

Preliminary Study on Shanxi Drum Music

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Abstract

Shanxi is a province in the middle reach of the Yellow River Basin, famous for its rich variety of folk arts. Shanxi Drum music is the typical representative of folk music in northern China. From south to the north, four drum music types have been in the list of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage for the unique artistic features, musical instruments used, history, cultural function and roles in the folk life. Shanxi gong and drum music is the collective wisdom of the people, and their aesthetic value lies in their wide popularity. Its unique artistic charm comes from the grandeur of the performance, flexibility and versatility of the beating techniques, as well as the combination of music, dances and folk life.

Keywords: Shanxi Drum Music, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Music Features, Cultural Function

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Shanxi is located in the Yellow River Basin, and is one of the birth places of Chinese Civilization. It is not only “the ocean of folk songs”and “the cradle of opera”, but also “the home of gongs and drums”. Shanxi gong and drum music has been well rooted in the common people and lively. According to the regional division, it can be divided into Mid-Shanxi Drum Music, Southern Shanxi Drum music , Northern Shanxi Drum music and Southeastern Shanxi type. Among them, Jiangzhou Drum Music of Xinjiang County the “Weifeng gongs and drum music” of Huozhou, Linfen and Hongdong, the “Taiyuan gong and drum music of Taiyuan and Jinzhong, are the representatives. Shanxi Drum music has continued to take on a new life and has been widely active home and abroad, bringing the world’s attention to this ancient and revitalized music in recent years. Thus it displays the pride of people of Shanxi to the world.

I. The Historical Development of Shanxi Gong and Drum music

The gong and drum culture in Shanxi has a long history, with historical discoveries and records of it in Shanxi dating back to the Neolithic period. Archaeological findings from Taosi Site in Xiangfen county unearthed numerous percussion instruments such as Earthen Drums, Wooden Cavities, Tuo Gu(in China, a drum made of crocodile leather), Special Chimes and Bells etc. There are different legendary stories for the origin of the drum music. With the change of history, Shanxi drum music evolved together with the local development, gradually forming a cultural system of drum music in Shanxi represented by four major schools:

Jiangzhou Drum Music, Jinnan Wei Feng Gong and Drum Show, Taiyuan Gong and Drum Show and Yungang Gong and Drum Show.

The world-famous Jiangzhou Drum Music was born in Xinjiang County. It is a historical and cultural city in south-western Shanxi. The music originated during the pre-Qin period, became famous during the Tang Dynasty and reached its peak during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. In south-western Shanxi, Jiangzhou Drum Music ushered in its first peak period in early Tang Dynasty(618-907AD). In the third year of Wude in early Tang Dynasty, Li Shimin hoarded troops here, “*Prince of Qin Crashing the Battle Line*” was popular in the army then, which was the first drum music in Jiangzhou. Up to now, there are still nine pieces of music notes of *Prince of Qin Crashing the Battle Line* in Japan. It is often played with various drums of different shapes and forms. It is performed in a variety of ways, and the music produced is delicate, seeking a perfect combination of artistry and skills. It is one of the first batch of National Intangible cultural heritages due to its unique artistic charm.

In Southern Shanxi area, it has been said since ancient times that “Gongs and drums originated in Hedong”(the old name of Shanxi). It comes from a historical allusion: “When Emperor Yao was inspecting with his officials in his hometown, Xie Village, Hongdong County, Shanxi Province, he saw a man plowing the land with a copper basin hanging on the plow. The man stroke the basin to scare the oxen to move forward, instead of whipping them. King Yao asked, “Why are doing this?” The man replied, “The oxen are already struggling to plow the field, I cannot bear to whip them. The sounds produced by striking the copper basin can also drive them to work.” King Yao felt that the man was very wise, and later gave the throne to this plowman, who was Emperor Shun. After Shun succeeded to the throne, the practice of “hitting basins to plow fields” became popular. Later, someone wrapped a cowhide around a copper basin and struck it, sounding roughly like today’s drums, giving rise to the saying of “beating drums to plow fields”. Jinnan Wei Feng Gong and Drum Show has a long history and is said

