

Discussion and Analysis on Nanping Minor

Juanjuan Cheng

China West Normal University, Nanchong, 637000, China

Keywords: Nanping minor, Play and sing, Folk music art, Sichuan, Jiuzhaigou Valley

Abstract. Nanping minor is also called Nanping play and sing, which is an art form of folk music in Nanping County in Sichuan Province. It is succeeded in the 1950s, which is prestigious in the local area, and is called “songs” by local people. For many years, it is popular in Northwestern Sichuan plateau area, Yuwang area, Shuanghe area, and Guang area, etc. As a play and sing art of self playing and self singing, Nanping minor has a lyric temperament of melodious, tactful, graceful and deep genre, which is loved by the people in Sichuan, and has become an exquisite Chinese folk music for a long time.

Introduction

Nanping County is the current Jiuzhaigou County, which is called Sheep Cave in the ancient time, and has a history of over 5,000 years. It is said that, when encounters the turmoil, Nanping is classified as the external area. Therefore, with the changes of history, there often has immigrates, soldiers and aborigines from everywhere, thus as time passes, it has become today’s Jiuzhaigou people. It is just the historical heritage for thousands of years derived the bright and colorful folk culture and art on this beautiful land, which makes the music art called “Nanping Lute Play and Sing” to be recognized by the outside world. Nowadays, once Nanping minor has become the Jiuzhaigou Minor, which is popular in the world. Even in 2006, it has been included in China’s first batch of national intangible cultural heritage, which makes the historic folk music to be continuously inherited.

Jiuzhaigou

Jiuzhaigou County is located in the northern part of Sichuan Province, its eastern and northern parts are connected with Wen County, Diebu and Zhouqu in Gansu Province, while its western and southern parts is bordered on Pingwu and Ruo Gaier in Sichuan Province. Here, it has abundant geologies and diversified structures, which is a worldwide and unique alpine Custer landscape. As an important stopover on the Southern Silk Road, it is not only witnessed the cultural exchanges and transfer of passengers all over the world, but also inherits the cultural wealth left by all nationalities in living and working. Today, Jiuzhaigou is known as its natural world natural heritage and magnificent landscapes around the world, but we should not forget that it is still the “town of folk songs” proud in people’s mind of Chuanshu areas.

Nanping Minor

History and development of Nanping minor

In 1915, the “Nanping Local Records” in the fourth year of the Republic of China recorded that: “Nanping is Sheep Cave, and the upper, middle and down Sheep Cave are the living places for Qiang people. In the third year of Emperor Yongzheng in Qing Dynasty, it starts to recover Nanping, and there are all foreign people in the area without any Han people.” This record shows the historic morphology and staff composition of Nanping County before the early Qing Dynasty, which is the inhabited land of Qiang and Tibetan minorities. According to the historical facts, the main life-style of Qiang residents in Nanping County is nomadism, taking farming as a means of survival. Until the Emperor Qianlong and Jiaqing in Qing Dynasty, the Han people in the area of Shaanxi and Gansu

gradually move to Nanping, and then an era of common communication between Han nationality and minorities begins.

In the early 1950s, students and teachers in Sichuan Conservatory of Music came to Nanping for music collection. The types and chapters of folk music here unexpectedly were more than one hundred with different forms, which never made people boring. Then they brought these folk songs in Chengdu, and changed a minor called “Small Flower” into “Hope the Red Army”, and showed in the school with the form of report performance. After the show, it caused strong repercussions inside and outside of the school, and this song was broadcasted repeatedly by the Sichuan Radio. It also invited the artists of folk Nanping minor in Nanping County for interviews, such as Liu Shaocheng, and Wang Yuyuan, etc. Quickly, Nanping minor was popular in the whole Sichuan Province, and became the art form of folk music favored by the people in Sichuan Province. Later, Nanping minor transmitted to Beijing and heard by Premier Zhou Enlai. Premier Zhou highly praised the Nanping minor, and even suggested “China Song and Dance Ensemble” to take Nanping minor as the repertoire when visiting to Southeast Asia. As a result, Nanping minor quickly boarded the international arena, and popularized in Asia.

Minor complex of Nanping people

Nanping minor is popular in the Han population around Jiuzhaigou County in Northwest Sichuan Plateau area. Every festive holiday, especially in the Spring Festival, people will perform it to heighten the festive atmosphere, so it can become one of the subjects in the social culture in Nanping area. Nanping minor combines not only the local dialect features, but also a lot of folk literature, which fully embodies the characteristics of Nanping people and the folk tradition and fold customs of this area. In addition to the festival, in the daily labor and life, the local people will play and sing Nanping minor, and its contents are mostly happiness, sadness, aspirations and ideas in life, and even people’s beauty-appreciation and legends. Nanping minor not only has social culture, but also has humanistic culture. People are willing to play and sing minors to speak their minds and to talk their emotions, so the human touch of Nanping minor also deeply attracts many writers, artists, folklorists and folk music researchers at home and abroad to conduct in-depth studies.

