

Folk Cultures and Artistic Characteristics of "Yisheng Goddess" Festival Lantern Drama

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ABSTRACT

"Yisheng Goddess" Festival Lantern Drama, which is an ancient folk cultural activity of Han nationality in Xiushui County of Jiujiang City, was added on Jiangxi Provincial List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (X-10) in 2007. It is regarded as one of the folk and artistic culture forms in Jiangxi Province. And in this paper, its overall development status is analyzed and explained by studying the embedded folk cultures and artistic characteristics. As a matter of fact, the folk culture is the context and ecological basis for the survival and development of the folk art. Therefore, in this study, a series of properties of Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama are explored, including its origin, development, cultural investigation, and artistic characteristics, etc. Meanwhile, the typicality of Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama as one of the Jiangxi festival lantern forms is explored from the perspective of folk art and folk culture, thereby showing the unique charm of Jiangxi Lantern Art in the grand context of Jiangxi Folk Culture, and the vital social significance of various Jiangxi festival lanterns in the development of rural cultural resources and the protection of intangible cultural heritage in Jiangxi Province. The purposes of this study are, on one hand, to conduct in-depth research on and carry forward the Chinese folk culture and folk art, while on the other hand, to carry out scientific analysis and research on the status quo and artistic characteristics of the folk art of Yisheng Goddess combining with local culture.

Keywords: *Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama, Folk custom, Culture, Artistic characteristic, Intangible cultural heritage.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama is an ancient and traditional folk-cultural activity in Donggao Village of Gushi Town, Xiushui County, Jiujiang City, Jiangxi Province¹. Xiushui County is located in the Northwest[1] part of Jiangxi Province. It is a place having beautiful natural scenery, unique folk custom, long history, and profound humanistic spirits. There are two rivers passing through the whole county: one is the Xiuhe River, which flows from the west to the east of the county; and the other is Mishui River, which originates from Huanglong Mountain in the west part of the region, flowing through a number of towns and villages westwards till reaching Dongting Lake. Huang Dalin, Ci Poet of Song Dynasty, once described Xiushui like this: "it borders Dongting Lake in the west, which was originally the Chu State territory, and is adjacent to

Poyang Lake, which was originally the Wu State territory in ancient China."² — Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern emerged and became popular from here.

2. It is cited from *Finding an amazing place from the east of a shabby house in Shuangjing, which is surrounded by dense forest and dangerous peaks. It has sweet spring water and fertilized soil, so that it is an ideal place to settle down and live a quiet and happy life. It was at the foot of the Yanshan Mountain that I wrote four poems, which I sent to Luzhi to read together with scholars of Weidu Poem II.* Huang Dalin, date of birth: unknown, Ci Poet of Song Dynasty, style name: Yuanming, pseudonym: Yin'an, born in Fenning of Hongzhou (it is now the Xiushui County of Jiangxi Province). He was the elder brother of Huang Tingjian, the magistrate of Pingxiang. Three of his Ci poems are reserved, which show a fresh style.

1. The regionalism code is 360424103203

2. ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF YISHENG GODDESS FESTIVAL LANTERN DRAMA

Yisheng Goddess refers to the daughter of Qu Yuan — Wei Ying.³[2] Legend has it that Wei Ying always lifted the masses from woe and cured their diseases. In Song Dynasty, the Family of Leng worshiped Yisheng Goddess as their family goddess, but no festival lantern activity emerged. At that time, a notable family, the ancestor of Leng Juezhai⁴, who was the senior grand secretary of Baozhang Collection Room, regarded and worshiped Yisheng Goddess as their family goddess. Counting from the time of Leng Juezhai, the activity of worshipping Yisheng Goddess has been lasting for 920 years. Till the beginning of Yuan Dynasty, the eldest son of Leng Juezhai — Leng Zhengshu went to Xiangyin and took office as the county governor. In that place, Leng Zhengshu obtained more profound understanding about the patriotic spirits of Qu Yuan who cared so much for the fate of his nation and finally demonstrated his destination by throwing himself into Miluo River. Due to the respect and admiration to the loyal official and his exemplary daughter, Leng Zhengshu initiated a festival lantern activity for Yisheng Goddess in his hometown of Xiushui. Especially, activities like building dragon boats and organizing lantern play were held to spice up holiday atmosphere, and express the masses' pray for happy life. In Ming Dynasty, descendants of Leng Family built up the Ancestral Hall of Leng Family and the Grand Secretary Memorial Archway. In Qing Dynasty, the descendants of Leng Family built up the Yi'an Hall and the Ganlu Temple. And on the right side of the ancestral hall, the Mu'an Hall and the Ciyun Palace were also constructed, among which, the Ciyun Palace is the place to worship Yisheng Goddess. Later in the period of Cultural Revolution, the Ciyun Palace was ruined, and the ancient cultural and entertainment activities of local farmers that lasted for hundreds of years, such as building dragon boat and organizing lantern show, were also suspended. Then in the year of 1993, local residents donated and constructed the Yisheng Goddess Temple, and accordingly, the lantern show was also

