

The Early Stage of the Anti-Japanese War and the Short Prosperity of the Han Drama of Saving the Nation

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Abstract—During the year and a half from the outbreak of full-scale anti-Japanese war to the fall of Wuhan, Wuhan became the national center of drama. The main theme of drama performance in this time is saving the nation. It was integrated into a variety of activities such as the Anti-Japanese Propaganda Week organized by the National Government, the performance of the Corps organized by the Wuhan Opera Association, and charity performances held by the Han Opera Association and folk theater troupes. Although this glorious history is very short, Han opera players are very active in their patriotic performances, writing a magnificent chapter in the history of Chinese opera.

Keywords—the July 7 Incident of 1937; Han opera; patriotic performances; Wuhan

I. INTRODUCTION

After the September 18 Incident of 1931, the Han Opera fields were greatly angry so they held the performance to save the nation. Opera Class Society of Hubei and Chongqing far away from thousands of miles carry out vigorous patriotic performances under Fu Xinyi's leadership. At the end of 1931, the anti-Japanese fashion show "Ma Zhanshan" arranged by them was one of the earliest modern dramas drafted in China. The public response was unusually warm when it was staged together with historical drama "Conquering Gaoli dynasty") at Chongqing Yousheng Grand Theater. Under the unified planning and organization of Hankou Theater Association, there were a lot of Han Opera held to save the country. For example, the anti-Japanese fundraising performance held by the Han Opera together with Peking Opera in February 1932, it raised money to awaken the public and the funds collected from the game were completely donated to save the country." [1] Moreover, after the outbreak of the comprehensive Anti-Japanese War, the performance of Han drama got to the climax. Various patriotic performances exceeded the average business performance and became the mainstream, giving Han drama a rare opportunity.

II. THE OUTBREAK OF ANTI-JAPANESE WAR AND THE PATRIOTIC PERFORMANCES ORGANIZED BY HAN OPERA FIELDS

First of all, we should mention folk Han opera groups whose anti-Japanese propaganda is both early and successful. For example, in the fall of 1937, the Chongyang County Popular Theater Research Institute raised funds to buy stage props in Hankou and hold public performances. The institute raised a lot of money just from the performances held in Wanshougong and spent some to buy more than 100 sets of cotton garments for the anti-war soldiers. The players also went to many counties around to perform such as Puhuang and Linxiang. They not only raised some money for the war but also made great contributions to the anti-Japanese propaganda in rural areas in southern Hubei and northern Hunan. A large number of such folk opera troupes at that time became a powerful complement to the anti-Japanese propaganda of the Han opera industry organizations and government agencies.

Patriotism and helping people are the glorious tradition inherited by generations of Han Opera players. In the early period of the Republic of China (1912-1949), the performance of Han drama was normalized. For example, the drastic drought in 1920 in North China touched the hearts of the majority of Han opera artists. They cooperated with Peking Opera players for days in Hankou and Yiyuan to raise money and donated them to the poor struggling on poverty. In another example, in the flood disaster in Hubei in 1921, all of the famous players of Han dramas went to Beijing to perform for nearly two months and raised a great deal of money for villagers in Lv village, which was highly praised by the Beijing newspapers, "they had already been famous all over the country, they give performances probably because people really need them." [2] It can be seen that the Han drama has the good traditions of concerning about the common people from all walks of life and is well praised both inside and outside the county. In the crisis of life and death of the Chinese nation, the Han opera industry performed even remarkable. On July 7, 1937, the Japanese imperialists took the Lugouqiao Incident to launch an all-out war on China. Han opera artists actively devoted themselves to the anti-Japanese war, fueling the climax of Han's patriotic drama. The Han Opera Association

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organized a series of patriotic performances. For example, the public salvation bonds conferences at the Tian Sheng stage in November, there are as many as 200 Chinese actors participating in the performance including Wu Tianbao, the Monk and Chen Fengqin, which is a complete general mobilization of Han drama. Due to the careful organization of the Han Opera Association, the performance is very high and the "Capture Saburo" acted by Peony (art name) became the focus of the fans.

At the same time, the grand drama "Pingwo Zhuan" organized by the Han Opera Association was staged. This is the first Han drama reworked for the War. The historical evidence is based on that the army of Ming dynasty has twice defeated the Japanese army led by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in the invasion of North Korea. The drama was acted by Wu Tianyu and Peony (art name) and gained full of praise of the audience in early December that year.