In Jiuzhaigou people’s opinions, playing and singing Nanping minor must be the emotions from inner heart, and is the most authentic experience deeply inside. Playing and singing spread everywhere, and singing the minor till the full moon. The main reasons for Nanping minor is well known at home and abroad are not only the deep emotional expression, but also its complex and sophisticated techniques, such as the accompanies between songs of saucer, lute and Banjo, and the flexible switch between simple and vivid single song and complex and changeable associated song. These make Nanping minor embody more warm, storytelling and full of infinite emotional tension. But its simple, elegant and bright style and its villatic charm full of earthy smell meet the aesthetic needs of people in Jiuzhaigou area, combine with the local unique geographical environment, and become the spiritual food of people.

Classification of Nanping minor

Nanping minor can be classified from the perspective of content, covering a wide range, such as, “Crops Song” and “Pick Grapes” describing field work and family life; “Love Song”, “Sendoff Husband” and “Embroider Pouch” describing the emotional thinking in man and women love, and “Meng Jiang Cry the Great Wall” and “Dukang Brewing” describing the history and traditions; if according to the structural forms, it also can be divided into fragment narrative style “Boya Break Piano”, complete narrative style “Nanping Dipping Water”, and even the narrative “Twelve Soldier” without any plots; and if from the perspective of rap, in addition to a very small part of works combined with speaking and singing “Two Girls”, and most minors are singing. Many of them start with seven characters, and of course, there are the combinations of seven characters and five characters “Moon Falling to the West”.

The forms to classify Nanping minor are varied, but from the large system of artistic expression, the civil society will divide it into two parts: flower tune and rebate tune, in which it takes flower tune as the mainstream expression form, and it has a broader spread range and is more personal to people’s heart. In terms of expression form, singing style and musical accompaniment, it is similar to the lute

in Wen County popularized in Southern Gansu. Songs like “Ban Foreign Cigarettes” “Fifth Brother of Ma” tell the real stories around Gansu Wufen River. While the expression form of rebate tune is closer to the Mei E singing popularized around Shaanxi and Gansu, and the same to Flower Tune is its historical plot presented by it, such as the classic songs like “Emperor’s Aunt Becomes a Nun” and “Master chooses Gowns”

Song styles of Nanping minor

Single song and associated song are different on the musical structure, but they are able to connect two different tunes. For example, although the song “Emperor’s Aunt Becomes a Nun” belongs to the associated song in the musical structure, it is actually combined with six single songs: “Sister-in-law from the Village Go to the Street”, “Basic Tune of Emperor’s Aunt Becomes a Nun” “Eight Immortals” “Hanging Red Lights”, “Tune of Becoming a Monk or Nun” and “Cry in the Whole Night”. There is a fixed music score as the interlude between these tunes, but the interludes between different associated songs are different, for example, in “Pass the Five hurdles”, it selects $\parallel: \underline{111} \underline{25} \mid \underline{212} \underline{25} : \parallel$ as the interlude music. By linking the associated song and single song, we can see that on the musical structure, using the same interlude to connect two or more tunes according to the structure characteristics, it forms a new musical structure, but the associated interlude music is different between different songs.

Back to the two big structural classifications in Nanping minor: flower tune and rebate tune, they differ not only in singing, but also in the musical structure, and this difference comes from the binding structure between the names of the tunes and the style of songs. Taking the rebate tune of “Yue Tune” called by Jiuzhaigou people, it is mainly played by Banjo with Mei E singing style. Its Qupai style has a certain successive rule, which is a typical associated song, and is composed of many single songs. For flower tune, it uses the most useful instrument lute in Nanping tune, and then matches up with percussions such as saucers and finger cymbals. Its musical structure although shows in single song, but there is only one piece of Qupai music in the whole song, and forms the complete song with repeated playing. “Weave the Towel” and “Crops Song” are such kind of songs.

Due to Nanping minor focuses on the structure of Qupai, musical form and libretto, so from the overall performance, it has expressed a very high artistic quality. While in the lyrical aspect, the narrative method taking songs as the subjective will make the history and tradition of Nanping to be more vivid, visualized and artistic, so whenever we hearing Nanping minor, we will feel its unique performance style, beautiful and steady music melodies and unparalleled folk art. And in the singing skills, such small male voice, pitched singing pass, lyric flat tone and female voice of rebate tune also reflect the unique skills and local characteristics of folk music, which not only has a high appreciation value, but also has a very deep tasting value, such as “Hanging Red Lights”, its first four sections are sung by the natural voice, and with the widening of music range, it changes to be falsetto singing. But the flat tune will always choose to use the natural voice, whose tune is slow and fluctuated, and the sense of expression rhythm is not too strong.

Lute in Nanping Minor

The main instrument for playing and singing Nanping minor is lute, and the minorities in Jiuzhaigou County, such as the Hui nationality, the Tibetan nationality and the original Han nationality who developed Nanping minor, their people plays and sings the minors by lute.

