

National Vision and Aesthetics

Playing and Singing Art of Maqu Under the Construction of Aesthetic Modernity

Zhanhai Song

School of Liberal Arts
Northwest Minzu University
Lanzhou, China

Abstract—The discussion of aesthetic modernity is a hot topic in the current literary research circle. Although this theory has been widely used at present, it is often ignored to make a comprehensive study of folk art from the effective perspective of aesthetic modernity by the academic circles. This paper attempted to place Gannan Maqu playing and singing art in the field of aesthetic modernity and explore the new explanatory space of Gannan Maqu playing and singing art in the field of aesthetic modernity from three aspects: the transformation from locality to nationalism, the disenchantment of divinity to humanity, and the separation living state like scattered sand into the field of modern culture, in order to respond to the aesthetic appeal of the modern society, and sublimate the unique significance of Maqu playing and singing art. Consequently, cultural protection and inheritance will not be taken for granted as self-talk.

Keywords—nationality; aesthetic modernity; construction; Maqu playing and singing

I. INTRODUCTION

As the nearest snowy plateau to the mainland, Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture is in the east of Tibetan region and the west of Han region. It has been known as "Han-Tibet Corridor" since ancient times. It is an important hub connecting the ancient Silk Road and the Tang-Tibet Road. Maqu County, located in the southwest of Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, occupies the important position of the first meander of the Jiuqu Yellow River in the junction of Gansu, Qinghai and Sichuan. It has vast grasslands and beautiful mountains and rivers. The unique geographical location makes Tibetan and Chinese music culture blend here. Tibetan Buddhism is broad and profound. Gesar culture has a long and brilliant history. With horseback playing and singing, thousand people dancing, all of them carry the unique folk music flowing naturally on the snow plateau and the brilliant music culture of Maqu.

In the past 60 years, the creation and development of contemporary Maqu playing and singing has gone through three periods: the successful grafting of political discourse and traditional singing in the 1950s and 1960s, the establishment of aesthetic identification mechanism centered on "national ideology"; the replacement of religious belief by ideology in the 1970s. It gave birth to the establishment of Aesthetic Subjectivity of this artistic form on the other hand. From the end of the 20th century to the 21st century, the traditional

singing and playing culture of Maqu ushered in fission and sublimation again under the impact of modern society. The construction process of aesthetic modernity of Maqu playing and singing not only becomes a special perspective for us to examine the contemporary development of Chinese national folk art, but also provides an important reference for us to grasp the construction way of aesthetic modernization of contemporary Chinese folk art.

As a comprehensive concept, the proposition of aesthetic modernity covers aesthetic and artistic modernity, which is relative to classical or traditional art. It presents a transformation from classical art form and aesthetic concept represented by it to modern art form and aesthetic concept represented by it. It is not only the expression of modernity at the level of art and aesthetic experience, but also the observation of modernity in the level of aesthetic reception. As a manifestation of Tibetan folk culture, Maqu playing and singing not only reflects the distinct characteristics and unique customs of Tibetan culture in form, but also reflects the spiritual appeal and value orientation of the deeper culture of the nationality. With this traditional folk art from the natural state of existence into the context of commodity economy, in the wave of diversified culture, the audience's acceptance of its aesthetic value is also quietly changing.

II. FROM HOME TO COUNTRY: CONSTRUCTION OF AESTHETIC IDENTITY MECHANISM

There are two common definitions of identity. Freud's psychoanalysis has long believed that "identity is a psychological process in which one makes oneself conform to others or groups through imitation and internalization. In this process, the behavior, attitudes and values of individuals or groups are all reference criteria"[1]. However, social psychology points out that "identity refers to the multiple interactions among personality, society and culture, which maintains the unity and consistency of personality" [2]. Both of the above views explain identity, which is the embodiment of the convergence of individuals and groups or cultures in the subjective aspect. As an important component of forming group's moral tendency, behavior standard, value orientation, national spirit and aesthetic psychology, identity is a necessary condition for individuals to integrate into ethnic groups and cultural unity. After the combination of aesthetics and identity, there is no loss of stability, unity and integrity. Once this aesthetic mentality comes into being, consensus on beauty will

be formed in the group's own culture, forming a consistent and stable understanding and judgment from the psychological point of view. However, in the continuous communication and collision between culture and aesthetic ideas, aesthetic identity will continue to change accordingly. Individuals and groups have been in a new round of psychological reconstruction. Cultural integration is finally achieved in the process of this change, and aesthetic identity will develop in a unified direction, with integrity.