to have been formed in connection with the marriage ceremony of Emperor Yao's daughter. It came into being in Pingyang (now Linfen area), the Yaodu in the southwest of the mountain. The instruments used are small, often carried on the body, and performed with cymbals and gongs etc. The performance of the Wei Feng Gong and Drum focuses on the formation and the overall picture, which is majestic and imposing. Wei Feng Gong and drum Show has received much attention for its exquisite artistic style and is among the first batch of National Intangible cultural heritage along with Jiangzhou Drum Music.

In northern Shanxi in Qin and Han dynasties(221BC-220AD), when going for and back from hunting the hunters would hang their banners and flags with horns blowing and drums beating in areas of Loufan, Jingle counties in Shanxi Province. In Wei, Jin, the North and South Dynasties(220-589AD), a cultural convergence was brought about by the national migration as the Central Plains split, national migration and the formation of a large population. At this time, the instruments of gongs and cymbals imported from the western region combined with the local drums, gradually forming the drum music system. Since then, the art of gongs and drums in the Northern Wei Dynasty had been gradually perfected. After the Ming and Qing Dynasties, folk music and religious drumming activities also came into being. Yungang Gong and Drum Show is popular in northern Shanxi, including 27 counties (cities) such as Datong, Huaiyuan, Yanggao and Wutai etc. It is located on the north border of Shanxi. Datong was once the capital of the Northern Wei Dynasty in history, with rich cultural resources. Yunsheng Gong and Drum Show, with its typical cymbal percussion method, is unique in Shanxi Drum Music. In 2010, it was selected into the third batch of National Intangible cultural heritage.

Taiyuan Gong and Drum Show originated in Jinyang, the ancient capital of the nine dynasties (now Taiyuan area). It is said to have originated in the Later Han Dynasty of the Five Dynasties (around 947 AD). It is a general name for seven types of gongs and drums in Taiyuan and Jinzhong. Taiyuan Drum and Gong music is famous for their unique mirror shackle skills

and simple large-scale musical instruments, putting itself in the list of the second batch of National Intangible cultural heritage.

These four representative drum music schools are popular in Shanxi Province from south to north, each with its unique characteristics and colorfulness. They are the rare and valuable cultural heritage.

II. Characteristics of Shanxi Gong and Drum music Culture

In terms of overall musical characteristics, the gong and drum music of Shanxi is generally in ancient style and with robust features. Specifically: Jiangzhou Drum Music has been known as “the sounds shaking earth and mountains and carrying ten miles away”, its performance is well-known at home and abroad; Jinan Wei Feng Gong and Drum Show, as the name implies, has the characters of powerful aura and huge scene; Taiyuan Gong and Drum Show in the performance of the two battalions, impassioned, as if two troops fighting with each other; In Yungang Gong and Drum Show, the drums sound neatly, and the rides are blaring. Represented by the four schools, Shanxi drum music has become a banner of the Yellow River culture with its earth-shaking, majestic artistic characteristics and rich historical culture deposits that unite people’s hearts and attract the soul of the nation.

1. Music Feature

The drum music of Shanxi is similar in its overall artistic characteristics, but each has its regional uniqueness, with different musical characteristics. Jiangzhou Drum Music is the most southern of the four types. It is the most delicate in its artistic expression, focusing on details, using different techniques and the different timbres produced by hitting the various parts of the drum to enrich its musical expression. For example, there are more than a dozen types of drumming techniques commonly used in Jiangzhou Drum Music, such as hitting the side of the drum, rubbing the surface of the drum, beating the drum, pumping the skin of the drum, knocking the drum ring, and touching the drum frame.

