

The Forms and Features of Bashu Dances Shown on Carved Stone in Han Dynasty*

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Abstract—The dance image on carved stones of Bashu area in Han Dynasty reflects the scene of majority of social music and dance activities in Bashu area of Han Dynasty and is mainly in small and medium structure. There are two types of performance. One of them is self-entertainment dance for the purpose of own enjoyment and is commonly in two forms such as "self-dancing" and "invited dancing"; the other one of them is entertaining dance for the purpose of entertaining others and includes solo dance, couple dance, group dance, etc. Due to the unique geographical location of the Bashu area, style of the dance images varies and presents a strong cultural style of Chu State.

Keywords—Bashu carved stone; self-entertainment dance; entertaining dance; style characteristics

I. INTRODUCTION

Han Dynasty was in the ascendant period of Chinese feudal society, realized a great communication and confusion between China and the West in political, economic, cultural, military and other fields through Zhang Qian and Ban Chao's missions to the western regions and appeared a thriving and prosperous scene especially in culture. The political system enlightened by the rulers of early Han Dynasty and the establishment of concept to advocate folk customs and "sharing happiness with the people" greatly promoted the socialization tendency of music and dance in Han Dynasty so that the art of music and dance way highly popularized and improved and also reached unprecedented prosperity in performance form. The dance image in carved stone of Bashu area in Han Dynasty mainly reflects the scene of majority of social music and dance activities in Bashu area of Han Dynasty and is mainly in small and medium structure. Most of the contents are small music and dance activities. It can be divided into two types of performance form such as self-entertainment dance and entertaining dance.

II. SELF-ENTERTAINMENT DANCE

This is a form of dance that aims to achieve self-entertainment by dancing. This kind of dance has two most remarkable features: first, it is a form of dance appeared for meeting emotional demand and is for the purpose of own

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enjoyment. It doesn't emphasize on techniques and is featured by spontaneous and random; second, it has certain innovative and aesthetic significance. "Self dancing" and "invited dancing" are two common forms of performance of this dance.

A. Self Dancing

During Han Dynasty, this form of dance was very popular in all levels from the royal families to the folk merchants. This form of dance is a dance played spontaneously when a party or feast reaches its climax. Self dancing is not a performance dance, having not that high requirement for dance skills. The performers are mostly families or invited guests of the host. As recorded in "Han History · biography of Gai Kuanrao", Ping'en Duke Xu Boqiao provided a banquet for guests when he moved to a new house. During the banquet, when the wine cellar was happy, Tan Changqing got up and danced the dance of "Macaca Fighting against Dog". "Macaca Fighting against Dog" is a humorous and funny dance popular in folk mansion houses of Han Dynasty. A well-known imperial court member made a dance like Macaca fighting against dog in the banquet just for pleasure. This indicates that self dancing is a form of dance played mainly for self entertainment and entertaining others.



Fig. 1. Chengdu banquet happiness image carved brick.

In 1975, the "Banquet Happiness Image Carved Brick" (see "Fig. 1") unearthed from the Tomb of the Eastern Han Dynasty in the western suburb of Chengdu shows a scene

that a male beats drum with two hands, a female sings besides with hair highly worn in a bun, one man and one woman seat on the right up place of the ground, eating and drinking while watching the show, one drum beating male appears on the left down place and one man in long sleeve and long dress is dancing in the right place. This picture shows the self-entertainment dance played when drinking wine in a banquet of Han Dynasty.

B. Invited Dancing

It is a courtesy and self-entertainment social dance popular in the upper class of the Han Dynasty. Its function and nature are similar to modern ballroom dancing. During the banquet, the host may first get up and dance, then invite the guests to dance. To be polite, guest must also get up and dance in return. After the dance, the host and partner may invite others to dance and so forth till enjoying themselves to the full. The person invited can be male or female. However if the invitee refuses or does not dance in return, he/she may lose the etiquette and may be considered that he/she looks down upon or disrespects the inviter, which may often lead to enmity between them. There are also certain rules for the movements and postures when inviting for a dance. He/she may lose the etiquette if he/she fails to dance or not dance according to the rules. It shows that dancing to show affection, tolerance, skill and attitude is the basic artistic qualities of this ceremonial dance. This style of "invited dancing" was widely spread from the upper class to all levels of the society in Han Dynasty until the Wei and Jin Dynasties.



