

Study on the Protection of Han Opera Master Mi Yingxian's Opera Culture

On Its Historical Contribution to the Formation of Peking Opera

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Abstract—Mi Yingxian, native of Hubei Chongyang, was the recognized founder of Peking opera. In the periods of Qianlong and Jiaqing, he brought his Hubei Han tune to Beijing. He became the leader role of Chuntai Troupe, one of the four Hui troupes. Later, the Han tune converged with Hui tune, which marked the formation of Peking opera. Mi Yingxian was one of the key figures in the confluence of the Han tune and Hui tune. For two hundred years he was recognized as the ancestor of elderly male characters in Peking opera circle and has enjoyed a high reputation in the history of Chinese opera. But unfortunately, such an important artistic master with national influence hasn't been paid enough attention in Xianning City and Chongyang County. This paper has evaluated Mi Yingxian's outstanding position in the history of Chinese opera, analyzed the current situation and problems in the development and protection of his opera culture, and put forward corresponding countermeasures and approaches.

Keywords—founder of Peking opera; Mi Yingxian; Chongyang county; opera culture; development and protection

I. INTRODUCTION

Mi Yingxian, native of Hubei Chongyang, is an important figure in the history of Chinese opera. In the period of Qianlong, he brought Hubei tune to Beijing. Later he founded Chuntai Troupe, one of the four Hui troupes. He had been the leader role in this troupe for more than 20 years. In the period of Jiaqing, Peking opera was born under the joint action of Han tune, Hui tune and Jing tune. Among them, Han tune gave the greatest contribution. Mi Yingxian has also been recognized as one of the founders of Peking opera. As the country pays more and more attention to the protection of cultural heritage, it is of great significance to carry out in-depth protection and development of Mi Yingxian's opera culture. The paper has put forward some views.

II. THE COMPOSITION AND VALUE OF MI YINGXIAN'S OPERA CULTURE

Mi Yingxian was an important figure written in the *Peking*

Opera History. Obviously, his main contribution in Chinese opera history is the promotion of birth of Peking opera. Meanwhile, he was one of key figures in the promotion of Han Opera Singing Art and the maturity of its performance form. And he also made a crucial contribution to the spread of Han tune in Beijing.

A. Mi Yingxian's Outstanding Position in the History of Chinese Opera

He made great contribution to the spread of Han Opera in northern area. Han Opera is the first major opera in Hubei. In the middle of Qing Dynasty, it was called Han tune. In the period of Qianlong, Hubei artists had went to Beijing. But they did not set up Han opera troupe. After the foundation of the four major Hui troupes, they soon joined in them. Among these artists, Mi Yingxian can be called as a banner artist. He was recognized as the first artist who brought Han tune to Beijing successfully. In the fiftieth year of Qianlong period (1790), Zhejiang Salt Administration undertook the eighty-birthday ceremony of Gaozong Emperor. In the performance in Hangzhou, Sanqing Hui Troupe, lead by Gao Langting, first arrived in Beijing. In the later ten years, a large number of Hui troupes arrived in Beijing in succession. Among them, Sixi Troupe, Hechun Troupe, Chuntai Troupe and Sanqing were the most famous. They are known as the four major Hui troupes.

With years of efforts, Mi Yingxian became the leader role in Chuntai Troupe in the first year of Jiaqing Period. He played well as elderly male character, especially as the character of Guan Yu. He had been very famous in Peking opera circle. In *Changtan Conglu*, Li Dengqi described: "in all his performance, his sound was beautiful; his expression was vivid. Audiences were touched and listened carefully. He became a celebrity in Beijing. People came to Beijing to present tribute or study, and they all want to know him. In the troupe, his colleagues called him Mr. Mi. Other people respected him and followed and also called him Mr. Mi, as well as his fans"[1]. It can be seen that Mr. Mi has been very prestigious in Beijing because of his skilled art. And his reputation was spread far to foreign countries. Obviously, it is important for the spread of Han tune in foreign areas. From people's respect on Mr. Mi, we know that he has been very prestigious in Beijing Liyuan. He has a good reputation both in art and virtue. With management of a batch of artists like Mr. Mi, Han tune has

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gradually become an important tune compared with Jing tune, Hui tune and Qin tune. Because of it, Peking opera circle has been reconstructed.

