

# Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty and the Jiao Di Opera

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**Abstract**—The Jiao Di Opera originated from the Warring States and developed rapidly during the period of Emperor Wu of Han. And the rapid development of Jiao Di Opera in the period of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty was closely related to the thought of the Emperor. Jiao Di opera can be loved and strongly advocated by Emperor Wu of Han, mainly because he likes the magic of gods and spirits, and some of the content in the drama is magical, which caters to Emperor's ideological demands. Of course, the development of Jiao Di Opera also had something to do with the great success and the pretensions of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, and also with the national peace and the preferences of the people at that time. But the most important thing is still related to the Han Dynasty Wu Emperor seeking the immortal Taoism thought.

**Keywords**—*Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty; Jiao Di opera; Taoism*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Jiao Di Opera originated in the warring States period. At the beginning of its origin, it was a kind of martial arts, used for the entertainment of soldiers, and later developed into a variety of art forms of popular entertainment. A vigorous development of the drama in the Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, but because of rehearsals, huge cost, it was abolished during the Emperor Yuan of Han dynasties. Jiao Di Opera can be developed rapidly when Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, not only because the entertainment form has been recognized by the whole people, but also because of the great relationship with the thought of seeking immortality and Taoism of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty. The prosperity of Jiao Di Opera was developed rapidly for official reasons. Let's first look at the development and performance of the opera.

## II. THE DEVELOPMENT AND EVOLUTION OF JIAO DI OPERA

Jiao Di Opera originated in the Warring States period. At the beginning, the opera was used to have fun in the communication between two countries or in the military, and to replace the real war with the martial arts. There is a brief comment on the Origin and Development of the opera in *Journal of Criminal Law in Han Dynasty*:

After the Spring and Autumn period, weak states were destroyed and entered into the warring States period. During the Warring States period, the etiquette of martial arts was added, used for entertainment, and also for bragging. Qin took its name "Jiao Di", and the etiquette of the previous king period was submerged in entertainment. ... When the Han Dynasty was founded, Liu Bang, the founding emperor, was wise and brave, generous and merciful, and the hero of the world. So he killed Xiang Yu and his rival Qin Dynasty. Liu Bang used the ideas of Xiao he and Cao Shen, the tactics of Zhang Liang and Chen Ping, the speculation of Lu Jia and Li Yiji, the etiquette of Shu Sunong, the combination of civil and military, calmed the whole country. After the stability of the country, Han emulated the Qin State in the establishment of officials, the capital setting up South Army, and the Northern Army for defense. By the time of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, he calmed down Guangdong provinces, established seven schools in the interior, and set up warships along the coast. Every year, military exercises would be conducted and armaments should be dealt with. By the time of Emperor Yuan of Han, according to the advice of Gong Yu, he cancelled the opera, but at the same time, he did not put forward a good strategy to manage the military affairs.

From this passage, we can see that during the Warring States period, Jiao Di Opera was regarded as a "martial ceremony", and in the exchanges between two countries, it "bragged each other", indicating that at the beginning of its establishment, Jiao Di Opera was used to replace the real war, and to show the state power. However, in the Qin Dynasty, the use of martial arts instead of war was weakened, and the opera became a pure entertainment tool. Thus, the rituals of the early kings were drowned in entertainment. From Han Xing to Emperor Wu of Han, the situation was unstable due to the initial determination of the world. By the time of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, he calmed down Guangdong provinces, established seven schools in the interior, and set up warships along the coast. Every year, military exercises would be conducted and armaments should be dealt with. Therefore, during the period from Han Dynasty to Emperor Wu, the army was still in great need. And Jiao Di Opera was a kind of disguised performance of war, so it was natural for the development and expansion of the opera. But after the military expeditions of Emperor Wu, the state and the border were stable. So force became a kind

of luxury, and the country did not need to spend huge money to reserve the huge army, and the opera also faded out of the historical stage. Ban Gu explained the development process of Jiao Di Opera, but he did not understand the evolution of the opera, especially the reasons for the greater development of the opera in the time of Emperor Wu.