Fig. 2. Carved brick showing county magistrate Peng's image of dancing with long sleeves.

The style of "invited dancing" was also very popular in Bashu area and was reflected in the carved stones and bricks of Han Dynasty such as the carved brick showing county magistrate Peng's image of dancing with long sleeves as shown in "Fig. 2". As shown in the figure, two men are dancing oppositely, the left man is stamping and kicking his legs and stretching his hand out of sleeves to invite the woman to dance, the right woman in a long dress extended to the ground is stretching her hands out of sleeves politely to accept the dance invitation, two lady's maids beside her are holding fans to cool the lady and the left lady's maid horizontally carries an instrument named "zhu". From the image, it can be seen that "invited dancing" is different from social dance in the West in form and significance. In the form of "invited dancing", men and women are not cuddled together and do not have much physical contact but complete

mutual communication, respect and appreciation and other social functions via the elegant dance, while creating an atmosphere full of artistic sense in the banquet. This is a unique feature of ancient "ballroom dance" in China.

III. ENTERTAINING DANCE

Unlike self-entertainment dance, entertaining dance is mainly for entertaining others. This form of dance has three basic characteristics: first, the performer is full-time music and dance skilled person. These persons were professional dancers of that era kept in emperor's harem and the prominent officials and eminent personages' house. Their social position was low. In order to survive in the fierce competition environment, they have to undergo harsh dance training and constantly improve their dance skills, create new and excellent song and dance works to cater to the aesthetic taste of the royal family. They traveled throughout the harem and the aristocrats and scholars' houses. Second, it is collected, sorted out and created by specialized music and dance institution. There are two music and dance institutions in Han Dynasty, namely Taile affiliated to Fengchang and responsible for elegant music played in religious sacrificing ritual and Yuefu affiliated to Shaofu and responsible for folk music. The establishment of Yuefu is essentially to collect folk music and dance to help the rulers to observe what are going on with the people. However after these folk music and dances are collected into the palace, they were sorted out, adapted and re-created by professional musicians to mainly entertain the emperor and nobles. During the periods of Emperor Wen, Emperor Jing and Emperor Wu in Han Dynasty, there were musicians and female musicians (called "royal musicians") in the court for entertaining the emperor. Among the people, there were also professional artists who specially trained dancers to make a living. They continuously contributed rigorously trained music and dance skilled persons to the court or the houses of the nobility, and also obtained the material condition to make dance creation and performance and the opportunity to do artistic practice. Third, the dances performed by music and dance skilled persons have strong artistic and appreciation qualities. These dances include the art works created by professional artists to cater to the tastes of the rulers, but more of them are the adaptation, processing and creation on the basis of folk music and dances. Many of them became representative art works of that era and many works became classic dance works that have been passed down for a long time and there are also partial works slowly disappeared as time goes on. Most dance images shown on carved stones and bricks of Bashu area in Han Dynasty are plate and drum dance, handkerchief dance and long-sleeve dance. Wherein, long-sleeve dance became the typical feature of such images. The form of dance art shown on carved stone can be roughly divided into three types: solo dance, couple dance and group dance.

A. Solo Dance

It is an art work relatively complete or complete in content form finished by the dancer independently, wherein the dancer can be either male or female. Solo dance is characterized by independent dancing of the dancer and has

special outfit combined with the performance content. Such dancer is professionally trained in both form and dance movements, showing a colorful and professional feature. In this aspect, it is greatly different from self-entertainment dance. Many dance movements are specially trained and are actions that ordinary people can't do, such as the "raised sleeve and bent waist" dance image shown on the said carved stones and bricks. This form of dance can be seen in the music and dancer figurines unearthed from Han Tombs.