Mr. Mi has made outstanding contributions to the formation of Peking opera. Mr. Mi brought Han tune to Hui troupe, which laid a solid foundation for the confluence of the Hui tune and Han tune. Someone commented: "Mr. Mi founded Chuntai Troupe and was the leader role in this Hui troupe. Cheng Changgeng took him as teacher. From these facts, we can know that Han tune has an important impact on singing and performance of Hui Opera"[2]. In the early period of Jiaqing, Hui troupe has become an outstanding opera troupe in Beijing. According to record of *Menghua Suobu*, "Hui troupe must be the first one that is invited in each opera theater, such as Guangde House, Guanghe House, Guanghe House, Sanqing Garden and Qingle Garden. They are big opera theaters and in them Hui troupe predominates"[3]. In all opera troupes in Beijing, Hui troupe is most famous. And a lot of outstanding artists turned to Hui troupe. So is Han tune. At the period, almost all artists of Han tune turned to Hui troupe. Hui tune and Han tune gradually converged. As everyone knows, the confluence of Hui tune and Han tune is an important symbol of the formation of Peking opera. In the period of Jiaqing, Mr. Mi was the first entered into the leader class of Hui troupe. He directly promoted the confluence of Hui tune and Han tune, promoting the birth of Peking opera. It can be seen that Mr. Mi was one of the founders of Peking opera.

B. The Relationship between Chongyang County and Mi Yingxian's Opera Culture

Mi Yingxian, style name of Shi Quan, assumed name of Tao Lin, stage name of Mi Xizi, was native of Hubei Chongyang and born in the forty-fifth year of Qianlong Period (1780), and died in the seventh year of Daoguang (1832). He learned to Han tune from a child, and performed in South Hubei. He leave from Chongyang to Hankou and performed when he was young. Gradually he became popular in this region. Later he became famous in Beijing. In his later years he returned to his hometown, Chongyang County because of illness. He hosted to build houses, roads and bridges, and promoted opera in the countryside.

He smoked opium and had hemoptysis throughout the year, so he became weaker and weaker. Gradually he couldn't sing. In the 24th year of Jiaqing, he returned to his hometown from Beijing. In Chongyang County, he devoted to the promotion of Han tune. He took apprentices, and a lot of artist came to him. For the convenience, he moved to Yangsi Bridge in the western suburbs (now near Baiquan Village, Chengguan Town). There he invested heavily in building a house, and the house still exists. After death, he was buried near the Yangsi Bridge, and the tomb is still there. For the convenience of traffic, he also funded the construction of a stone path toward the county. His action has won high praise by people in this region. It is worth mentioning that in the center of Baini Town there was Sanzhenkou Opera Stage originally. It was a waterside stage. It is very rare in the province. This stage was built in the period of Kangxi. During the period of Guangxu, Sun Weishang, of great family, carried out large-scale renovation to play Han opera. According to local historical

records, Mi Yingxian had performed Yunzhang Qu Changsha on this stage with local Han opera troupe for many times after he returned back to hometown from Beijing. Unfortunately, the stage was dismantled at the beginning of the founding of the People's Republic of China. But the path to the stage still remains.

Mi Yingxian has achieved outstanding achievement in opera. It is inseparable from the nourishment of folk opera culture in Chongyang. In other words, the opera culture in Chongyang is the origin of Mi Yingxian's opera culture. At the same time, over the past hundred years, folk operas in Chongyang County have been enduring, and they are closely related to the influence of Mi Yingxian. Over the years, Han tune and Chu opera, native of Hubei, are beloved by people. More importantly, a new opera Tiqin opera was born in Chongyang. It originated from Hunan Yueyang Huagu opera. It mixed the tune pattern and tune names of Hunan Changsha Huagu opera. Especially it profoundly integrated with folk songs and night songs in Chongyang and folk Taoist music and opera elements in other areas. Finally, it formed a new opera. Tiqin opera is praised as the flower of the traditional folk opera in Hunan, Hubei and Jiangxi Provinces. It can be said that Tiqin opera cannot be formed without the nourishment of local opera culture, and the opera culture of Mi Yingxian is the most splendid flower in the long-history opera garden in Chongyang County.