In the Qin Dynasty, especially in the second Qin Dynasty, the entertainment function of Jiao Di Opera was more prominent. *Historical records of Li Si Legend* recorded:

At that time, Qin II in the Gan Quan Palace, held Jiao Di Opera to watch. Li Si had little chance to see Qin II, so he wrote to criticize Zhao Gao.

The Pei Yin quoted Ying Shao as saying: "During the warring States period, the etiquette of teaching martial arts was added, used for entertainment and for bragging about martial arts. The State of Qin took its name 'Jiao Di, meaning wrestling. "Wen Ying said: "In the Qin Dynasty, it was called the 'Jiao Di. The two men tried wrestling, archery, driving, and so on."

From Ying Shao's explanation, "Jiao means the horns. Di means contradicting each other". This form of art should be somewhat similar to modern wrestling. In combination with Wen Ying's explanation, we can be sure that the opera is a competition between two people, but the content of the competition is not only the martial arts, but also includes the content of archery, martial strategy and so on. Ying Shao, Wen Ying's explanation is closer to the original meaning of the opera. However, Qin II's "the view of Fangxiao" was not performed by real samurai, but was performed by "excellent" entertainers, indicating that Jiao Di Opera had been interpreted from martial arts to "literary drama" based on entertainment. And as a major category of acting, there are many subcategories, and two people have developed into a certain plot of the multi-player performance. The description of "Huang Gong in the East Sea" in Zhang Heng "Xi Jing Fu" is proof.

When Emperor Wu of Han, Jiao Di Opera on the one hand expanded, on the other hand, the plot was more complex. "(Yuan Feng) in the third year of spring, Jiao Di Opera was performed and People from the capital more than three hundred miles came to see." (*History of the Han Dynasty, Emperor Wu of Han*) Moreover, there are not only large-scale performances, but also small-scale performances. "The people of the capital watched the opera at the Ping Le Guild in Shanglin." (*History of the Han Dynasty, Emperor Wu of Han*) Emperor Wu organized Beijing people to see Jiao Di Opera at the Ping Le Pavilion in Shanglin Yuan, which should be a smaller performance. There are both large-scale performances and small-scale performances, which can see the prosperity of the play. At the time of Emperor Wu, the role of the opera was also as a reception ceremony, to show the national power. "Setting up a substantial meal to treat guests, playing the music of *Ba Yu* and *Dang Ji* in the sea, acting as the fish or dragon, there is Jiao Di Opera performing to watch" (*The Western regions of the Han Dynasty*)

Perhaps this large-scale play rehearsal and performance would cost a huge amount of money, so Emperor Yuan of Han heard the proposal of Gong Yu, once ordered to abolish it. *Journal of Food and order in the Han Dynasty* recorded:

Han-Yuan emperor ascended to the throne, with the country flooded, and 11 areas in the East were more serious. The next year, famine occurred in Qi, grain prices soaring, people starving to death, and people ate people in Lang Ya. Civil officials say that salt officials, iron officials, field officials and warehouse officials should be removed, not striving for profit with common people. The emperor followed the advice. And Emperor stopped guards of Jian Zhang palace and Gan Quan palace, producing the clothes making of the opera and funeral, saving the royal expenses to help the poor, reducing half of the guards of the monarch temple. At the same time reduce Guanzhong guards 500 people to transit food for the poor. Later, the money was not enough, only to restore the salt iron officials.

Also see *The Biography of Emperor Yu in the Han Dynasty*:

The emperor adopted faithful advice to let horse managers feed less food to horses, let water conservancy managers reduce food for animals, reduced the expenses of Yichun Garden to help the poor, and at the same time canceled the show and funeral the three officials in charge of clothing. Gongyu was sent to work as official Guang Lu.

Jiao Di Opera did not disappear during the Emperor Yuan of Han, but it was abolished temporarily because of famine. And the Jiao Di Opera itself was still moving forward. *Biography of the East Yi in the later Han Dynasty* recorded:

In the first year of Yong He, the heads of state came to the capital of the Han Dynasty. Emperor Shun advocated drum as music and Jiao Di Opera to entertain the heads of state.