The most crucial artistic feature of Jinan Wei Feng Gong Show is the close combination of instrument playing and physical dancing movements, often dozens to hundreds of people playing together during the performance. The performance team is formed into a square, round or plum blossom formation and other graphics. The drummers are carrying Flat Drums, Hand-held Gongs, Cymbals, Rides and other musical instruments. While playing the instruments, they perform a variety of "drumstick throwing", "the wrist turning", "chest flip", "snap back bow", and other stunts. The art of dancing and playing musical instruments are skillfully blended in a way that is pleasing to the eyes of the audiences.

Taiyuan Gong and Drum Show is in a spacious and decisive manner, with the playing of the Cymbals as its special feature. In its history, it has gradually developed the famous 18 methods of playing the Cymbals, namely: the Flat Blow, the crossed Blow, the Lifting Blow and the Pulling Blow. The large and heavy Cymbals used in the show, coupled with their impressive performances, make the performance one of the best.

Yungang Gong and Drum Shows also have unique musical characteristics; for example, most of them are themed music pieces. Regardless of the size of the repertoire, each score has its own name. The music covers a wide range of topics and rich content. In addition, Yungang Gong Drum show is polyphonic percussion music, with various playing methods and the most representative small rides playing.

2. Instrumental Features

Shanxi drum music uses various instruments, including drums, cymbals, rides and dozens of other percussion instruments. These instruments are combined differently to create a variety of rhythmic patterns and a powerful image of drumming with their different shapes and timbres. However, they have their distinctive characters in terms of their use for each type of music.

The instruments used in Jiangzhou Drum Music performance are mainly drums, and

the music is produced by using different tones, techniques and rhythms of the drums, and the typical drums are: Flat Drums, Small Drums, Big Drums, Flowerpot Drums and War Drums and other percussion instruments such as Clapper, Bangzi, Tang Gong, Gong and Cymbal etc. The instruments are chosen and combined to perform according to the music scores.

Wei Feng Gongs and Drums Show also use a variety of different shaped drums. The most distinctive of them is the use of the Satchel Drum (also known as the flat drum), which is often carried on the players' bodies while they are marching and playing. The drums are about 55 cm in diameter and 27 cm high. Hundreds of performers playing and moving together with flat drums accompanied by other percussion instruments such as different shaped and sized gongs and cymbals, hinges and Banging Bells.

Briefly, the instruments for Taiyuan Gong and Drum Show are large. For example, the big drums often used in the Orchestra are as large as 250 cm in diameter, and the smallest Drums are about 65cm in diameter; the weight of the cymbal is 2 to 2.5kg, and the diameter is about 30 to 40cm. The instruments used in Taiyuan Gong and Drum Show can be divided into two groups of large and small instruments according to their combinations: Large Drum, Large Cymbals, etc.; and small instruments: War Drums, Two Cymbals and Hinges. In the actual performance, it is often accompanied by the percussion instruments used in Shanxi local opera bands, such as Horse Gongs, Water Cymbals, Hinges, Hand Gongs, etc. There are nearly 30 kinds of instruments in total.

The main instruments used in Yungang Gong and Drum music show are: Main Drum, Ear Drum, set Drum, Small Gong, Gou Wazi (Also called the dog doll, the shape is similar to a small plate, playing, with pepper wood or bamboo small board knocking, the tone is sharp and crisp, like a puppy woof bark, so named), Small Cymbal, Hinge, Large Ride, Tao Gong, Wooden Fish, clappers. Among them, the use and performance of small rides are the most characteristic. The players use the sounds of small rides to imitate the sound of running horses,

chickens and ducks, performed by two players or one player.

3.Folklore Features

The importance of drumming in Chinese folklore is evident from the saying that “a banquet is not a banquet without wine and a temple fair is not a fair without drums”. From ancient times to the present day, drum music has been widely used in folk rituals, celebrations, rain praying, weddings and funerals, as well as to welcome gods and goddesses. The drum culture was born from folk life, developed with the change of local culture, and flourished with social development. The most folkloric feature of Shanxi drum music is the performance in traditional festivities, the annual ritual for thanksgiving and harvest praying. In the fireworks competition, Stilt Walking, land Boat Running, Lion Dance, the Gods Whip, Twisting Rice-song, Shua Haier (It is one of the most popular local operas in the north of Shanxi, and one of the many types of Shanxi culture. The songs are mainly sung in the main and in the slow movement, and are both fixed and varied), Back Stick, Shadow Play, Full-scale Drama, Playlet and other performances are accompanied by gong and drum beatings. As the same time, gong and drum show can also be performed alone, playing a very crucial role.