We can see that in the salvation movement in Wuhan drama, as a leader in Hubei opera, the Han opera indeed did well. From another perspective, the magnificent anti-Japanese propaganda changed the downturn in the performance of Han drama to a certain extent, making the performance of Han drama expanded. According to reports, "in the early stage of anti-Japanese war in twenty-six (1937) of the Republic of China (1912-1949) to Wuhan retreat in twenty-seven (1938) of the Republic of China (1912-1949), the Hankou drama has maintained the highest record. In terms of units: There are two playgrounds (New Market, Peak), four to five places for Peking Opera (Hankou big stage, the new market big stage, Tiansheng, Ling Xiao Peking Opera, and sometimes Victoria Memorial), Chu drama is up to eight (Manchun, Mei Cheng, New Market, Ling Xiao, East Garden, Tian Xian, Ning Han, Yun Xian), and Han Opera also holds two or three bases (Changle, new markets, etc.), not counting the drama places in Wuchang. The opera activities were improved greatly in the twilight." [3] Although there are only two or three professional theaters on the Han Opera, far less than the Peking Opera and the Chu opera, it is still improved greatly over the previous years. At the same time, it is not difficult to find that most performances of this period are traditional repertoires. This is because the anti-Japanese new play is still in creation, and until the spring of 1938 that it has been brought onto the stage one after another. Such as the plays in the salvation treasury bonds conferences are all the traditional operas, such as "Shuangtou Tang", "Throw Halberd at Yuan Gate", "Sanniang Educating the Son", "Overthrow the Superstition", "Behead the Son at Yuan Gate" "Wufeng Building", "Qinghe Bridge", "Turning to Qiao Mansion for Help", "Females Save the Country", "Thor Cave" and "Song Shi Hui" and so on. Of course, the traditional drama with patriotic spirit is more popular, "Pingwo Zhuan" gained a hot discuss after being staged, Tian Han also thinks that this kind of drama should be more after watching this show. "During the creation time of the anti-Japanese fashion play, the traditional drama plays an important role in the transition for anti-enemy propaganda.

Advocated by the Han Opera Association, artists perform charitable drama over other fundraising activities on the stage. According to Han opera actor Liu Jinfeng's recall, in order to increase the amount of money she suggested that colleagues go

to the theater and cinema to sell flowers and sugar, which immediately gets the female artist's warm response. The scene of charity then is deeply moving:

They were organized to wear the lamb cheongsam unitedly, with the embroidered "renewal" on the chest with white silk, indicating that they are today patriotic literary and art warriors and no longer the old actors of the past. Some of them carry a tray of candy, and some hold a bouquet of flowers before the performance in the theater and cinema, selling sugar and flowers, singing the "March of the Volunteers" and "Broadsword" and other anti-Japanese songs. Zhang Meiying, Liu Jinfeng, Xin Huiqin also took the stage to give lectures: "My fellow intimates, the Japanese invades our nation, we are facing the national crisis. In order to save the Chinese nation from danger, the soldiers fought bravely in the front. They used life and blood to defend our sacred land, defend the great Wuhan so our brothers and sisters behind them must support the frontline to reward the soldiers who kills the enemy. The state rise and fall, everybody has the responsibility; we can contribute money or strength". The generous words gained the strong resonance in the audience, They showed a high degree of patriotic enthusiasm, and some donated the French currency, copper coins, silver coins, and some took off the watch, gold ring, gold earrings to buy sugar and flowers, the scene is very touching. [4]

It can be seen that Han opera female artists can not only create artistic images on the stage to infect the audience, their betrothal actions also touch hundreds of people. At the time, the press highly praised their patriotic actions and called them patriotic ten-sisters. They are Wan Zhandeng, Zhang Meiying, Yun Xianzi, Xin Huiqin, Black Peony, Hua Yanyun, Bi Yanyun, Huang Meiyun, Gai Xin pei and Liu Jinfeng.

In addition to the Han Opera Association, the Wuhan Opera Drama Association also organized a large number of patriotic performances. On the day of the July 7 Incident of 1937, it formed a charity performance group to reward corps and immediately started performing. The performance consisted of almost all theaters and operas in the city. The performances took longer than usual, and the number of performances was unmatched by general performances.

Obviously the amount of money raised is also amazing. According to the statistics, the Association raised 51,000 yuan a year by donation performance, which undoubtedly provided tremendous financial support for front-line war. The Han Opera takes the leader role in the charity performance. Through the compilation and analysis of newspapers, we can see that the performance for Corps is very frequent. On average, there is a large-scale performance once a week. As of the first anniversary of the July 7 Incident of 1937, a total of 56 performances have been held. Han opera players can be seen almost in each performance. For example, in the spring of 1938, the money 8,000 yuan raised for the Wartime Childhood Conservation Society was originated from the charity performances of Han drama and the Chu drama. Among them, they held Grand joint performance at Wuchang Republican Stage on March 30. It should be pointed out that the charity performances are generally performed by players of Han opera and other dramas, so the scale of the event is ambitious. In the

56th charity performance, there are 12 theaters participating in the performance, and as many as two thousand members including not only the players in Wuhan but also the players of national theater celebrities. For example, in November 1937 at the Shanghai Grand Theater, the 14th charity performance, the New Peony, Zhang Meiying, Liu Yu Lou and other well-known Chinese opera actors performed together, the scene is very hot. The thirty-second performance of the labor force is a joint play of Han drama and Chu drama, the atmosphere of which was extremely hot. While the atmosphere of 32nd charity performance by Han opera and Chu opera also surpassed the performance of a single drama. What is different from the past is that the purpose of the performance was to create an anti-Japanese atmosphere instead of displaying the voice beauty of the opera.