C. The Content and Composition of Mi Yingxian's Opera Culture

Mi Yingxian's opera culture mainly contains two aspects: one is spiritual culture, and the other is relic culture. This is an important treasure of Chinese opera and Hubei opera, and also one of the quintessence of Southern Hubei culture.

Mi Yingxian's spiritual culture is extensive and profound. First, from the artistic point of view, Mi Yingxian strived for excellence, and made an indelible historical contribution for the maturity of the Han tune art and its spread in Beijing. According to records, "once a censor art group was going to play an entertainment play, and they invited Mi Xizi to perform in *Changsha War*. When he appeared on the stage, he covered his face with sleeve. When he withdrew his sleeve and showed his face for a sudden, all audiences stand up. They said he looked like real Guan Yu, so they stand up unconsciously"[4]. Because of his special efforts, Han tune became hot at that time. Second, seen from the history of Chinese opera, he was one of key figures promoting the birth of Peking opera, and one of founders of elderly male character in Peking opera. Most famous elderly male characters took Mr. Mi as teacher, so Mr. Mi is recognized as ancestor of elderly male character in Peking opera. Third, from the perspective of culture, it is one of the core parts in Hubei opera culture and Han opera culture, but also a bright pearl in South Hubei culture. This is the most important three aspects, and the others need to be further studied.

It includes the relic culture taking Mi Yingxian's former residence as the core. At present, there are many related ruins in Chongyang County, which are important contents of Mi Yingxian's opera culture. The first is the former residence of

Mi Yingxian. The house was built in the twenty-fourth Jiaqing Year of Qing Dynasty (1819), dating back nearly 200 years, with high conservation value. The house has two stories. According to the *Chinese Opera Chronicles - Hubei Volume*, "it is made of wood, covering an area of one hundred and eighty square meters. It is of stone-ringed door. Widows and guard rails are carved with flowers and birds. In the house, a statue of Mi Xizi is put on a porcelain seat with golden Buddha pattern. There is also an old wooden-carved bed. The bed is divided into two parts, the front part and the back part. It is very exquisite. Now Mi Xizi's descendant Mi Jincheng lives here"[5]. It is gratifying to note that the former residence still exists. In addition, Mi Yingxian's tomb was moved back and buried at the hill of his hometown a few years ago. Mi Yingxian's ancestral house was a few kilometers away from the village.

III. THE CURRENT SITUATION AND PROBLEMS IN THE PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF MI YINGXIAN'S OPERA CULTURE

The above discussion shows that Mi Yingxian's opera culture has a high artistic value and cultural value. No matter in history of Chinese opera or the characteristic culture of Southern Hubei and Jingchu, it is worthy of in-depth excavation and full protection. But undoubtedly, in the rapid development of local economy, governments at all levels ignore the protection of this traditional culture. Therefore, there is a very embarrassing situation: lack of reasonable publicity, disjointed cultural protection and economic development, lack of protection of cultural relics, lack of relevant data collation and collection and so on.