It is precisely because aesthetic activities include human understanding of the world and communication, through continuous aesthetic activities, the relationship between human and the world can be established. The existence of aesthetic identity overthrows "the wall" between different beliefs and races, and people living on the same earth begin to build mutual understanding and respect. "As a way of communication, art enables people to further understand their people through the arts of other nationalities. The existence of music, like a right key, opens the door to mutual understanding among the people of every country in this era". [3] This is also the embodiment of the spirit of the times in folk art, especially in music, whose evolution and development clearly deduces the causes of social symptoms in times.

Now, Maqu is different from before. It has broken away from the previous feudalism, landlordism and slavery and entered a modern fair and just social system. Every Maqu people can be their own masters of the country and have their own happy life. Even now, there are many unsafe political fluctuations and ethnic disputes, but Maqu still keeps its basic harmony and stability. All this comes from the wise leadership of the government of Maqu County and the mutual assistance and unity of each nationality. Of course, the most important thing is that Tibetans, as the main ethnic group, have traditional values in their national culture. These Tibetan concepts are reflected in many traditional dragon-head qin performances. For example, some performances are performed according to the characteristics of Han, India and local hometown. India is a very important place, where Buddhism originated. Almost all Tibetans have their religions, so India naturally has a great sacredness to the Tibetan people. Then, the Tibetan ancestors have always had the concept of the Han and Tibetan being of one family. These ideas have been handed down and have a great impact on the Tibetan people. They have been rooted in the blood of the Tibetans and cannot be removed. These factors play a great role in promoting the harmonious and stable development of Maqu. After the unremitting efforts and struggles of the Chinese people, Tibet was peacefully liberated in 1950, which opened a new era of development for the Tibetan people in Maqu. Influenced by the emergence of a new civilization, the Tibetan has also begun to construct a new life. Of course, Tibetans are a people who can sing and dance well. They also use songs to express their feelings and joy, and express their yearning for the coming new life. Moreover, they began to use their own local characteristic music to express their praise to the leaders, which promoted the beginning of a new transformation of Tibetan local folk songs. Although, to a certain extent, the transformation was led by local government officials, in fact, it is also the self-awakening of the local Tibetan people's sense

of ownership. In their own understanding, these people have made different interpretations of these historical traditions of playing and singing culture, so that the performance of this kind of playing and singing culture keeps pace with the times. At the same time, this kind of rebuilding of playing and singing culture can also promote the harmonious and stable development of Maqu in economy, politics and society to a certain extent. As a deeper political and social phenomenon, whether social culture can develop healthily will have a great impact on local social stability. At the same time, with such a relatively harmonious and stable political culture, the people can reconstruct the traditional culture of their hometown, which is conducive to the harmonious and stable development between man and nature, man and man.

After a long history of development, the Tibetan people are constantly struggling with the formidable natural environment. In this process, they understand the power of unity and inherit and develop this good character. Such local proverbs have been circulating in the Tibetan area of Maqu County, such as "100 ants can eat a bear", "1,000 leeches can suck dry a yak", "tigers dare not attack a group of yaks". These proverbs can be understood at a glance. Although the language is relatively simple, the description is very realistic. They show the importance of unity for Tibetans. Every Tibetan people will remember these simple and unadorned languages and engrave them in their own bone forever. The Tibetan people not only attach great importance to the unity within their own ethnic groups, but also the unity and friendship in their exchanges and cooperation with other ethnic groups. These qualities can also be reflected in many local folk songs. The Tibetan people yearn for friendly exchanges and united development with other nationalities. These concepts have been spreading and developing continuously since their ancestors. After the reform and opening up, influenced by economic and political factors, the Tibetan people have re-created the content and form of playing and singing. Anyway, there is an idea that they are friendly and united with "Han" people, which has been rooted in the hearts of Tibetans since a long time ago.

After the founding of New China, Tibet was peacefully liberated and the Tibetan people were free. They also had a new understanding of "Han land". More folk songs were transformed and innovated. These new songs were sung again among these alpine meadows. There are so many similar songs, such as "Golden Beijing", "Singing a New Life", "A Golden Sun in Beijing" and so on. These songs are related to the times and politics. They are a manifestation of the Tibetan people's joy and recognition of the new social change. Tibetans sing songs to express their happiness after liberation in their place of residence, and also to express their gratitude to the Han land. Of course, the Tibetans in Maqu are also among them. This area is also a region with strong religious color. Especially for the Han area, which has a deep connection with the local Tibetan Buddhism, they pay more attention to it. This phenomenon causes them to unconsciously deify these places in many folk songs, such as this one:

Friends, please listen slowly.

(Oh) Beijing is a gold pagoda.