Strictly speaking, the folk musical art used lute to play and sing is extremely rare, and Jiuzhaigou County is one of the few areas still retain lute to play and sing, so this will also add some beauty and the heavy feelings of historical tradition to Nanping minor. From the perspective of lute’s model and structure, Nanping lute has been popularized in ancient times, and the earliest can be dated back to the Eastern Han Dynasty. At that time, the lute is mostly willow-shaped with the sound-style playing structure of three strings and seven ranks, and the style of string is also focused on 6-3 type and 5-2 type. In terms of playing the lute, old Nanping people have this saying: “Whether can play or can’t play, the middle finger does not touch the string.” This is the best reflection of ancient Nanping lute’s playing and singing style kept by modern Jiuzhaigou people, and it is a kind of cultural heritage.

Nanping lute playing and singing tents to the flower tune in the musical form, followed by the rebate tune, but for the Jiuzhaigou people, they are referred to be “minor” and “ditty”. The spread scope for Nanping lute to play and sing minor is wide, not only in the northern Sichuan region, but also in Tibetan areas, Shaanxi and Gansu areas and Yunnan and Guizhou areas. As the main expression form of Nanping minor with smooth melody and widespread singing, its playing and singing style is unique and different from other tunes, for example, it will play a fixed introduction at the beginning of each ditty: $\underline{335} \quad \underline{3 \ 6} \mid \underline{335} \quad \underline{6 \ 6} \mid \underline{635} \quad \underline{6 \ 6} \mid \underline{1235}$. The introduction has four sections, and in the interval, it reflects three major jumps from four degree, five degree to eight degrees, which directly bring the audience’s mood into the song, but once turns to the song, the melody gradually returns to be soothing, which mobilizes the audience’s emotions. Another example is one section in “Picking Flowers”, and in this song, in addition there is no substantial interval to jump in the whole song, the whole rhythm likes a slow and unperturbed river. This soothing musical rhythm forms a stark contrast with the pitched jump in the above mentioned introduction of the lute.

From the above two minors, their end syllables are composed by two factors, such as the 5 or 6 in the lute’s inner string, in which mostly are the 5-note scale of minor’s mode structure, and rarely appear the scales greater than 8, so when playing the lute, it will be many empty strings, and basically place the melody in a fixed position. Then the introduction played by the lute still plans the melody direction of the minor, that is to say, the keynote evolution of the introduction determines the keynote of the entire minor, so that the characteristics of Nanping lute is also here.

Artistic Value of Nanping Minor in the Contemporary Culture Market

As a non-material cultural heritage of our folk art, and as a musical expression form hidden in northern Sichuan folk, it is quite difficult for Nanping minor to be recognized by the country and the masses. Since it has been chosen by the Premier Zhou as the repertoire of diplomatic visits after the liberation, the development of Nanping minor is recovered, and it has become the well-known musical art form for people in various regions. On the CCTV Western Folk TV Contest in 2004, the folk song “Picking Flowers” from Jiuzhaigou County won the third prize of honor, which not only showed the unique style of northern Sichuan region to the national people, but also promoted the artistic charm and cultural values of Nanping minor. At the same time, it was also the appeal of Jiuzhaigou people to the outside world that, the protection and inheritance for Nanping minor in Nanping regions and by Nanping people is not enough, and it needs more people to protect and support. In musical terms, it should compose some Nanping minors with multi-ethnic features and multi-style musical forms, and from the artistic point of view, this approach also allows the artistic value of Nanping minor to be reflected in our contemporary cultural markets.

Conclusion

“There is Love before playing the minor”. It is quite difficult for Nanping minor to inherit so far with its quaint local customs and practices and beautiful and graceful melodies, especially under the reality of rapid development of science and technology nowadays and foreign cultures continue to impact the domestic art and culture market, how to protect and inherit it, and to continuously give it new life, become the reasons for Nanping minor to be continuously developed. For now, to further dig Nanping minor such kind of musical and artist form, and to continuously compose more rich and diverse new songs, make the artistic value of Nanping minor to keep youth forever.

Acknowledgments

This paper is the research result of the topic “Arrangement and Study of Nanping Folk Songs” in the Education Office of Sichuan province, and is also the research result of innovation team for the “Musical Dance Study in Qin-Ba Mountain Areas” in China West Normal University. Project No.:

14 SB0101, and the topic of innovation team for the “Musical Dance Study in Qin-Ba Mountain Areas” (Project No.: CXTD2012-12)

References

- [1] Long Youcheng. Discussion on the Structural Features and Inherit Protection of Nanping Playing and Singing. *Sichuan Drama*, 2011(5).
- [2] Zhuang Chunhui. The Enchantment of the Minor in Jiu Zhai Gou. *Tibetan Art Studies*, 2004(3).
- [3] Ma Chengfu, Xiu Hua. The Brilliant Art Treasure--An Analysis of Jiuzhaigou Folk Songs. *Journal of Aba Teachers College*, 2003 (3).
- [4] Li Jianrong. First Exploration on Nanping Minor. *Sichuan Drama*, 2008 (5).