

# Research Review under the Perspective of Urban Ethnomusicology: Taking the Example of Street Chu Opera Performance in Xiaogan

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**Keywords:** Urban ethnomusicology; Street Chu opera; Sound landscape

**Abstract.** Urban ethnomusicology is a branch of ethnomusicology; its research perspective focuses on the urban sound landscape and pays attention to the music culture phenomena in the surroundings. The street Chu opera performance of Xiaogan is the urban sound landscape. It is of practical significance to inherit and carry forward the Chu opera through placing the street Chu operaperformance in Xiaogan into the perspective of urban ethnomusicology and illustrating this urban cultural symbol.

## Introduction

In recent years, the study of urban ethnomusicology has become a new academic trend at home and abroad; both in terms of theoretical construction and case investigation, ethnographic records have produced a series of results. Urban ethnomusicology is a branch of ethnomusicology; the research perspective changes from the rural fields to the city, focusing on urban sound environment and paying attention to the music culture phenomenon in the surroundings, which is sometimes called "ethnomusicology at home". In addition to the methodology of the discipline, urban ethnomusicology has also absorbed the music sociology and postmodern theory model; it is an active academic field currently. In addition to the theoretical significance, its practical significance lies in the study of urban ethnomusicology can provide theoretical basis for the government to formulate urban cultural policy. The American musician Nettl Bruno, in his monograph--"Eight Urban Musical Cultures: Tradition and Change, University of Illinois Press, 1978," analyzes the urban music life, music products and their producers, consumers and music behavior, as well as some practical issues (such as how to maintain the traditional, urban school music education in the face of modernization , etc.) through the records of urban ethnomusicology. American musicologist Shelemay's (Kay K.) monograph--"Soundscapes, Exploring Music in a changing World, WW Norton, 2001"-- is a book that attracts more attention in China in recent years. Shelemay holds: "There is a sound culture, that is, a musical culture has a distinctive background, voice and meaning." Here the "background" refers to the performance site and performers and the behavior of the audience; "voice" refers to the tone, pitch, value and loudness; "meaning" is the connotation of music itself and its connotation to the performers and the audience. In addition, some foreign scholars, such as Witzleben published "Silk and Bamboo" "Music in Shanghai: The JiangnanSizhu Instrumental Ensemble Tradition (Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, 2008), which pays attention to the structure of the traditional woodwind music from the "outsider" point of view as well as the performance form and inheritance mode of the woodwind music in the Shanghai downtown; J. Stock wrote *Huju Traditional Opera in Modern Shanghai* (Shanghai Conservatory of Music, 2009), which pays attention to Shanghai operas from the perspective of an "outsider" in terms of history. The book consists of five chapters. The first chapter describes the rise of local operas in eastern China before 1920. The second chapter discusses the female roles and female

artists from 1915 to 1950 from the perspective of gender. The third chapter discusses the region and music as well as local drama in Shanghai from the perspective of "local knowledge". The fourth chapter discusses the evolution of Shanghai opera after the liberation. The fifth chapter discusses the study of ethnomusicology in the urban context.

The real development of Western ethnomusicology began in China since the 1980s, and its biggest feature in the 1990s is that the Western cultural anthropology thought entered China's music academics from different angles. Since the 1990s, the development of ethnomusicology in mainland China was rapid, and the research field closely followed the trend of the world, and the research perspective was diversified, changing from the mere study of musical form to the concern about production of musical matters, from music culture to sound landscape and so on. The attention perspective changes from the minority or strange music culture to the field before home. Urban ethnomusicology is a branch of ethnomusicology. In its vision, whether it is the construction of methodology or case practice, domestic scholars have had abundant research results. In the 1980s, the theory and method of urban ethnomusicology were mainly translated, such as "Urban Ethnomusicology" (Linda Folia, translated by Wang Beicheng); the author thinks that urban ethnomusicology, "broadly speaking, refers to the study of all the music that has been created, played, and disseminated in the city. It centers on the location and determines the scope of the study." (1984) and proposed that urban ethnomusicology is "to study the music created and performed in cities, thus clarifying the relationship between urban environment and music" (1984). In "My Experience" and "My Reflection" - The Method and Meaning of Urban Field Work in Music Anthropology (2011), Luo Qin discusses that the "urban music field", as a new area of work, what's its difference from the "music field" in the countryside? Does the difference lie in the regional space or the multi-dimensional compound space? What specialty does the method of "field work" of the city music and the ethnographic writing have? Should the position be rethought when the music ethnomusicology with "others" as the research object faces the "urban music field"? With these questions, Luo Qin made five aspects of the discussion: transition of the "field" concept of music ethnomusicology; characteristics of urban music culture; object, category and type of "urban music field"; the methodology of urban music "field work", and "near my experience" and "near my reflection"-the meaning of urban art work in music anthropology. Luo Qin's another article *The Theory, Method and Significance of "Music Shanghai Studies"* proposed to summarize the construction value and meaning of 'music Shanghai school' as 'a typical case of Shanghai's urban music research'... He tried to explore with the method of Chinese culture context and historical awareness and gradually changed the state that the Western academic methods long dominated the Chinese academia, advocated, made efforts to work at the door and highlighted the urban field characteristics. Take the most representative Shanghai urban music rich ore as the example. It focuses on the Chinese social and cultural context, emphasizes research of the historical dimension. Through efforts and accumulation of the "music Shanghai study", it set up the characteristics and the right to speak of Chinese music anthropology of their own. (2012) Early in 2001, Luo Qin has applications of the above theory; his monograph-"Street Music: A Microcosm of American Society and Culture" (People's Music Publishing House, 2001.) took the American urban street as the "field" and selected 24 lens of street music show. It is a microcosm of American music and society. The author combined with music sociology and other theories and reflected the American society and the "grassroots" culture through the urban landscape: street music. Tang Yating's *City Music Landscape* (Shanghai Conservatory of Music Publishing House, 2005.), combined with the theory of the city landscape of Slobin and Sherme and focused on the landscape of the "door" of Shanghai. Another book of Tang *The Music Life of Shanghai Jewish Community* (Shanghai Music Academy