The wise leader is the sun and the moon at the top of the tower.

Millions of people are layers of the tower.

In the concept of Maqu Tibetan, our capital Beijing not only exists as a geographical location with administrative significance, but also as the economic, cultural and administrative center of the People's Republic of China. Beijing has been sacred and symbolized in people's minds. There are two places that Tibetans in Maqu County, especially the older generation, yearn for all their lives: Lhasa and Beijing. They want to go to Lhasa for pilgrimage and to Beijing for worship of the remains of Mao Zedong, a great man. As a symbol of holy and pure land, "Beijing" and "Lhasa" are pilgrimage places to purify Tibetans' minds and to light up people's hopes for life. As the famous western scholar Firth said, "Once symbols and complex series of symbols are interrelated, they are not related to or directly equivalent to symbols or a certain substance, but become a kind of relationship that is regarded to be habitual or even exclusive" [4]. As a geographical location with administrative significance, Beijing and Lhasa are not realistic sacred and pure lands, but their symbolic meanings have taken root in the hearts of Tibetans. This symbolized concept is also conveyed by the Tibetans through Maqu playing and singing art. Therefore, playing and singing art has immeasurable influence in the process of inheriting the national spirit. People understand a lot of history and store lots of knowledge in the process of playing and singing and listening, and understand the truth of being a man. It retains the most positive content in the field of national spirit, and also plays the role of cultural propaganda, which is conducive to the further cultural development of local society.

Based on the subjective consciousness of individuals, the Tibetan people in Maqu County constructed and interpreted beautiful feelings in the lyrics by playing and singing, and their worship and yearning for "Han land" gradually penetrated into people's hearts. In this process, compared with the guidance of the local government, the awakening of self-awareness is more indispensable, which is conducive to further building a harmonious culture, achieving national unity and common prosperity and development.

III. FROM DIVINITY TO HUMAN NATURE: ESTABLISHMENT OF AESTHETIC SUBJECTIVITY

As we all know, the Tibetans in Maqu County believe in Tibetan Buddhism and are a people with deep religious beliefs. Influenced by Tibetan Buddhism for a long term, some of the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism, including the ideas contained in the teachings, are regarded as a kind of life concept and mottoes by the local people. The activities of Tibetan Buddhist organizations are usually closely related to the daily life of the Tibetans, so there is a strong connection between them. Religious beliefs have long become spiritual sustenance of Tibetan people in Maqu County. In other words the central idea of Tibetan Buddhism has long permeated the whole Maqu Tibetan area. Although people other than monks do not know much about Buddhist doctrine, they have lived in a Buddhist atmosphere for a long time. They inevitably regard religious

belief as a part of their life, and often express it in the form of music. It is embodied in a huge number of songs chanting their masters, divine Buddha or conveying the spirit of Buddhism. From a large number of Buddhist songs, we can know that the concept of Tibetan Buddhism has gradually penetrated into all aspects of the Tibetan people's social life in Maqu County, and even can be said to affect the future development direction of local folk songs. The folk songs that show respect for Buddha have already become a special form of communication with Buddha to a certain extent. Therefore, there is an important relationship between playing and singing and Tibetan religion. Xia Min, a scholar, also believes that folk songs play a role of religion to a certain extent. He believes that "there is a close relationship between ballads and religion. Singers' views on religion often influence their songs and make them change their ideas in the content or form of songs. In fact, in religious activities, singers are also part of the activities. Music makes singers and listeners become part of religion, which makes people and songs have a strong relationship and influence each other". [5]

Almost all the Tibetan people believe in Tibetan Buddhism. This culture has been spreading among the people for thousands of years and has been deeply rooted in the inner of the nationality and has a profound impact on the whole nationality. Buddhism has persuaded people to be compassionate, to help the weak, to promote the idea of equality among all living beings. The culture in Tibetan society has gone through a long period of development. Tibetan Buddhism will affect the three views of every Tibetan, so that Tibetans are friendly and approachable. We can feel it from the songs they play and sing.