resumed. However since lots of precious materials are missed, leaving only a few dictation records and family tree material, and the number of old artists is reducing, it is quite hard to resume the prosperous development of the festival lantern show.⁵ In the year of 2006, local residents constructed the Xianren Pavilion and Yisheng Goddess Memorial Archway. Till now, the trinity layout of palace, archway, and pavilion have been attracting numerous pilgrims to worship Yisheng Goddess. They come here and pray a happy and health life. And certainly, Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern has also turned into a traditional culture and art form with local characteristics, and become popular in local place.⁶[3]

3. INVESTIGATION ON FOLK CULTURE OF YISHENG GODDESS FESTIVAL LANTERN DRAMA

The folk activity of Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama[4] is held every year, lasting for 21 or 22 days from the 24th day of the last month of Chinese lunar year (also the Little New Year in China) to the 15th day of the first month of the next Chinese lunar year (also the Lantern Festival in China). It composes of three stages, including boat building, boat sending, and lantern show. The stage of boat building lasts from the 24th day of the last month to the last day of the last month of the Chinese lunar year. A singer wearing robe, top hat, and light make-up leads the chorus while other players on-site accompanying the lead singer. The atmosphere on the scene is quite joyful ("Figure 1") The lyric of the lead singer is easy to understand, which is usually the introduction about Qu Yuan's family and the entire process of boat building at the very beginning. There are 180 lyric lines in total, and each line contains 7 Chinese characters. For example "Yisheng Goddess arises everywhere in Donggao, come out and worship Yisheng Goddess. You don't need to stay long, just come and accept her blessing. Yisheng Goddess arises when you show your worship, safeguard your property and health."⁷ Boat sending is held in the New Year's Eve. Descendant of Leng Family load all clothes offered by the pilgrims to the dragon boat,

3. According to Changsha Prefecture Annals and Taojiang County Annals, Qu Yuan has a daughter who named Xiuying, or also can be called Wei Ying, and her tomb is located in Huayuandong Village of Yiyang, Hunan Province. There are six types of sayings about Qu Yuan's children. And this is one type.

4. Leng Juezhai is the 14th generation of Leng Family. He is the grandchild of calligrapher Huang Tingjian, and famous poet of Song Dynasty, grand secretary of Baozhang Collection Room. He is praised as one of the "Eight Worthy Persons of Xiushui"

5. <https://m.weibo.cn/status/4597567901672440>

6. Zhu Fayuan, Mufu Narration [J] Position, March 2019, P167

7. *The Song of Boat Building* in Xiushui: "Meet five goddesses on the lantern boat, The five goddesses bring with auspicious fates, Qu Yuan has five daughters, Five daughters look like goddesses, Five daughters are originally goddesses, They are worshiped in five different places, Yisheng Goddess sits at Shuanggangkou, Make her presence and power felt due to the worship of ancestors of Donggao....."