Press, 2007.) combined with historical ethnomusicology and was concerned about the music life of Jewish immigrant community from the historical perspective during the war in Shanghai. It started from the "intersection" of urban music event and analyzed its cultural characteristics and social functions. After Tang Yating and Luo Qin translated the western urban ethnomusicology, other domestic scholars also paid attention to the field of urban ethnomusicology. They learned from the theoretical information at home and abroad and at the same time conducted in-depth academic rationality thinking. In recent years, they have yielded a lot of results. XiongXiaohui's *Study on the Anthropology of Music Anthropology-The Value Orientation, Paradigm and Theoretical Significance of Urban Music Anthropology* (2008) and "Urban Music Anthropology 's Morphology, Pattern and Its Way of Study" (2009) stated that "while the urban music anthropology had profound changes in urbanization process, its own form had major changes. It has become the inevitable thing of the discipline development of modern music anthropology and also made the mode and form of urban music anthropology research have new important characteristics, as well as the form characteristics, research route and paradigm". In *Interpretation of Urban Music Culture Context* "(2003), Liu Shilin"held that the conversion of cultural interpretation context could effectively eliminate and decompose the mainstream music culture's distorted descriptions and explanations of folk music culture from the perspective of hermeneutics and further found the real music soul and free life activity mode". In *National Musicians, Please also Look to the City*(2011), Du Yaxiong pointed out: "With the accelerated pace of urbanization in China, many varieties of traditional Chinese music have many changes including the popular region urbanization, commercialization of performance purpose, secular nature of the activities, popularization of the repertoire and the westernization of the formal content, etc. The ethnomusicology should face the objective situation and appeal to the city, vigorously carry out urban folk music research". Guan Jianhua, in the *Urban Music Production under the Post-modern Economics*, proposed the changes of cultural ideas of economic production and music production, meaning the conversion to the production of urban music culture originality oriented by common economics and new economics, the non-material culture production of urban music oriented by the ethics economics of evil&good economics, the social culture significance production of urban music education oriented by cultural economics(2013). There are some scholars who are concerned about the urban music in cities like Hong Kong and Shenzhen with higher openness. For example, in *A Typical Example of Social Maintenance of Traditional Music Culture - A Field Investigation Report of Hong Kong Volkswagen Society* (2005)written by Yang Hong, through study and description of the internal composition of Hong Kong temple street public opera, performance style, performance repertoire and external operation, it discusses the current cultural and ecological overview of the folk Cantonese opera society and learns how to maintain the continuation and development of traditional culture in the diverse culture in Hong Kong. In Zhao Zhongming's *Shenzhen City Music Investigation Report* (2006), the author believes that "competition between cities and regions no longer simply depends on the economic growth, but rather depends on the culture" and explores the urban music culture and the problems of immigrant urban culture. In Chen Bo's "*Research Review of China's National Folk Music*", the status of urban folk music research in China is sorted, classified and summarized. The article concludes that "with the changes of the times, urban folk music is gradually concerned and focused. The research paradigm and methodology of traditional ethnomusicology need to adapt in the urban cultural space and need new theory to construct; research perspectives need to be diverse and research things need to expand."(2014)

## **Review of Studies on Chu Opera**

On the study of Chu opera, the current research is mainly focused on the characteristics of vocal music and the history and spread of Chu opera, etc. The representative monographs include Zhu Bin's *Overview of Chu Opera Music* (Changjiang Literature and Art Publishing House, 1993.), Zhou Shulian's *Chu Opera Music* (China Drama Publishing House, 1994.), Yu Wenqing's *Chu Opera Music's Existence in Cities for A Hundred Years* (China Archives Press, 2001.). There is no research about Chu opera from the perspective of urban ethnomusicology. Therefore, this project research has a lot of research space and is of certain initiative.

Chu opera, as a representative of Hubei opera, has been selected into the directory of national "intangible cultural heritage". Xiaogan, as one of the birthplaces of Chu opera, has a rich cultural heritage. Chu opera, as a symbol of the urban music, has a strong symbolic significance. The street Chu opera show is one of the urban sound landscapes of Xiaogan. Chu opera is the most popular music culture; most people enjoy Chu drama not in the theater, but in Xiaogan streets and parks. "Grass team" of Chu opera almost covers all the main streets and parks of Xiaogan. To watch Chu opera has already been part of the local life; it carries the function of cultural heritage. In the view of urban ethnomusicology, combining with music sociology and postmodern theory, conduct reproduction of traditional music and cultural resources through the construction of music culture space.

## **Conclusion**

Chu opera is part of Chinese traditional music and part of Chinese culture. Music and culture are inclusive and difficult to segment, so studying music should be in the "cultural environment", rather than conduct separately or split exploration. Merriam firstly proposed "music in culture" (Merriam, 1964), and later "music as culture" (Merriam, 1977). Rice later proposed the research model of "historical composition, social maintenance, personal application" (Rice, 1987). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Slobin and Shelemayput forward the theory of urban sound landscape. The street Chu opera performance of Xiaogan is not only a cultural symbol, but also urban sound landscape. The construction of Xiaogan street sound environment under the view of urban ethnomusicology is not only the mapping of history in the present and the shaping of the future urban cultural space.

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