III. THE DRAMA SALVATION MOVEMENT UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF DEPARTMENT THREE OF WEST BANK NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

On the eve of the fall of Nanjing in December 1937, the west bank National Government was forced to relocate to Chongqing. The party and government agencies moved to Wuhan for the time being on the way to the west. At the same time, various political parties and all walks of life also gathered here. Wuhan became the central hub of the country's anti-Japanese national salvation movement and was the real capital of wartime. This situation remained for nearly a year until October 1938, when Wuhan was abandoned by the west bank national government.

A. *The Reorganization of Governmental Cultural Institutions and Anti-Japanese Propaganda Week*

Drama was clearly the most effective popularization method in wartime. To make full use of this function of drama, the Anti-Enemy association of the Chinese theater association was established in Wuhan on December 31, 1937. Fu Xinyi of Han Opera, Wu Tianbao and Tang Yongsan were elected as members of the association, Zhu Shuangyun and Fu Xinyi also served as the director and deputy director of the general affairs department of the association. After the founding of the association, it actively organized performances such as the joint performance of Han opera, Peking opera and Chu opera in commemoration of the first anniversary of the January 28 Incident. Wu Tianbao, Peony, monk and others performed "Crying beside Ancestral Grave", "Revolt of the Fishing Folks" and other plays.

The drama activities organized by the cultural institutions of the national government are obviously more powerful. In order to meet the needs of the war, in January 1938, the National government promulgated the "Outline for Amending the Organization of the Military Commission" to restructure the military council, the highest military institution. It consists of an army command, a military training department, a military senate, a political department, an executive department of military law and an aviation commission. Chen Cheng was the political director and Zhou Enlai was the deputy director. It also consists of four offices, of which the third in charge of publicity was established in the lush Tan Hualin in Wuchang in April 1938, and the famous progressive

cultural person Guo Moruo served as officer. There are more than 300 people belonged to the system in the third office formally. There were also ten anti-enemy theater teams, four anti-enemy propaganda teams, a children's troupe and a comic propaganda team affiliated to the third office. As well as employees employed in various departments and offices, it consists of about two thousand people. The elite national theater players also gather here, including the dramatists Tian Han, Hong Shen, Ma Yan and so on. As famous playwright Hong Shen said, at that time almost 90% of the country's drama talent was concentrated in Hankou [5]. Thereafter more than six months, the players performed in Wuhan centered fighting against the enemy and giving money under the organizational arrangement of the third office.

The first large-scale cultural event held by the third office was the Anti-Japanese Propaganda Week, which was planned and implemented by Tian Han, director of the sixth department. These include Song Day, Art Day and Drama Day, while the drama activities undoubtedly become the focus of all anti-Japanese propaganda activities. In order to direct the promotional activities in depth, the Office decided to expand the target audience and the scope of publicity. So they advocated all walks of art and cultural workers, including Han opera actors to connect the grassroots and the general public, and make the propaganda focus shift to factories and rural areas so as to raise the resistance awareness of the broad masses of workers and peasants. At the same time, it calls on the vast number of artists to go to the front of the war and inspire the fighting spirit of the warriors. During the lasting propaganda week activities, the Han opera team went deep into the countryside and factories to give performances, contributing a lot in provoking the people's resistance to Japan. Han opera people organized drama team and propaganda team, taking Wuhan as the center and radiate to all parts of the province and marching forward. North along the Pinghan railway to Xiaogan and Ying Shan, south along the Yuehan Railway to Xianning and Puqi County, along the Xiang River to Hanchuan and Mianyang counties.

Han opera plays an indispensable and important role in the anti-Japanese propaganda week activity. ROC President Yuan Shikai signed the "Article 21" with Japan on May 9, 1915, a treaty of national betrayal and humiliation. The day was later declared a national shame day after that. In the "wiping out the humiliation" propaganda campaign in 1938, the Han opera propaganda team went deep into the outskirts, rural areas, the pier, street corner, wounded hospitals and refugee shelters to review the history of humiliation to perform to encourage people working together to resist the Japanese aggressors.