and assign four persons to carry the large sedan chair for Yisheng Goddess to a large lawn or river beach area, making the dragon boat follow the Goddess sedan chair. Suona horns and drums are played all the way together till reaching the destination where the dragon boat is fired by candles or touch paper. The ashes of the fired dragon boat are then thrown to the river. This is a form holding memorial ceremony for Qu Yuan and his daughter. Then the stage of lantern show lasts from the first day to the 15th day of the first month of Chinese lunar year. The performers of Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama show take the performance instruments to visit every household. The band composes large drum-beating and wind-instrument teams (10 performers per team) and small wind-instrument teams (3 performers per team). Each stage is arranged with different music. And the singers sing in local dialect which shows extremely unique local characteristics. First of all, in the drum beat sound, the performers hold up the lanterns and 12 color flags with blessing words or memorial oration; then, the Yisheng Goddess Sculpture in a sedan chair which is carried by four persons and protected by another four persons shows up; after that, the small wind-instrument teams play their instruments while various types of lanterns are displayed. There are over twenty types of lanterns, among which, the dragon boat lantern is the most characteristic one ("Figure 2"). The actor of the male boat owner is at the bower of the dragon boat lantern, while the female owner is at the stern position. Meanwhile, there's also a beautiful woman character in the boat. They all wear ancient style clothes, singing and dancing in a humorous manner. The performers also cooperate with tacit understanding. Therefore, the performance form of Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern is featured in extremely high local entertainment property and regional artistic characteristics.



Figure 1 Boat Building Ceremony of Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama.



Figure 2 Dragon Boat Lantern and Performers of Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama.

It can be known from the above that, at the very beginning, Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama was only the private activity of Leng Family for memorizing the patriotic poet Qu Yuan and his daughter Weiying. Then, it had been developed into a local cultural activity popular among the masses of Xiushui County and its surrounding areas. It carries forward the patriotic spirits while promoting the construction of spiritual civilization. Meanwhile, it combines traditional morality with folk art, which shows positive significance for the construction of harmonious society and rural area nowadays.

4. ARTISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF YISHENG GODDESS FESTIVAL LANTERN DRAMA

Local residents of Jiangxi Province regard the color lanterns as a mascot that can bring with happiness and avoid disasters. It can be seen in various activities, such as festival activities, ceremonies, sacrifices, and etiquette activities. The lantern show is organized in all major folk holidays in most Jiangxi regions, including Spring Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, and Mid-Autumn Festival, etc. Among the above, the Lantern Festival is no doubt the most joyful occasion for lantern show. At this time, all regions of Jiangxi Province organize the lantern activities with their respective art styles and folk characteristics. As a matter of fact, there are over four to five hundred types of lanterns in Jiangxi, which can be divided into three major categories, namely: performance category, appreciation category, and sacrifice category. Only for performance lantern, there are over two hundred types. The most commonly seen lanterns are dragon lantern, lion lantern, and flower lantern. Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama represents some common characteristics of Jiangxi lanterns, such as ritual and performance properties embedded in dragon and flower lanterns.

4.1 Craftsmanship Characteristics of Lanterns

Different places of China have different craftsmanship characteristics in making lanterns. Generally, it can be divided into the "southern style" and the "northern style", which both have unique characteristics. The "northern style" is represented by Shanxi, Harbin, and Beijing, while the "southern style" is represented by schools of Shu, Wu, Yue, and Min. As a matter of fact, Jiangxi region has been called the "head of Wu, tail of Chu, and the entrance of both Guangdong and Fujian" since the ancient time, which shows its critical location advantage at the throat position of East part of China. Therefore the fabrication of lantern here integrates advantages of various places and schools, and forms its own style and characteristics.

The representative flower lantern ("Figure 3") and dragon light ("Figure 4") of Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama are featured in vivid shape-design, looking just like what they are called. These lanterns are of proper sizes, appropriate component proportions, and firm frameworks. No matter for concrete or abstract shape, static single shape or large-scale complicated shape, or connected flexible shape, these lanterns are all characterized by complex structure and tactful conceiving thoughts. There are many kinds of materials selected to make Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern. In the ancient times, materials were obtained locally, which were mostly cheap paper, grass, bamboo, cloth, sheepskin, and yarn, etc. But today, in order to lighten the atmosphere, materials that are firmer and more exquisite are used. For example, the two-year bamboo is used to make the skeleton of the lantern; the copy paper and white gauze are used to cover the lantern skeleton; a variety of offlint-coated paper, iridescent paper, and dyed paper are adopted to engrave pattern and decorate lantern; the flexible wires are applied to bond the skeleton, etc. By these means, the lanterns are firmer and more durable than ever before. In terms of craftsmanship, it emphasizes exquisite techniques in every step, including design, bending, binding, papering, pattern pasting, and edge enclosing. The warm colors, such as red, orange, and yellow are taken as the basic colors of the lanterns. Each lantern contains at least 5 colors, among which, red represents festive auspicious wish, yellow represents richness, green is harmonious life, and gold means health life. For the color matching, it usually red with yellow, yellow with purple, red with blue, and gold with green. Besides, it also uses bright pink, green, purple blue, cyan, dark green, medium

yellow, and gold, especially bright colors like red, yellow, gold, and green, etc.