Emperor Shun still used the Jiao Di Opera to entertain the foreign state, indicating that the opera did not stop. And Jiao Di Opera in the government's praise, has been developed relatively widely. *The Fifth Book of the Later Han Dynasty* recorded:

The ceremony of banquets for generals: officials meeting, sitting down, and the guide with the "knot" will lead generals go through the door. The leader of the military commander walked forward with the "streamer-silk" escort. After that, the official accompanying Emperor took the "knot" to mourn the suffering and listen to advice. At the end of the banquet, the Jiao Di Opera was given to watch. After the performance, the farmers were advised.

Thus, Jiao Di Opera has become a very common form of entertainment, the equivalent of banquets between the singing and dancing.

After Han Dynasty, Jiao Di Opera became more diverse and gradually developed to drama. For example, Tang Su'e, *"The Romance of Su"*: In the *Records of Han Dynasty*, it is stated that Emperor Wu of Han developed the drama in the third year, which was used in banquets for foreign envoys.

People of the capital more than three hundred miles came to see. Jiao Di is also the meaning of wrestling victory or defeat, probably for the wrestlers wearing horns on the head, so named as Jiao Di. Tang Su'e understanding of Jiao Di Opera and Shao has explained that "Jiao means the horns. Di means contradicting each other". The meaning of conflict is very different, which also reflects the development and evolution of the opera.

It is undoubtedly that Jiao Di Opera is one of the embryonic forms of Chinese drama development, but what we want to discuss is why did the Emperor Wu of Han make great efforts to develop the drama? Therefore, we want to discuss Emperor Wu's thoughts of seeking immortality.

### III. THE INFLUENCE OF EMPEROR WU'S QUEST FOR IMMORTALS AND TAOISM ON JIAO DI OPERA

The ideological composition of Emperor Wu of Han was more complicated, and the thought of seeking immortality and Taoism was an important part. "Emperor Xiao Wu had just ascended the throne, especially respecting the ghosts and gods." (*Historical Records of the Emperor Wu*) Emperor Wu of Han was educated by Huang Lao from childhood, so it was deeply rooted in the pursuit of immortality and Taoism. By contrasting *Records of History* and *Book of Han Dynasty*, we can see that Sima Qian and Bangu did not write the biography of Emperor Wu of Han from the same angle. Sima Qian made great efforts to exaggerate Emperor Wu's pursuit of immortality, while Ban Gu desalinated the matter of Emperor Wu's seeking for immortal practice, and focused on writing about his martial arts. What does that mean? When Sima Qian wrote the *Records of History*, Emperor Wu was still alive. Sima Qian knew his deeds very well, exaggerating his pursuit of immortals and implying "hidden irony". When Ban Gu wrote *Book of Han Dynasty*, Emperor Wu of Han had passed away, Ban Gu focused on his great achievements. Therefore, the study of Emperor Wu's thought of seeking immortality should focus on the Sima Qian's *Records of History*.

According to the *Records of History · Fengshan Book*, Emperor Wu of Han was very keen on ghosts and gods, and because of his fancy, magicians who was able to communicate with gods, were reused by Emperor Wu one after another. However, several Taoists who were reused by Emperor Wu were all discovered by him. Nevertheless, Emperor Wu still believes in the art of immortality as always. The first man who deceived Emperor Wu of Han was Li Shaojun, who claimed to have lived several hundred years. He encouraged Emperor Wu of Han to take gold and then make gold into utensils. Until the gods saw the vessels made of gold, could they come. Soon Li Shaojun died, but Emperor Wu thought he was not dead other than immortals, and let Kuan Shu learn Li Shaojun's method to continue to seek immortality. Whether Li Shaojun is dead or not is unknown, but the gold he smelts is nowhere. Li Shaojun's deception to Emperor Wu of Han had a great concealment, and Emperor did not notice its scam. The second man who deceived Emperor Wu of Han was Shao Weng from Qi. Shao Weng claimed to be proficient in ghosts and deities. In order to verify, Shao Weng recruited Wang's ghost of