It lacks reasonable publicity and doesn't form a cultural brand with regional characteristics. Some officials and some scholars do not know the importance, so they don't pay enough attention to the opera culture of Mi Yingxian. As everyone knows, in recent years, Xianning has builds many famous local culture brands. For example, with the effort of Li Chengxia, the culture of Wuqi Cadre School at Xiangyang Lake was excavated and became a prestigious cultural brand in the country. Ding Guangping, professor of Hubei Institute of Science and Technology, spent a lot of time to excavate the brick tea culture of Yangloudong. It is highly concerned by domestic and foreign scholars. CCTV has repeatedly reported him. In addition, hot spring culture, fragrans culture, Chang'e culture, Xiangyang Lake culture, long folk song culture in Southern Hubei are all deeply excavated. Unfortunately, Mi Yingxian's opera culture and many opera cultures in Southern Hubei did not get enough attention: leading authority of Han opera – Yu Hongyuan, native of Xian'an, and the development history and artistic form of Tiqin opera in Chongyang. The study about leader role of Han tune in early times in Tongcheng and Chongyang is almost blank. It is painful if we ignore the building of Mi Yingxian's opera culture, for it has great value and Mi Yingxian was a famous opera master in the country.

It lacks the protection of related cultural relic resources. Some even are destructed by people. At present, the historical sites related to Mi Yingxian are not protected and repaired. In summer of 2015 when the author went outside for field

investigation, the author saw that: former residence of Mi Yingxian is close to collapse. For years no one repair it and walls become decayed. The residential owner Mi Tiegang said, 4 large rooms collapsed due to rainstorm at the end of summer in 1998, and he just repaired simply. Through two centuries of winds and rains, the ancient house beams decayed, and windows and doors broke. Descendants of Mi Yingxian are scarce and they are not rich, so they are unable to repair the house completely. In 2009 the residence of Mi Yingxian was rated as provincial cultural relic protection unit. But the relevant repair funds have not been in place. It is fantastic that the plaque is hanging above the gate of ancestral house of Langkou Mr. Mi mistakenly, which also caused that the real residence of Mi Yingxian has not been effectively protected.

Study and collection and sort of relevant data aren't carried out systematically. Many relevant data are scattered and lost. They are not searched and sorted systematically. At present, local research institutes and colleges have not started to study and sort materials of Mi Yingxian. So, it is impossible to build Opera Culture Research Center of Mi Yingxian, Museum of Mi Yingxian (or Culture Gallery), or Mi Yingxian Memorial Hall. The county-level and city-level culture departments and local colleges and universities, like Hubei Institute of Science and Technology are not involved in study. No professional pay attention to the academic research data. There are only a few academic articles and the depth is not enough. There is no *Research Data Compilation of Mi Yingxian* temporarily. Relevant research is rare.

Cultural protection has fallen behind the development of tourism and people's livelihood cause. It has not formed a benign protection mechanism. At present, the development of tourism in our city is in the ascendant. Hot spring tourism has become the pacesetter in the city's tourism industry. In addition, the Three Kingdoms tourism with ancient battlefield of Chibi as core, cave tourism with the Yinshui Cave as core, and the leisure tourism with Jiugong Mountain as core are all hot. But the deficiency in our city's tourism is the lack of cultural taste. We have not combined the development and protection of culture with the tourism industry to form a two-way sustainable development of cultural protection and tourism. Mi Yingxian's traditional opera culture is a typical example. Near the former residence of Ming Yingxian is a famous hot spring – Langkou Forest Spring. We totally ignore the integration of the opera culture in the development of the hot spring tourism.

IV. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the opera culture of Mi Yingxian hasn't been officially launched in our city at present, which is undoubtedly a regrettable thing. We suggest that the relevant government departments and cultural departments should attach great importance to the protection and development of Mi Yingxian's opera culture. In this regard, the author has put forward the following points:

A. To Strengthen the Leadership and Formulate the Overall Plans for Protection and Development

At present, the relevant cultural protection work has not been started. The main reason is that relevant departments,

especially the cultural authorities, don't pay due attention. Therefore, first of all, governments at all levels should improve their understanding, intensify efforts to promote the work, and, if necessary, upgrade the protection work to the municipal level strategy.

At the same time, the relevant experts should be invited to formulate the overall planning of cultural protection. According to the scale and complexity of the cultural project, it can be divided into overall planning and special planning. From the protection of relics, the first is to formulate the *Overall Plan for the Protection and Development of Mi Yingxian's Opera Culture*. Meanwhile, make special planning or scheme for the former residence and tomb of Mi Yingxian. From the point of view of academic research, we should also formulate the overall plan of academic research on Mi Yingxian, and formulate sub-programs, such as, opera culture institute and compilation of research materials. It is necessary to add that when planning, we must combine Chongyang's cultural resources, such as the protection of Tiqin opera, the protection of Wang Shijie and Zhang Guaiya and other celebrity culture. Try to connect multiple cultural points together to form a strong cultural force.