Figure 3 Flower lantern of Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama.



Figure 4 Dragon Boat Lantern of Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama.

4.2 Singing and Dancing Characteristics of Festival Lantern Drama Show

Jiangxi Lantern Drama music can be divided into two types from the perspective of performance forms: the Chinese wind and percussion instrument music, and the vocal singing music. The former is mainly composed of Suona, big gong, and small drums, which is featured in great expressive effect. The latter is vocal singing, which narrates a multi-level story through repeated expression of multiple periods. On the other hand, according to different purposes and contents, Jiangxi lantern Dramas can also be divided to four types of lightening atmosphere, praising, mourning over death, and religious sacrifices. The characteristics of the above four types can be seen in Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama music at different time periods to some certain extent.

一、造船

1 3 2 | 1 3 2 | 1 3 3 1 | 5 6 1 1 6 | 6 1 2 | 1 6 5 | 5 —||

二、划船

1 3 2 | 1 3 2 | 1 3 3 1 | 2 6 1 1 6 | 6 1 2 | 1 6 5 | 5 — | 2 6 1 6 |

5 — | 3 2 3 1 | 2 • 6 | 6 6 6 3 | 5 — |

打击乐

3/4

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Figure 5 Music scores showing the boat building and boating parts of Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama.

Jiangxi Lantern Drama Dance integrates singing and dancing art into folk lantern art. This is a custom originated from the Nuo dance show at the very beginning. For Jiangxi Lantern dances, different performance forms show different music characteristics. The moves of the dances are simulation of the shapes and acts of flowers, birds, insects, and animals, which are wild but beautiful to appreciate. The dance movement is varying with changes between static and moving, high and low, gathering and separating. According to the characteristics of the dance moves, the Jiangxi lantern Drama dance can be divided into lantern holding dance, fan holding dance, and lantern carrying dance. Yisheng Goddess Lantern Festival dance are also featured in the above-mentioned dancing characteristics.

5. CONCLUSION

There are many legends about Yisheng Goddess in Xiuhe River basin. Sacrifices held by Leng Family for Yisheng Goddess has become a set of folk customs, including ethics, sacrifices, singing and dancing. This not only is a demonstrative example for studying the ancient civilization of Jiangxi, but also provides an analysis perspective forexperts to verify the place where Qu Yuan was banished. Besides the study on Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama can help to obtain more profound understanding about Qu Yuan's worries and the patriotic love from his behavior of throwing himself into the river. Due to the respect and admiration to the loyal official and his exemplary daughter, this festival lantern is designed with dragon boat building and lantern show activities to lighten atmosphere and express the wish

of people of Han nationality to live a happy life. The study on Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama is to take use of folk culture brand resources[5] to show the traditional performance art, music culture, beliefs and other content, improve the cultural connotation of folk tourism[6], and let the whole society feel the charm and value of cultural heritage.

The study on folk culture[7] in the art of Yisheng Goddess Festival Lantern Drama is also in line with the requirement of developing cultural resources in rural area and protecting the intangible cultural heritage[8]. We are experiencing rapid urbanization nowadays. The urbanization and the process that farmers are turning to be citizens bring lots of new problems and challenges to the protection of intangible cultural heritage in rural areas. However this also spawn the internal drive to carry forward the intangible culture heritage in rural areas. Inheritance should be performed in places where people live in, and become the witness of human social civilization, thereby providing resources and motivation for the sustainable development of human society.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The main part of this paper is completed by Zhenhao Li, and Dandan Zhou wrote the manuscript and contributed to revising and editing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The study was supported by "2021 Jiangxi Province University Students Innovation and Entrepreneurship Project — Mass Literary Creation and Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage — A Case Study of the Music of Lantern Opera in Ganpo Valley"(Grant No. 202111843013). "2021 Jiangxi University Humanities and Social Sciences Research Project — Research on the Music Culture of Lantern Drama in Poyang Valley"(Grant No. YS21107).

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