

A Study on the Modernization Transformation of Qinqiang art in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China: Centered on the Xi'an Yisu Society

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Abstract

As the most representative local opera in Shaanxi, Qinqiang has experienced thousands of years of development history. It began in the Qin and Han Dynasties, flourished in the Tang Dynasty, and spread in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Qinqiang has undergone many transformations in its development. This article finds that the flow and development of Qinqiang are related to the promotion of the Shanxi and Shaanxi business communities. Even though Qinqiang was once popular all over the country, there are still some difficulties in its contemporary development, including the lack of successors to local opera repertoires, a significant reduction in the audience group, and the difficulty of new forces to continue. Based on this, this study believes that Qinqiang faces the difficulty of modern transformation. As a specialized institution integrating teaching and performance of Shaanxi Qinqiang, Yisu Society plays an important role in the development of modern Qinqiang.

Keywords

Late Qing Dynasty and Early Republic of China; Qinqiang; Modern transformation; Xi'an Yisu Society.

1. Introduction

Originating from the Loess Plateau, Qinqiang art has local artistic characteristics. It was formed in the Qin Dynasty, refined in the Han Dynasty, flourished in the Tang Dynasty, completed in the Yuan Dynasty, matured in the Ming Dynasty, and spread in the Qing Dynasty. In terms of cultural history, Qinqiang art can be divided into pre-Qinqiang and post-Qinqiang. Pre-Qinqiang is the Qinqiang art recorded around 1780, including Shaanxi Tu Erhuang and Han Diao Erhuang, now known as Shaanxi Han Opera; post-Qinqiang appeared in Xi'an around 1807, initially called Guoguo Opera, later called Shaanxi Bangzi, and now called Qinqiang (Fang Jiawen, 2013). Qinqiang art also shows outstanding integration in the process of dissemination. From the perspective of art history, the development of Qinqiang culture and art has undergone some diffusion processes, which have enabled it to have the basis for integrating multiple arts. As for the pre-Qinqiang, the process of Qinqiang culture spreading to Hubei, Yangzhou, Beijing, and Sichuan has enabled Qinqiang to acquire artistic characteristics such as "Hubei dialectization" and "Hui-Qin fusion"; as for the post-Qinqiang, its cultural integration with Shanxi Bangzi has promoted the development of Shanxi-Shaanxi Bangzi art, and its popularity in Hebei and Shandong has further stimulated the spread and development of culture.

Against this background, Xi'an Yisu Society, as a Qinqiang reform drama society, was originally called "Yisu Lingxue Society" and was initiated by Tongmenghui members Li Tongxuan and Sun Renyu (Liu Lei & Jing Xiaoqing, 2012). The birth of Xi'an Yisu Society is inseparable from the promotion of modern intellectuals in Shaanxi. Unlike the traditional Qinqiang troupe system,

Yisu Society's operating model mainly refers to the characteristics of modern drama societies, and has formulated a "branding" development plan to a certain extent. By building branded products, segmenting market positioning, and strengthening brand alliances, Xi'an Yisu Society quickly established a reputation among drama lovers. At the same time, Qinqiang further stimulated the changes in the form of drama consumption with the help of media communication. Based on this, this study takes Xi'an Yisu Society as the center and conducts a comprehensive investigation on the modernization transformation of Qinqiang art in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China. It is believed that the Xi'an Yisu Society not only promoted the modernization transformation of Qinqiang art but also, through a series of innovative measures, gave new vitality to this ancient art form.

2. The Modern Transformation of Qinqiang Art in the Late Qing Dynasty and Early Republic of China

2.1. The Early Origin and Historical Development of Qinqiang

Regarding the origin of Qinqiang, Yan Chenggong once gave a relatively detailed description of Qinqiang in his book "Funny Things in Shaanxi". According to the book, the origin of Qinqiang is first related to historical geography. There were Qin tribes in the primitive society until the Qin Dynasty established its capital in Shaanxi. Therefore, the drama that was "native" here was naturally called "Qinqiang"...Folk songs of Zhou and Qin, Yuefu of Han Dynasty, and Liyuan Faqu of Tang Dynasty had a great influence on the vocal style of Qinqiang...It is said that "Qinwang Pozhenqu," composed by Li Guinian, a musician of Liyuan, a specialized drama institution established by Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty, was called "Qinwangqiang" or "Qinqiang" for short. Qinqiang art ushered in drastic changes at the end of the Ming Dynasty and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty. For example, the legendary manuscript "Lotus in the Bowl" during the Wanli period contained "Two Criminals of Western Qinqiang". As a mature drama, the formation of Qinqiang's "Banqiang" also benefited from the accumulation and development of this period.