Tibetan herdsmen on Maqu grassland are faithful believers in Tibetan Buddhism, and they believe in Buddhism all their lives. Before the liberation of Tibet, Maqu was controlled by Labrang Monastery in Xiahe. Maqu Tibetans were religious people under the leadership of Labrang Monastery. Everyone had a devout respect for Tibetan Buddhism in their hearts. Buddhism thought was integrated into every herdsman's life. The content of Maqu dragon-head qin playing and sing could not be separated from that deep respect in their soul. Just as most folk singers believe in and worship the music goddess "Melodious Goddess" in Buddhism, they are convinced that they are protected by the goddess and that it is "Melodious Goddess" who brings them wonderful music. So they have a kind of godlike reverence for their dragon-head qin. Their dragon-head qin is sacred. Not anyone can touch it at will, let alone step over it. They think that this kind of behavior is actually a desecration to "Melodious Goddess" and will make them suffer bad luck. Similarly, most dragon-head qin performers will describe the merits and benefits of their masters in the content of their performance. In this way, they express their infinite reverence for their masters. This culture originates that Tibetan people believe masters are the beacons guiding practitioners on the road to Buddhism. Therefore, almost everyone will have a "master" in Tibetan called "Lama" and pay homage to their masters. And this worship deeply rooted in the hearts of the people, and naturally it was absorbed by the dragon-head qin playing and singing art.

Specifically to the content of dragon-head qin playing and singing art, there are many parts that can directly reflect Buddhist thought. For example, no killing, protects animals and plants, respects the old and cares for the young, and helps the weak. In Buddhism, all beings are equal. In manners, keep a concept of benefiting others. In Buddhist thought, killing is the first of all kinds of malignancies, while to free captive animals is a matter of immeasurable merits and virtues. These are the concrete manifestations and influences of Buddhism on singers. For example,

The shining sun
Is a blessing to the blue sky.
The spring wind warms the meadow.
It is a blessing for plants and trees.
The longevity of loving parents
Is a fortune for their children.

Indeed, the description of lyrics and songs are very similar to the real life of local people. Even in praise of the Buddha, it is not only spiritual, but also gives people a feeling of being closely connected. It can be seen that Tibetan Buddhism has played a very important role. For example,

The great savior of mankind,
Sitting on the lotus throne,
Proclaiming the Holy gospel,
Be holy forever and forever.
The supreme classics,
Like a blue ocean,
With sails of goodness,
Always standing in the world.

Generally speaking, the songs related to the praise of spirit in Maqu County began from the introduction of Buddhism. At the beginning, it was mainly revolved around the illusory spiritual world of the Buddhism. These contents had a great impact on the Tibetan social life in Maqu County. After the peaceful liberation of Tibet, they were both politically and economically influenced. In the praise of Buddhism, the content will be closer to their lives. As follows,

On the top of the eastern hill,
With the brilliance of national policy,
The sun shines all over the earth.
The sun shines all over the earth.

In the early human society, the limitations of human ability made it unable to compete with the powerful natural forces, and the relationship of human to nature presented a dependency relationship. Ancient Greek philosophy believed that man was a homogeneous entity with nature, which neglected that man was the unity of material and spiritual, leading to the status of man as the subject and the subjectivity of man could not be established for a long time. With the

development of society, the ability of human beings to transform nature is constantly strengthened. The attitude towards nature has changed from obedience to conquest. People are gradually endowed with the connotation of subject, and the status of subject is gradually established.

The entry of modernism makes the concept of "divinity" begin to change to the concept of "human nature". Specifically, in Maqu playing and singing art, its content has progressed from the original aesthetic appeal of "entertaining gods", "worshipping gods" and revering life towards the individual subjective expression of "self" in the historical context of aesthetic modernity. The religious core of Maqu playing and singing, its original social function attributes, its inherent spiritual appeal and so on, have made corresponding self-adjustment in varying degrees.

IV. FROM CLOSE TO OPEN: AESTHETIC SURVIVAL CIRCUMSTANCES

For Tibetans, it is not hard to sing or dance. Folk songs are an extremely important part of Tibetan culture. Now they have become a very characteristic part of tourism activities in Maqu County, which can also be said to be a tourism brand. With the rapid development of the tourism industry in Maqu County in recent years, the traditional folk songs, originally based on the real life of the working people as a model, spread from the alpine meadows, have gradually come to the public's vision. In the process of singing like this, the situation of folk songs has gradually changed.

With the passage of time, most of the traditional dragon-head qin performers who once were popular in the society have begun to retire. But those young singers have not yet grown up, lacking experience in the edification of traditional Tibetan music and systematic learning of music knowledge. So, most of the dragon-head qin playing and singing in today's society have lost their original flavor. Such a situation is also indispensable in the process of development. But now many people who love playing and singing think that modern playing and singing has lost the taste of the last century, and it is an indisputable fact that nature and simplicity have gradually disappeared. Now Maqu dragon-head qin playing and singing lessen simplicity and folk customs and contain more artificial elements. Many Tibetan singers began to record records in studios. It is often accompanied by Western musical instruments, and the recording level is uneven, which makes the charm of traditional dragon-head qin playing and singing almost non-existent. In the long run, it will mislead the audience, and the consequences are worrying.