The most characteristic folk activity of Jiangzhou Drum Music is praying for harvest in spring as recorded in the "Xinjiang County Records": " March is the most important month for annual ritual and traditional festivities. On the third day, it is the Medicine God. On the eighth day, it is the festival of the Saint Mother. On the 8th, it is the Festival of the water Goddess ... there are several temple fairs on Qingming Festival (Chinese All Souls Day)...". For the people of Xinjiang, the annual Spring Prayer is a sacred event, and drumming plays a vital role in the various rituals and activities throughout the year.

According to legend, every year on the third day of the third month of the lunar calendar, the people of Yangxie village in Linfen area beat gongs and drums to pick up two "aunts" from Lishan and Wan'an to their mother-in-law's house (the "aunts" are the two daughters of

Emperor Shun). On the 28th day of the fourth month of the lunar calendar, the people of Lishan and Wan'an also beat gongs and drums to send the two "aunts" back to their in-laws. In this way, the meeting and sending marching procession accompanied with gong and drum music formed a unique combination of dance marching and gongs and drums music performance over time. This kind interaction of meeting and sending holy relatives gradually become a traditional folk activity.

Taiyuan Gongs and Drums show in the annual traditional ritual shows the characteristic of competition. This confrontation often occurs in the streets on festive days. Whenever this happens, the two sides do not give way to each other, each presenting their best skills, one piece after another, fast beatings after slow beatings. This confrontation and competition have become a traditional custom of the Taiyuan Gongs and Drums show. This unique form of traditional festivities is sporadic in China. It reflects the local characteristics of the Taiyuan people since ancient times, which are rough and tough, as well as the national characteristics of the Taiyuan people who are indomitable and have the desire and pursuit of victory. Taiyuan gongs and drums show is the most important performance in the annual ritual.

Yungang Gong and Drum Show was originally used in the villages and towns to welcome the gods, and occasionally also for the literati to entertain themselves at home for "elegant" performance. Its unique folk show is: pray for rain activities. It is dry in northern Shanxi with scarce rainfall. Starting from ancient time, people in northern Shanxi have played drum and gong music for rain praying every year to express reverence for the gods. Now Yungang Gong and Drum music has spread to the city, factories and mines, professional, amateur stage and other broader places for various function except thanking gods and rain-praying.

III. The significance of Shanxi drumming culture

“The best gong and drum music in the world is in the East. The best drum music in the

east is in China. The top drum music of China is Shanxi."Shanxi drum music, the ancient folk art, has a strong vitality and artistic influence today because it not only has a long history but also absorbs the excellent element from other forms of arts in different places and incorporates modern rhythms. Shanxi gong and drum music has participated in: "the 11th Asian Games", "Tiananmen Square Celebration for the 50th anniversary of the founding of PRC", "China International Folk Art Festival", "China Arts Festival " and other large-scale performance activities. It has had tour shows in the United States, Canada, South Korea, Denmark and more than a dozen countries. Nowadays, Shanxi Gong and Drum Music has taken up new roles to promote national culture and build up a bridge of friendship between China and the world, besides its traditional function of offering sacrifices to Gods and immortals.

There are four types of Shanxi Drum Music that have been listed in "National Intangible Cultural Heritage", which are valuable cultural treasures of Shanxi province. We should not only inherit its exquisite performance skills but also study its deeper cultural connotations. Shanxi drum Music has shown significant value in folklore, history, sociology and aesthetics. As the quintessence of Shanxi folk culture and a pearl of Chinese gong and drum art, it is for sure that Shanxi drum music culture will keep playing splendid music for harmony in both China and the world.

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