Qinqiang in The spread and popularity of Qinqiang across the country is actually related to the promotion of the Shanxi and Shaanxi business groups: Qinqiang, as a local opera of the two provinces, carries the important mission of Shaanxi local culture to reach the whole country. In the hometown association hall, Qinqiang is even more of a carrier of fellow townsman sentiment, summoning a sacred feeling based on the hometown. Qinqiang originated in the Loess Plateau, formed in Qin, refined in Han, flourished in Tang, perfected in Yuan, matured in Ming, and broadcast in Qing. It is a very ancient Chinese local opera. Specifically, Qinqiang art can be divided into Pre-Qinqiang and Post-Qinqiang according to historical periods. Among them, Pre-Qin culture is popular in Hubei, Yangzhou, Beijing, Sichuan, and other places because of the business activities of the Shanxi and Shaanxi business groups in these places. Qinqiang has become an important cultural carrier for gathering the friendship of fellow countrymen among the Shanxi and Shaanxi business groups in other places. Post-Qing culture has merged with local operas such as Shanxi Bangzi to form an influential local drama.

2.2. Shanxi and Shaanxi Merchants and the Spread of Qinqiang Art

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Qinqiang was also famous in Beijing. The Shanxi and Shaanxi Merchants played a key role in its popularization. The East Line, Southeastern, Northeastern, Central and Southern, South China, Southwest and Northwest Trade Routes opened up by the Shanxi and Shaanxi Merchants played a prominent role in promoting the popularity of Qinqiang art throughout the country. During the Anti-Japanese War, Ma Jianling organized comrades to perform modern dramas such as "Blood and Tears Revenge", which was hailed as the "New Qinqiang" during the revolutionary period. Since the founding of the

People's Republic of China, the traditional art form of Qinqiang has experienced unprecedented prosperity and development. In 1959, Shaanxi Province organized the "Three Qin Operas Entering Beijing" to present a wonderful performance for the 10th anniversary of the National Day. This move not only demonstrated the charm of Qinqiang in Beijing but also spread the artistic influence of Qinqiang to the Great Wall and beyond, and to the north and south of the Yangtze River through touring performances in 13 provinces and cities such as Nanjing, Wuxi, Suzhou, Guiyang, and Nanning.

There are three main ways for Qinqiang to spread: First, it was spread by the peasant uprising army or the garrison troops from Shanxi and Shaanxi. For example, "Shu Nan Xu Lue" records that in the 16th year of Shunzhi (1659), when Yang Guomin, a general under Zhang Xianzhong, was stationed in Jiading, he held a banquet and asked the Qinqiang troupe to perform. Second, Qinqiang artists spread it. Wei Changsheng, a Thai opera artist from Sichuan in the Qing Dynasty, led his troupe to perform in various places, and brought Qinqiang to Hebei, Beijing, Tianjin, Shandong, Henan, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Hubei, Hunan, Anhui, Sichuan, and other places. Third, it was spread by Shanxi and Shaanxi merchants through trade routes, which was also the most extensive and longest-lasting way for Qinqiang to spread. The footprints of the Shanxi and Shaanxi merchants spread all over the country, and gradually formed several trade routes leading to various places. In most places where they went, there were guild halls of fellow townsmen, and most of them had stages. Regular and irregular performances of Qinqiang troupes became part of the functions of the guild halls. The Shanxi and Shaanxi merchants built a large number of guild halls on the trade routes, which opened up many opera routes for the spread of Qinqiang (Song, 2006). Although commerce is not the most important factor driving the spread of Qinqiang art, the activities of business groups have indeed stimulated the spread of Qinqiang art across the country and in turn influenced the modernization transformation of Qinqiang.

3. Yisu Society: The Carrier of Qinqiang in the Modernization Transformation and Development

3.1. Qinqiang and the opportunity for the establishment of Yisu Society

Since ancient times, opera has not only been an important form of leisure and entertainment for the people, but also an effective way to achieve social customs reform, and Qinqiang is no exception. After thousands of years of evolution and dissemination, Qinqiang has been closely connected with people's lives, and its cultural connotations have permeated the customs and customs of the Sanqin land. However, no matter how remarkable the achievements and reputation of the opera industry are, its social status has never been prominent. The first official improvement of the social status of Qinqiang began with the establishment of the Xi'an Yisu Society. Under the promotion of Sun Renyu and other patriots, the Xi'an Yisu Society came into being in 1912. Its establishment not only promoted the prosperity and development of Qinqiang art, but also established the important role of opera culture in social education and customs improvement. The development of Qinqiang art can be better developed with the intervention of some important literary and artistic groups.

According to textual research, the establishment of Yisu Society emphasizes showing people with new organizational forms and literary and artistic appearances, stipulates terms of office in the management system, and can promote the development of cultural Qinqiang with repertoire construction. The Yisu Society model is characterized by the combination of production, learning, research, and application, and emphasizes the "cultural brand +" development model. As a local cultural brand, the spread of Qinqiang art and the construction of Yisu Society complement each other. At the same time, Qinqiang art is also mixed with contemporary propositions such as rural revitalization. Its spread and development as an

intangible cultural heritage is driven by policies. In the development of Qinqiang art, the role played by literary and artistic carriers is more of a supporting role, and the Yisu Society has played such a platform role.