Emperor Wu's wife to his account at night. Emperor Wu personally saw his wife's ghost. He believed Shao Weng very much and rewarded him with a lot of money and named as General Wen Cheng. General Wen Cheng encouraged Emperor Wu of Han to build the Gan Quan Palace in order to recruit immortals. But after a long time, Shao Weng didn't recruit immortals and wrote a letter by himself, then fed it to the cow. And he pretended not to know at this time, claiming to Wu Emperor that there were strange things in the cow's stomach. After killing the cow, the content of the book got from the cow was very strange, most people could not understand. But Emperor Wu recognized Shao Weng's handwriting, he was angry. Shao Weng was grilled and finally confessed to forgery. Emperor Wu killed Shao Weng in anger. But Emperor Wu did not wake up and continued his quest for immortality. Then the third man who deceived the Emperor appeared Luan Da. Luan Da was recommended to Emperor Wu of Han by Le Cheng Marquise, saying that Luan Da and Shao Weng were taught by the same teacher. Emperor Wu of Han was regretting killing Shao Weng. He was delighted to hear that Luan Da and Shao Weng were learnt from the same teacher. Luan Da was a scam at first. Le Cheng Marquise had a sister, the wife of Kang king Liu Ji, who had no children. After Kang's death, the son of other princes succeeded to the throne. Le Cheng Marquise's sister, who had a bad life and was at odds with the new king, heard that Shao Weng was dead. So she offered Luan Da to please Emperor Wu of Han through her brother, and the result was that Emperor Wu was taken in. This Luan Da was boastful, later his methods were not effective, Emperor Wu also killed him. Before this, Emperor Wu was worshipping gods or sacrifice without music. But when he met Li Yannian, a famous musician in the Han Dynasty, the situation changed. *Records of History · Fengshan Book* contained:

The spring of this year, Han Dynasty has already destroyed South Vietnam. Li Yannian, who is very good at the rhythm, visits the emperor. The emperor liked Li Yannian's opinion very much and asked the minister for his opinion: "Folk temple sacrifices advocate singing, dancing and drum music. Can't state sacrifice use music now?" The ministers said, "There was music in ancient sacrificial heaven and earth, and the gods were glad to hear it." Some ministers said: "the first emperor let the virgin daughter play 50 strings of the piano. Music is so sad that the emperor did not let play, instead of 25 strings of piano playing now." So when the land of South Vietnam was offering sacrifices to heaven and earth, it began to perform songs, dances and play music. And they called for people proficient in music playing 25 strings. "Harp" is popular from that time.

Since then, there has been music for sacrifices. In the past, sound, music, dance is a trinity. With music, there is also dance.

Sima Qian wrote the *Records of History* and the same biography of Emperor Wu in the Han Dynasty as in the *Fengshan Book*. It can be seen that Sima Qian is disgusted to the pursuit of immortality by Emperor Wu of Han. However, it was precisely because of Emperor Wu's way of seeking immortals and spirits that Jiao Di Opera developed rapidly during the time of Emperor Wu. As the above *Book of Han*

*Dynasty · Emperor Wu*, in Yuan Feng the third year, a large-scale Jiao Di Opera is staged after Li Yanian suggesting to Emperor Wu to match music and dance with sacrifices. It is estimated that from that time on, Emperor Wu began to pay attention to this kind of drama, which can also be used to entertain the gods, and strongly advocated its development.

#### IV. THE MAIN CONTENT OF JIAO DI OPERA IN THE PERIOD OF EMPEROR WU OF HAN

The Jiao Di Opera had already made great progress in the period of Emperor Wu of Han. The people above have preferences, and the following have emulated them. Emperor Wu of Han was fond of immortals and spirits, so many operas had this aspect of content.