B. To Promote the Restoration of Mi Yingxian's Former Residence, Tomb and Other Cultural Relics as Soon as Possible, and Restore Their Historical Outlook

We should actively expand and restore the sources of funds. Get the provincial and municipal financial special funds, and raise funds at the same time. For example, we can cooperate for construction and use other ways to raise funds. We should strive for the establishment of the local traditional opera culture protection fund, and also actively get donations from individuals, enterprises and social organizations to protect the cultural heritage.

The urgent matter is to renovate the former residence of Mi Yingxian, for it is the core of the cultural protection. At present, it is on the verge of collapse. If it goes like that, it will be a great loss to our city's cultural heritage. From the perspective of heritage conservation, the house has nearly a history of two hundred years. It is not many ancient houses remained of Middle-Qing Dynasty. From the angle of art, Mi Yingxian as a famous artist has high artistic attainments. The houses he built personally or hosted to construct also have very high artistic value. When I went to the investigation, I found that the stone carving on the porch is very fine, and the wood carvings on windows are vivid. They all need to be repaired completely.

At the same time, start to renovate other cultural relics. Mi Yingxian's tomb also needs to be repaired. The current state is far from well protection of the provincial cultural relics. First, search for the missing tombs and stone sifter of the Qing Dynasty. If we cannot find them, we can make ones same as originals. At present, the surrounding environment of tomb is very bad. The path to tomb and tomb were covered by weeds. They all need to be invested for improvement. Second, we can build pavilion and related facilities on the basis and imitate the construction of tomb of Han-tune Master Yu Sansheng in Luotian, and tomb of Li Zicheng in Xianning. Build into a celebrity tomb with both tourism and cultural value, and make

it become an important tourist attraction in Chongyang County together with his residence. Third, the stone path built is still dimly discernible, and the ancient Yangsi Bridge is still there, which should be included in the scope of development and protection.

C. Drawing Lessons from Jiangxia District, Luotian County and Other Places and Building Livelihood Projects, Such as, Theater and Park of Mi Yingxian

Our city should seriously study and learn from the good practices and good experiences of other places. For example, District of Jiangxia in Wuhan and Luotian County have achieved good cultural and social benefits. They closely combine the construction of livelihood protects with the cultural protection of Peking Opera Master Tan Xinpei and Han Tune Master Yu Sansheng.

It should start to build a memorial hall for Mi Yingxian. We can build an antique building nearby or on the basis of his residence as memorial hall. Give full play to its focus, exhibition and education features of the hall and make it become a concentrated display place of Han opera culture and Mi Yingxian. The exhibition hall can be divided into two units: one is to display culture of Han opera, including its history, tune characteristics, performing form and leader roles. The other is to display the opera culture of Mi Yingxian. We can introduce him through drawing pictures, modern sound and other forms. At the same time, construct a stage in the hall, making it as new opera center in Chongyang. We can play Tiqin opera, Han opera and other operas here.

Also, it could build an opera theme park - Mi Yingxian Park. It can be located in the popular Langkou Forest Spring or in other area. This park can be featured by opera, highlighting its characteristics of entertainment, culture and leisure and participation. Meanwhile, combine the culture of hot spring and make it a good place for villages in Langkou and nearby and tourists.

We should rebuild Sanzhenkou Stage in Baini Town. In the Qing Dynasty, the Sanzhenkou Stage in Baini was very famous in Southern Hubei, and it was also a rare waterside stage. Operas were often performed there. Mi Yingxian often played opera there after he came back to Chongyang. Unfortunately, the stage was destroyed at the beginning of the founding of the People's Republic of China. We can rebuild the stage on the site which is still named Sanzhenkou Stage. We can build the surrounding scenic spots nearby. In this way, it is very meaningful to carry forward the opera culture of South Hubei and commemorate Mi Yingxian.