Fig. 3. Female dancer figurine in Xiangguo Temple of Chongqing.

As can be seen from the well-preserved female dancer figurine unearthed from Xiangguo Temple in Jiangbei, Chongqing (see "Fig. 3"), the female dancer wears a round-neck shirt inside and a dress outside with trumpet-like right sleeve and a thin waistband. The female slightly takes the dress with left hand and raises right hand to step and dance, with foot head exposed and sleeve flap lapped behind the sleeves. The vivid face expression, elegant dancing and beautiful cloth makes it become the best pottery figurines art work in the Han Dynasty.

B. Couple Dance

It is performed by two dancers at the same time. Couple dance has three features. First, it needs to be played by two persons without restriction on gender. Namely, the dance can be completed by one male and one female, or by two males or two females. But most of the dances are completed by one male and one female in general. Second, the art work played by two dancers has strong artistic and appreciation natures, has complete or relatively complete structure and independent or relatively independent theme of ideology which is the major means to build up the dancing image, reveal inner word of the character and drive the plot development. Third, such dancers must have the characteristics of solo dancer, have strong consciousness of teamwork and be able to act in perfect unison in providing the performance in addition to having solid basic foundation. As the work is jointly performed by two persons, the content is of more plot nature, more diversified form and easier to attract the interest and responsive chord of audiences.



Fig. 4. Carved brick with image of music and dance in Xindu.

The carved brick with image of music and dance unearthed from the Tomb of the Eastern Han Dynasty in Xindu of Chengdu, as shown in "Fig. 4", vividly shows the image of this dance played by one male and one female. This carved brick shows four characters. Wherein, there are two dancing persons on the left. The male dancer wearing turban on head, strait jacket and long hakama and fastening a ribbon around the waist is turning head, raising foot and lifting up the sleeve flap to dance. What beside him is a slim female dancer with hair highly worn in a bun, wearing longuette with wide sleeve on right hand and waist fastened with ribbon. This female dancer is in a posture with longuette extended down to the ground and hip raised behind and looking at the male dancer while lifting up the sleeve flap and dancing. This image vividly demonstrates that couple dance not only shows interactive dancing between them in posture but also presents the emotion communicated between the two dancers.

C. Group Dance

It refers to the dance played by no less than three persons and is in many forms such as group dances played by males or females or mixture of males and females. As a multi-person dance, this dance has complicated change in team shape and dance image composition. Group dance can be both an independent dance work and a dance segment with relatively independent plot. The content of group dance depends on the shaping of the dance personality and the advancement of the plot. It is usually expressed as depiction of the scene of the story to highlight the atmosphere, present the mood of the masses and show the local and national characteristics. Group dance is usually interspersed with solo, couple or triple dances to highlight one or more characters in the group dance and enhances the artistic nature of the dance by making change and contrast in art. The ordered movements and consistent style are the main performance characteristics of group dance.

In primitive society, group dance was closely combined with production work. In the rites and music system of Western Zhou Dynasty with strict class division, "Music" was subordinated to "rites". "Music" includes the formation of bands, music and dance and the use of musical composition and dance. The rites and music system gets the people in the upper class divided into many levels (such as king, princes, doctors, and scholars), and stipulates that different levels of people can enjoy different music systems,

which in turn reflect the relationship between the monarch and his subjects, fathers and sons, brothers, couples, friends, etc. and it is not allowed to arbitrarily act beyond the limit. For example, the king's band is called "Bayi band" which is composed of 64 persons arranged in eight lines and eight rows; princes' band can have 36 persons, doctors' band can have 16 persons and scholars' band can have 4 persons. The common people are in low social position and have no right to enjoy rites and music. The establishment of the rites and music system in Western Zhou Dynasty made this art form of group dance always valued by the ruling group due to its grand scale and strange changes.