3.2. The historical development and artistic contribution of Yisu Society

As far as the historical development of Yisu Society is concerned, the maturity of Qinqiang art is inseparable from the further promotion of carriers such as Yisu Society: on the one hand, the traditional repertoire of Qinqiang art cannot meet the cultural needs of young people in terms of performance form, showing a weak appeal; on the other hand, the new compilation of classical opera art such as new Peking Opera has a siphon effect on opera fans of young people, and the adaptation and innovation of new Qinqiang scripts are in urgent need of promotion. The carrier construction of Yisu Society has a more concrete role in the dissemination of Qinqiang art, that is, it can make up for the lack of multiple artistic activities, such as the adaptation of new Qinqiang scripts and the inheritance of traditional Qinqiang art in the development process of Qinqiang art.

As far as the artistic contribution of Yisu Society is concerned, the completion and artistic enhancement of new Qinqiang scripts are inseparable from the publicity and promotion of modern social media, such as the setting of mini programs and public accounts, but compared with the crosstalk art of Beijing and Tianjin, the dissemination of Qinqiang art still lacks leaders or typical programs. Therefore, the development of Qinqiang art urgently needs to further realize deep mediatization and use social media tools to help Qinqiang artists further enhance their dissemination influence. From the perspective of innovation in the development model of Qinqiang art, the platform role of Yisu Society can, to a large extent, make up for the shortcomings in the development of Qinqiang art.

4. Modern Qinqiang Art: The Basic Achievement of Modern Transformation

When it comes to the development of modern Qinqiang art, the Yisu Society carries the important mission of inheriting the classical Qinqiang art and realizing the innovation of new Qinqiang. In fact, as a local opera art, Qinqiang is more modern in form and hopes to play a role in the modernization of this art.

4.1. The process of artistic transformation: Observations based on the Xi'an Yisu Society

As a major component of Shaanxi's local history and culture, Qinqiang art is rooted in the deep soil of the history and culture of the Three Qins. With the changes in social culture, the development of Qinqiang art has entered a new historical and social stage. At present, the audience of Qinqiang art is shrinking, and the acceptance and dissemination of Qinqiang art by young people has become a typical case. Qinqiang has a unique meaning in Shaanxi culture, and at the same time carries the spiritual world and living space of Shaanxi people. From the perspective of Qinqiang culture, opera works attach equal importance to family and country, showing a clear feature of family-country isomorphism, connecting the small family with the big family. With the wave of globalization sweeping in, the lives, wills, and spiritual outlooks of our people have undergone unpredictable and immeasurable changes in the fields of economy, politics, culture, and society to varying degrees. In the social environment in which they live, people have unprecedented identity anxiety and identity crisis in various aspects, such as self and culture.

Samuel Huntington believes that "the national characteristics/national identity crisis has become a global phenomenon." People everywhere are asking, "Who are we? What do we belong to?" This identity crisis poses a threat to the disintegration of the country (Li et al, 2024).

The regional culture represented by Qinqiang culture is an important part of ideological education. It is an innovative exploration of constructing collective memory and an important ritual for reproducing, summoning, and reconstructing national identity. This study intends to analyze and study the relationship between Qinqiang art and nationalization and national identity, and attempts to explore the profound role of Qinqiang art in reproducing historical memory and building national identity through the relationship and interaction between the three.

4.2. Modernization of Artworks: Analysis Based on Qinqiang Opera Works

In some art blocks based on Qinqiang art, various forms of Qinqiang opera works have achieved modernization transformation under the empowerment of sound, light, and electricity technology. Recently, according to the report of Shaanxi Opera Research Institute, the highly anticipated Qinqiang "Red River Valley" will be staged in the opera hall of Shaanxi Grand Theater from July 11 to 13, 2025. This work was finally produced by Shaanxi Opera Research Institute. Qinqiang "Red River Valley" is set in the snowy plateau in the early 20th century. It tells the moving story of the Han and Tibetan children from strangers to life and death, and resisting foreign enemies with flesh and blood during the invasion of foreign aggression. In the process of modernization transformation, Qinqiang art works pay special attention to combining historical value with contemporary value and highlighting the importance of the sense of community of the Chinese nation.

From the perspective of collective memory theory, Qinqiang art can also focus on reflecting its role and function in the local cultural history of Shaanxi, and highlight its value. Influenced by the modernization of artworks, the transformation of Qinqiang opera works is also in line with the logic of collective memory construction. In the future, more types of Qinqiang artworks influenced by new technologies will appear, which will jointly affect the presentation and display of Qinqiang art and focus on the modern communication effect of translated artworks (Fu, 2023).

5. Conclusion

On the road of Qinqiang's modernization and transformation, Yisu Society has taken the lead in opening up an innovative "track" and creating a "culture and tourism +" model, integrating business, performances, and cultural communication in a pedestrian street, so that more young people can understand Qinqiang, fall in love with Qinqiang, and eventually spread Qinqiang. This paper starts with the development of Qinqiang art in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, aiming to find the innovations made by the Yisu Society in the modernization and transformation of Qinqiang art. Through sorting and analysis, this study believes that the development of Qinqiang art is a response to the modernization and transformation of art, showing outstanding modern characteristics.

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