Mi Yingxian could name a number of cultural projects by. In 2014 we have built Ancient Street of Xiangcheng on the cross of Mabai Road and Outer East-Ring Road. The core building is an antique stage. We can name it as Great Mi Yingxian Stage Second, name the avenue from Baini to Chongyang Tiancheng Town as Mi Yingxian Avenue, or name one road in Chongyang as Mi Yingxian Road. It can be carefully discussed. Third, change the name of Daji Square next to the government building of Chongyang into Mi Yingxian Square.

D. Combining the Tourism Industry of Langkou Hot Spring to Promote the Construction of Related Infrastructure and Supporting Projects

No matter it is opera culture or celebrity culture, the best protection approach is to combine them with tourism. Our city and Chongyang County can include Mi Yingxian's opera culture into the development of tourism. What is particularly worthy of deep reflection is that the tourism industry of Chongyang County is lagging behind though it has rich and profound cultural heritage. It has an important role in promoting the tourism industry of Chongyang to carry out the opera culture of Mi Yingxian.

At present, the city's hot spring tourism is popular. Langkou Hot Spring in Chongyang has been known in the province, so it will be a good approach to organically combine the protection and development of Mi Yingxian's opera culture with the hot spring tourism. This not only protects the local characteristic culture, but also adds the cultural taste to the hot spring tourism.

The author suggests that include Mi Yingxian's cultural circle in the hot springs tourism of Chongyang. First, develop tourism paths to Mi Yingxian's cultural relics and enable tourists to appreciate characteristic culture while going to spa. Second, invite spring enterprises to invest to construct infrastructure. Third, play opera in the scenic area of hot spring and enable tourists to enjoy Han opera and Tiqin opera.

E. To Make Use of Local University Resources to Promote the Related Research

It is related research mainly relies on Hubei Institute of Science and Technology. At the same time, connect Xianning Vocational Technical College, Xianning Municipal Party School, Xianning Institute of Art and other institutions. South Hubei Culture Research Center and College of Humanities and Media of Hubei Institute of Science and Technology have achieved fruitful results in excavating the regional culture, such as brick tea culture, Xiangyang Lake culture, dialect culture, celebrity culture of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, fresh-lake culture, narrative poem of South Hubei and so on.

We can set up a special research team to research Mi Yingxian's opera. Hubei Institute of Science and Technology has been concerned about the local operas for many years, and has formed an excellent research team. Professor Dan Changjiang has been devoted to the study of classical opera. He once paid close attention to Mi Yingxian, and published an article: *Chongyang Mi Yingxian and Peking Opera* in the core periodical. Wei Yifeng's doctoral dissertation: *Research on Performing History of Han Opera* was highly praised by domestic opera circle. In addition, Professor Zhou Hongbo, Dr. Huang Bing, Dr. Lei Hui and Master Dan Yi have also been engaged in the study of opera culture and opera teaching in Hubei Province. They have the full strength to study the opera culture of Mi Yingxian.

It should start a batch of cultural protection projects. Strengthen the horizontal cooperation between the South Hubei Cultural Center of Hubei University of Science and Technology and the Institute of Humanities and Media. First,

start publication of *Mi Yingxian Research Data Compilation*; second, publish high-quality papers; third, write relevant research reports. At the same time, set up special column about research of Mi Yingxian on the culture version of *Journal of Hubei Institute of Science and Technology*, *Xianning Lookout* and *Xianning Daily*.

It could be applied for a batch of good scientific research projects. It can be focused on social science fund in Hubei, the humanities and social science research project of Hubei Provincial Education Department and Xianning think tank project. These topics are of great value, such as, *Mi Yingxian's Contribution to the Formation of Peking Opera*, *Research on Mi Yingxian's Performance in Beijing*, *Mi Yingxian Chronicle* and *Biography of Mi Yingxian*.

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