Group dance was particularly developed in Han Dynasty. According to the "Han History · Sacrifice Record", the "Spiritual Dance" in period of Emperor Gao in Han Dynasty was a dance played by sixteen boys to sacrifice for Houji: this dance is a group dance composed of sixteen boys, averagely divided into eight teams; each team hold different farming tools, performing a corresponding image of labor, showing the labor lives such as reclamation, farming, hoeing, driving sparrows, harvesting, husking, removing grain skins, etc., in order to commemorate and sing the contribution of Houji to teaching the people farming. This elegant music directly sourced from life and reflecting life shows the forthright and sincere and simple and close-to-society style of the dance in Han Dynasty. This dance also reflects the purpose of rulers in Han Dynasty to stabilize the country, resume production, improve the efficiency of labor production and further achieve the prosperity of the country and the people. It gets the farming means and methods advanced at that time skillfully integrated into the dance forms popularized in the people so that people can receive education on agricultural work while appreciating the dance. This sufficiently shows the good intentions of the rulers of Han Dynasty and is also a typical example of the saying that music and dance art is originated from life and serves the practice of social production.

IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DANCE

Bashu area lies in the southwestern border of China. And the dance art image shown on the carved stones of Han Dynasty has the following characteristics:

A. The Dance in Bashu Area Has a Strong Cultural Style of Chu State

First from the geographical point of view, Ba State and Chu State were adjacent to each other and connected to each other by mountains and water bodies in ancient times. The area of "Zhounan" recorded in "The Book of Songs" includes partial territories of Chu State and Ba State at that time. As early as in the Warring States period, there were records stating that the people of Ba State sing "Xia Li Ba Ren" in region of Chu State, repeated by thousands of people; while the dance of Chu State was also very popular in Bashu area. In addition, the upper ruling group has a special liking for the dance in Chu State. Lady Qi, a concubine of Emperor Gao in Han Dynasty was good at dancing "raised sleeve and bent waist" dance. It indicates that the strong style of Chu State in

the dance of Bashu area was inseparable from the tendency that people may follow the example of their superiors.

B. The Styles of Dance Images Preserved in the Carved Stones of Bashu Area in Han Dynasty Are Diverse

On the one hand, most of the dances are performed by fairs in the harem by fairs in the harem and "female music band" maintained in the houses of the noble in order to cater to the appreciation and aesthetic requirements of the royal family and scholars. It is danced in a soft, pretty, agile, comfortable, elegant and light manner, pays attention to casting glances of love and is shown in bright colors. On the other hand, most of the dance image shown on the carved stones is one performance scene of the "Hundred dramas" most commonly popularized in Han Dynasty. The dance styles are mostly blended with Chinese traditional drama, martial arts and folk dances, characterized by the fast pace, tremendous momentum and powerful movements and vibrant style.

V. CONCLUSION

The dance image in the stone carvings of Bashu area in Han Dynasty reflects the development of Bashu music and dance in the Han Dynasty, and also makes up for the lack of research caused by the lack of historical records. The high prosperity of music and dance in the Han Dynasty is inseparable from the development of its politics and economy. First of all, in politics, the rulers attach great importance to Bashu area and the political environment is relatively stable; the establishment of the county system further promotes and strengthens the central government's rule and management of Bashu area; economically, the taxation of Bashu people is reduced and many Bashu soldiers who had military merit received the title and the field; during the period of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, iron officials were set up in Linqiong, Shu County, Wuyang, Jianwei County and Nan'an. The implementation of these policies has greatly promoted the development of agriculture in Bashu area, so that the Bashu has enjoyed the reputation of "the land of abundance", and the culture has also leapt from the former "wild" area to the advanced cultural state. Finally, the hobby of the rulers, and imitation, acceptance and tolerance of Bashu people are all important reasons for the popularity of the Bashu dance.

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