Another concern is that since the 1990s, the number of people who can make dragon-head qin in Ando area, especially famous dragon-head qin makers, was gradually decreasing. In order to make up for the shortage of dragon-head qin, performers begin to use other musical instruments. Ando dragon-head qin is the main accompaniment instrument in Maqu playing and singing. But it is gradually replaced by Western guitar and mandolin. Especially mandolin, it has appeared in many accompaniments. The light and handy and portable advantage makes many herdsman like it. At the same time, it can satisfy the fashion pursuit of the young generation

in Tibetan area, and cater to the development trend of urban pop music. In a short period of time, a large number of mandolins emerged, initially to make up for the shortage of dragon-head qin. But after a period of development, we found that the dragon-head qin was gradually replaced by mandolin.

However, we need to pay special attention. Mandolin has been manufactured in a factory way, which makes it abundant in supply, exquisite in workmanship, light in size and easy to carry, and it has objectively exerted an important influence on the popularization and dissemination of Ando's dragon-head qin playing and singing, especially Maqu, in recent decades. We must admit that among the various localization conditions embodied in the dragon-head qin, there are many humanistic and historical values, which are incomparable to those of mandolin. Therefore, the emergence of this phenomenon should not be, and arouse our reflection.

The problems have arisen in the modern reconstruction of Maqu dragon-head playing and singing, which are very worthy of our in-depth consideration. Because of these problems, the traditional dragon-head qin art may lose the form and content beauty of Tibetan traditional music, and be in danger of being gradually replaced by foreign forms of music. This would not only be a great harm and loss to Tibetan music, but also be unwilling to see by those who like traditional Tibetan dragon-head qin playing and singing art. Therefore, we should help young Tibetan dragon-head qin singers really understand the basis of the traditional artistic expression of this art. They should not only innovate, but also to adhere to the tradition in order to preserve the national character and the special ideological connotation of the nationality.

Almost all ethnic groups' traditional cultures have their special characteristics of the times. Playing and singing is an indispensable part of Tibetan culture. But this traditional culture should also timely respond to social changes, actively make adjustment and appropriate changes according to the requirements of modern society, so that Tibetan traditional culture can maintain its youth and vitality with the combination of tradition and modernity.

V. CONCLUSION

The transformation of Tibetan traditional culture in Maqu County is a necessary process of development. Not only can it help our Tibetan culture to be relatively adaptable, but also the life of the Tibetan people in Maqu County will change obviously. All these changes are due to the help of the Party and the state. At first, it is written from the perspective of praise to the repertoire of playing and singing, hoping to express their feelings in the songs. On the one hand, through a series of policy orientations, the government has helped them find self-confidence in the national theme in the process of development. On the other hand, the collision between modern culture and Maqu Tibetan traditional culture keeps growing toward prosperity. Therefore, as an important part of Tibetan traditional culture, "playing and singing art" plays the role of "bridge", providing a channel for communication.

Although the way to construct the aesthetic modernity of Maqu playing and singing is quite different from that of other nationalities in the world in the same period, they all show

similar cultural commonalities and have a high degree of unity of cultural self-sufficiency, exclusiveness and closure. In the grand historical context of China's modern society, this cultural attribute is constantly reconstructed because of political, economic and other ideological factors, and this continuous reconstruction is also the only way for Chinese national folk culture in the context of modernity, from which we can also examine the aesthetic modernity characteristics of the track in the development of Chinese national folk art.

REFERENCES

- [1] Zhang Chunxing. *Zhang's Psychological Dictionary*. Shanghai: Shanghai Dictionary Publishing House, 1992: 122. (in Chinese)
- [2] Sha Lianxiang. *Social Psychology*. Beijing: Renmin University of China Press, 2002: 4. (in Chinese)
- [3] [America] Xing Hudi, Davis. *Human Music*. Translated by Leng Shan, Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2003: 204.
- [4] Raymond Firth. *Symbols: Public and Private*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1973: 75.
- [5] Xia Min. *Himalayan Folk Songs and Ceremonies*. Heilongjiang: Heilongjiang People's Publishing House, 2005. (in Chinese)
- [6] Richard Baumann, Yang Lihui, Anderming. *Oral Art for Performance*. Guangxi: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008. (in Chinese)
- [7] Peng Zhaorong. *Theory and Practice of Anthropological Rituals*. Beijing: Ethnic Publishing House, 2007. (in Chinese)
- [8] Peng Zhaorong. *Literature and Ritual: A Cultural Perspective of Literary Anthropology*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2004. (in Chinese)