The *Xi Jing Fu* by Zhang Heng in the Eastern Han Dynasty has a detailed description of the Jiao Di Opera. From Zhang Heng's description, it can be seen that the opera has developed into a story with a certain plot. It was accompanied by acrobatic performances such as weightlifting, rope walking, hard Qigong, dressed as leopards, white tigers, black dragons, elephants, snakes, toads and tortoises, with music and singing. By the time of Emperor Wu of Han, the opera had turned into a big performance, so that people within three hundred miles had gathered to watch the performance. Since it was a big show, it couldn't have ended like wrestling for a while. It must have been a lot of fun, various acrobatics coming out one by one, and some with storylines. According to Zhang Heng's description, Jiao Di Opera in the Han Dynasty had storylines, and Zhang Heng only recorded the story of Huang Gong in the East Sea. But the story Zhang Heng used only six sentences to describe it: "Huang Gong in the East China Sea is taking a red knife in the wizard's clothes. To suppress the white tiger with a mantra, he was eaten by the tiger at the end. The magic of the wizard is not believed by the people." Through these six sentences, we can see the outline of the story plot of Huang Gong in the East Sea. Huang Gong in the East Sea was a magical figure. He wore a red sword and recited a spell in his mouth. He could use the magic of witchcraft to kill tigers and monsters. But in the story, Huang Gong did not succeed. It's an ironic witchcraft is not credible. Zhang Heng, a native of the Eastern Han Dynasty, described this story under the guise of Emperor Wu, so he had no worries and could not be trusted to satirize the gods and ghosts. Fan Ye also clearly explained the original intention of Zhang Heng of writing this article in "*The Book of Later Han Dynasty · Biography of Zhang Heng*": "Zhang Heng imitated Ban Gu's „Two Capitals Fu“ and wrote „Er Jing Fu“, which was used to satirize and advise."

The history records only recorded the production and performance of the opera. Especially at the time of Emperor Wu of Han, although Sima Qian, Ban Gu and others recorded the grand performance of the opera, there was no detailed description of the content. At the end, we only know that there is an opera, and do not know exactly what to play. However, according to the archaeological unearthed stone figures of the Han Dynasty, there are several types of performances, one is the fight between men and men, the

other is between men and beasts, and the third is between beasts and beasts. But what can be seen from the stone relief is a simple figure of the development of the drama in the Han Dynasty, and the concrete story plot can not be shown by the portrait. But according to Zhang Heng, the only story of the Han Dynasty, "Huang Gong in the East Sea", we can take a look at a whole. Jiao Di Opera in the Han Dynasty the story plot mostly has a lot to do with the gods, ghosts and gods, and this is exactly what Emperor Wu of Han likes. Therefore, Emperor Wu of Han had to satisfy his desire for immortality by watching the opera.

#### V. THE REASONS OF THE OPERA FLOURING IN THE PERIOD OF EMPEROR WU OF THE HAN DYNASTY

Jiao Di Opera developed rapidly when Emperor Wu of Han Dynasty, there is naturally the reason that folk people like, but more important is Emperor Wu of Han carries on the promotion from the government organization. The reasons for the promotion of Emperor Wu of Han are as follows:

The first is that Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty sought immortality in his whole life, and repeatedly reused alchemists, who claimed to have immortal art, to seek the immortal way for him, which cost him a lot of energy, material and financial resources. His idea of seeking immortals in life is reflected in the opera. Because some of the stories of Jiao Di Opera have the elements of ghosts and gods, they cater to the ideological demands of Emperor Wu of Han. Therefore, Emperor Wu greatly encouraged the performance, and we did not know how many performances the opera had performed in Shang Lin Yuan alone. On the contrary, the Jiao Di Opera was for the needs of Emperor Wu of Han. There is also the possibility of deliberately processing immortals.

Second, the world's wars are basically stable, showing a state of peace, so that the country has spare time for national entertainment. In the first year of Yuan Feng, Xiong Nu was basically calm, South Vietnam also attached, and southwest Yi was settled, a stable situation appeared in the country. Emperor Wu of Han was so happy that he held a grand national performance in Yuan Feng third year, and the people came to watch it within three hundred miles.

Third, Emperor Wu of Han inherited the original meaning of the opera, which was used for the exchange of force between two countries and for showing off the military strength of the country. But at the time of Emperor Wu, this kind of function has been weakened, mainly to show off the national power and preaches.

Fourth, the free development of the opera is in the folk. Sima Qian, Ban Gu only recorded the national government to hold the opera, and at that time, the country advocating, people enjoying, Jiao Di Opera in the folk has also been a certain development.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

In short, there are a variety of reasons for the rapid development of Jiao Di Opera, but it has a lot to do with the

preferences of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty. Because he likes the opera, it has become a national entertainment project. Thus Jiao Di Opera, evolving from a single fight into a variety of grand performances, with stronger story, more entertaining, sound, music and dance trinity closely combined, is the embryonic form of modern drama.

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