In rural areas, the Han opera with traditional drama was quite popular with farmers. The Han opera association organized two big teams to perform in the area of Hesheng Bridge in Wuchang County, which was praised by the media as "a new stance of acting old drama"^[6]. In the publicity week in early April 1938, a propaganda form was arranged every day, which was divided into seven thematic days: text propaganda, oral propaganda, singing propaganda, art propaganda, drama propaganda, film propaganda and parade propaganda. Among them, the April 11 was drama day. The scale of this performance is very large, 12 cinemas in Wuhan

were involved into the show, playing day and night and watch for free. The arrangement of the Han Opera is that, in the new market, Chen Chunfang plays "Wen Tianxiang" on day and "The Great Wall" at night. In Changle Theater, there are two "Pingwo Zhuan" on day and at nights by Wu Tianbao and Peony. In the republic big stage, Xu Jisheng performs "Heroine" on day and Zhang Meiyong plays "Wen Tianxiang" at night. The theme of the anti-enemy propaganda week in early July 1938 was "To Commemorate the July 7 Contributions". During the five-day performances, more than half a million donors participated in the donation and donated more than one million yuan. Obviously, the outstanding achievement is closely linked with the hard work of Han opera artists.

B. Study Groups of Han Opera and Opera Actors

The west bank national government thinks that there are many unhealthy habits among theater artists, which is very unfavorable to propaganda of war. In order to improve the ideological level and artistic quality of the old artists, they put forth "raising the awareness of the opera actors, awakening their patriotism and ridding the vicious atmosphere of the opera fields"^[7]. In August 1938, the third office opened a wartime study group for opera actors, which was in No. 1 high school of Hubei Province in Tanhua, Wuchang. The leaders of the class are famous people. Guo Moruo was the class teacher, and Tian Han was the chief of education and taught personally, he also worked with Xian Xinghai to make a class song. The study group gathered actors of many operas who stranded in Wuhan, mainly are players of Han opera, Chu opera, Peking opera, Shaoxing opera, modern drama, folk opera and acrobatics. Adding some pingju (a local opera of north and northeast China) players, oratorio plays and circus players, a total of about 750 actors and actresses were involved. The original plan was a short-term training about 10 days, which was extended to three months as the training effect. After the training, trainees were divided into two Peking opera teams, ten Han opera teams and ten Chu opera teams, and launched anti-Japanese propaganda activities directly.

At that time, most of the Han opera actors in Wuhan took part in the class. Zhou Tiandong and Wan Zhandeng also performed "Revolt of the Fishing Folks" during the training period. Through learning from Tian Han, Hong Shen, Ma Yanxiang, and Xian Xinghai, the artistic accomplishments of Han opera artists have been improved. During this period, they created many historical plays and fashion shows.

By studying in this group, ideological level of the vast majority of Han Opera artists was significantly improved. There even is a moving scene that the Han opera player takes the lead to donate money and goods. According to Zhang Chun Tang's and Yang Bolong's recall, Tian Han called the students to do a vest and write a letter of condolences when lecturing and sent to the frontline anti-Japanese soldiers. At this time, the Han opera actor Han Baoyan removed the earrings to Tian Han. Under her inspiration Beijing opera performer Xu Biyun and Chu opera actor Shen Yun then donated money to soldiers. Other artists also donated money and goods. Han opera players donating money and goods, indicated that their ideological level has been improved. Tian

Han mentioned in his memoirs that after the class, a young man suddenly took off his new sweater and delegated me to give it to the war-fighters. In fact, he is Han opera actor Li Luo. According to Li's biographical records, when he heard from Tian Han that the front soldiers are lack of winter clothing, he immediately donated his new sweater. Influenced by him, art artists donated money one after another, donating more than 1,400 yuan. Tian Han said, "The kind of pure and lively behavior makes me moved to tears".^[8] All these show that the effect study group is obvious. The artists, including the Han opera players, have made enough spiritual preparation and are ready to join the anti-Japanese war.

IV. CONCLUSION

Recalling the performance history of Han opera in the early days of the anti-Japanese War, it is brief but worth mentioning. It is worth highlighting in the performance history of Han opera. By combing the show more than a year we can find it shows distinctive characteristics. The first is the many changes of performance environment, which are worth researching. For example, in order to meet the needs of anti-enemy propaganda, they performed from theater to the streets. In another example, the joint performance of Han opera with other operas is rare, while during this period the joint performances with Peking opera and Chu opera are normalized. The second is the diversified nature of performances. There are official performances hosted by the government of the Republic of China (1912-1949) and the performance organized by the Han opera association and even the performances by amateur Han opera groups, so they are truly flourishing. The third is reduction of commercial atmosphere. Han opera artists and other literary and art workers take saving the nation as the first task and don't focus on commercial profits. They devote all energy into the performance to raise money for the war, describing an epic performance history.

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