed throughout the world. These successful methods can be introduced in to optimize the existing teaching system, improve the educating modes of local colleges and universities, and design special teaching methods of our own by combining with practical Chinese situation and the features of the Quanfeng Lantern Opera. The introduction of such excellent teaching methods would helpful for course constructing of Quanfeng Lantern Opera art.

#### C. Practice of course construction

In terms of the teaching and practice of regional music cultural course for Quanfeng Lantern Opera in Jiujiang University, it is planned to construct from both the vertical and the horizontal lines. The vertical line refers to the development history of Quanfeng Lantern Opera, while the horizontal line refers to the specific characteristics of Quanfeng Lantern Opera. Its contents can be roughly divided into the following parts:

1) *Introduction of Quanfeng Lantern Opera:* The contents include the origin of the lantern, the development history of the lantern; the distribution, origin, formation, evolution and spread of the lantern drama.

2) *Overview on the development of Quanfeng Lantern Opera:* The contents include the origin, history, protection, development, and modern honors of Quanfeng Lantern Opera.

##### 3) *Study on Quanfeng Lantern Opera performance*

a) *Full participation:* Generally a villager group or one to several families are grouped as the unit, for which, the head person is called the "lantern head". And the process of organizing the crowd is called the "grouping of lanterns". During traditional festivals such as the Spring Festival, lanterns of different gangs gather from all walks of life in the village, pass through the village to celebrate the festivals from the beginning of the new year to the Lantern Festival. It has become an important local folk event.

b) *Respecting traditional folklore:* A ceremony for "worshipping God of Lantern" would be held every time before the performance, for which, the administrator shall send "invitation" to all places, meaning praying for the favorable weather conditions, and prosperity of the nation and the people; or they would carry out the local statues of gods such as Bodhisattva, which means to send auspiciousness and safety. During the above process, firecracker, incense, and tribute would be presented and offered.

c) *The performance of three main characters on the same stage:* There are three main characters: female character — with one hand holding a handkerchief

while the other hand holding the handlebar of vehicle; male character — wearing a top hat with the facial makeup painted like tofu cube; clown character — with both hands pushing the vehicle at the back (the vehicle has its two sides covered by cloth, on which, wheels are painted). Compared with other fancy lantern arts, such as "antiphonal singing (a song-and-dance duet)", "five characters on stage (five-actors drama)", and "seven characters performance (seven-actors drama)", the Quanfeng Lantern Opera is the only art for three characters performing on the stage at the same time.

d) *Character inheritance*: The saying that "male character rides bamboo horse" is originated from the "Bamboo Horse Opera" in the northwestern part of China in Han and Tang dynasties; the saying that "female character sits in a chariot" is inherited from the "Chariot Opera" in the Central Plains area in the Tang Dynasty; and the humorous performance that "clown character pushes the chariot with bent legs, shaking shoulders, jumping, wearing inside-out coat, tying a belt, and wearing a skullcap" is right the modern version of "Zaban (miscellaneous impersonation) in Zaju (miscellaneous drama) of Song Dynasty.

#### 4) *Research on stage art of Quanfeng Lantern Opera*

- Lantern Opera: it takes the ancient lantern that has a history of over two thousand years for references, especially representing the palace lantern styles of the Tang, Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties on the performance scene. As for lantern making, it combines with local characteristics and evolution of times to make the lantern seem "elegant and luxurious" on one hand, and on the other hand, popular among the people. Its joyful effects make it indispensable in every happy moment of the people. "Lantern Opera" can be roughly divided into three categories: props (bamboo horses, vehicle lantern, boat lantern, etc.), modeling lantern (brand lantern, story lantern, revolving scenic lantern, auspicious lantern, hand dance lantern, etc.), and lanterns.
- Other props: (bamboo) horse, coach (lantern), boat (lantern), etc.
- Clothing and makeup: since its performance is usually improvised, having no restriction on venue or contents, the clothing and makeup are also not so highly restricted. The appearance makeup often simple but can represent the basic characteristics of the role.
- Set: from the traditional improvised performances in farmland or village roads, to the courtyard of farmers' households in modern times, to various adapted and re-created scripts,

as for the stage set, more attentions have been paid to restore the original scene and simulate the original ecological environment in order to present true and natural performance.

5) *Study on Quanfeng Lantern Opera music*: As for the forms of singing, it mainly includes "a leading singer with lots of backing vocalist", "antiphonal singing", "relay ensemble" and "chorus", combining both rapping and singing, and focusing on the use of free voice extension and dragging. Moreover, this type of art has a unique inclusive singing mode of "front tone" and "back tone", which means that the beginning part of the new song is the same with the end of the previous song; meanwhile, all its lyrics, including rapping and spoken part, are in local dialect with distinctive regional characteristics (the ancient Jiangxi dialect in the Chinese dialects, which belongs to the Duchang area of Jiangxi dialect); besides, a large number of lining characters, words, and sentences are added, which basically appear in every sentence the lyrics, making the performance cordial and artistic; the adding of percussion instrument like Chinese gongs, gongs, drums, and cymbals help to enhance the atmosphere of the performance. Sometimes accompaniment instruments such as Huqin, bamboo flute, and suona horn are also included.

6) *Research on the artistic regeneration of Quanfeng lanterns*: All the traditional props (bamboo horses, vehicle lantern, boat lantern, etc.), modeling lantern (brand lantern, story lantern, revolving scenic lantern, auspicious lantern, hand dance lantern, etc.), and lanterns, take the ancient lantern that has a history of over two thousand years for references, especially representing the palace lantern styles of the Tang, Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties on the performance scene, and inheriting traditional modeling elements in modern performance. As for the lantern making, local characteristics and evolution of times are integrated with to make the lantern seem "elegant and luxurious" on one hand, and on the other hand, popular among the people. Its joyful effects make it indispensable in every happy moment of the people.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Chinese excellent traditional culture represents the soft culture power of China. And as part of the traditional culture, the outstanding traditional music has also been recognized as an important element that needs to be carried forward urgently. In this case, music education is right the best tool to achieve this goal. Colleges and universities are the key bases for China to cultivate talents of all aspects. They play the main role in carrying traditional music forward. As for local

colleges and universities, their advantages in research shall turn out to be the key for the sustainable inheritance of their respective regional music culture. The way to integrate regional music culture study courses into the curriculum system of the music major in colleges and universities is efficient for the long-term preserving and developing of the regional music culture. On the other hand, by using the rich regional music culture resources, local colleges and universities can give full play to their specific advantages to improve their competitiveness while carrying forward the regional music culture. The study courses of regional music culture centered on "Quanfeng Lantern Opera" can be helpful for carrying the Quanfeng Lantern Opera art forward effectively, and for forming the characteristics of the university; meanwhile, it provides the novel thoughts and reference method for ordinary local colleges and universities like Jiujiang University to carry local regional music culture forward while improving their own music education level. The construction of these courses can be a supplementation to national curriculum and discipline teaching to some certain extent, promote colleges and universities to set up their own characteristic teaching system, thus to improve the professional and research capabilities of the teachers, satisfy the students' demands on learning diversified music, and help students to participate in more music activities. The establishment of the inheritance system for excellent regional traditional music culture can drive the inheritance and development of the overall traditional music, protect regional music in various places, and improve the local music education level all through China.

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