

The Development Process of Dongbei Dagou Vocal Music

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Abstract: Dongbei Dagou is a traditional folk music that originated in Northeast China and has a history of more than 200 years. After long-term evolution and development, it has formed unique musical characteristics and cultural values and occupies a very important position in the field of traditional Chinese music. This article mainly introduces the development process of Dongbei Dagou, and sorts out the artistic characteristics of Dongbei Dagou in different periods, which plays a positive role in the research and protection of Dongbei Dagou in universities.

Keywords: Dongbei Dagou; Development; Transmission and protection

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1. Introduction

Dongbei Dagou is a kind of vocal music art spread in Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Beijing, Tianjin, Inner Mongolia, Henan, Hebei and other regions in China. Because it originated in Shenyang and prevailed in some areas centered on Shenyang, it is also known as “Fengtian Drum” and “Liaoning Drum.” From its origin, generation, and development, Dongbei Dagou has experienced more than 200 years of development and evolved to become one of the earliest, most influential and widely spread vocal music in Northern China.

2. The origin of the Dongbei Dagou (1690 - 1709)

Special natural and human geographical environments always have a huge and profound impact on the formation and development of a specific artistic genre. This kind of influence penetrates all aspects of the art itself and plays a prescriptive role in the nature, style, and characteristics of the art. It is the same and is true for the Dongbei Dagou.

2.1. The historical and geographical background of the Dongbei Dagou

The Northeast of China is a multi-ethnic area. In addition to the Han nationality, there are 11 ethnic groups, judging from the existing literature and archaeological results. In the past, the frequent integration of Han

nationality and the ethnic minorities in Northeast China has greatly changed the ethnic composition and cultural characteristics of this region.

Northeast China belongs to the northern temperate climate. It has a vast territory and rich landforms. It is rich in resources and geographical and natural characteristics. Due to these unique and diverse geographical and climatic conditions, the people in Northeast China have unique and diverse lifestyles and production methods, as well as their distinct and unique national psychology and national character ^[1]. The Dongbei Dagū is the historical background of the generation and development of music culture in this region.

2.2. The national music environment generated by the Dongbei Dagū

Chinese folk music, when inspected in essence, will find some common basic features., including its content as the story, and its form which is mainly composed of singing and sometimes accompanied by musical instruments. These features can be found in the libretto, in the basic characteristics of Chinese folk music. They all come down in one continuous line with Bianwen of the Tang Dynasty, Taozhen of the Song Dynasty, Baojuan of Yuan Dynasty, and Cihua of the Ming Dynasty. From this, we can also see that, as a unique vocal music art in Northern China, the Dongbei Dagū has benefited not only from the creation of its own national culture but also from the transmission of traditional Chinese folk art.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, folk music entered the peak period of development. According to incomplete statistics, there are more than 260 kinds of folk music that have been discovered, and there are about 200 kinds of music with musical instrument accompaniment. The vocal music popular in Northern China is “Guci.” “Guci” is mainly about singing, combined with vocal music and singing, also known as “Dagū”. It can be seen that as early as the Ming Dynasty, the prototype of the Dongbei Dagū appeared in China ^[2].

2.3. Reasons for the formation of the Dongbei Dagū

The formation of Dongbei Dagū coincides with the comprehensive development of folk music such as vocal music and opera in China. During the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, the society was stable and the economy was prosperous, which created a good social-ecological environment for the development of culture and art. With the prosperity of various folk music and art, the Dongbei Dagū was produced under such an era.

So far, there are mainly two theories about the origin of the Dongbei Dagū, namely “Native Theory” and “Foreign Theory”. The so-called “Native Theory” means that the Dongbei Dagū originated in the rural areas of Northeast China. At that time, influenced by the culture of the Central Plains, during the slack season or New Year’s festivals, peasant artists in Northeast China made up their libretto and sang historical stories, folklore and universal knowledge to others to impart knowledge, express their feelings and entertain themselves. This kind of folk art produced by farmers marks the rise of rural leisure culture. With the prosperity of the agricultural economy and the need for market trade, folk art with rural artists as the carrier, from the countryside to the market and then to the city, after continuous cultural exchanges, finally formed the Dongbei Dagū, which first spread in Shenyang.

The so-called “Foreign Theory” means that the Dongbei Dagū originated from the vocal music art form of “Zidi Shu”. According to an article written by Zhang Jiepu, named “Dongbei Dagū Artist in Northeast China: In the Forty-eighth Year of Qianlong in the Qing Dynasty (1784)”, Beijing “Xianzishu” artist Huang Fuchen and others brought “Xianzishu” to Shenyang, and combined it with Northeast folk songs and other local folk music. After a long period of artistic practice, it evolved into the later “Fengtian Dagū”, and soon spread to all parts of the northeast urban and rural areas. In the long-term interviews, investigations and data collection, we also found some other claims about the origin of Dongbei Dagū art ^[3].

All these statements about the direct source of Dongbei Dagū art have a certain basis and reason. Based on history, the generation of any art form is multi-level, multi-sided, and multi-channel. As mentioned above, the specific natural and geographical conditions and historical and cultural environment of the Northeast region have created a distinctive and unique regional national psychology and national character of the Northeast people, which has also created the Northeast people's artistic aesthetic taste and appreciation habits, which later becomes the basis for the regional culture of the Northeast. The formation and development of the Dongbei Dagū has laid a unique material and spiritual foundation, which is also the geographical and historical background of the formation and development of the Dongbei Dagū ^[4].

3. The peak period of Dongbei Dagū (1890 - 1949)

At the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the People's Republic of China, the Dongbei Dagū art gradually moved from rural areas to cities, from folk singing to tea houses, from farmers to professional or semi-professional entertainers, from only male actors to singing together with actresses, from a single the percussion "Bangu" instrument into silk and string instrument which gradually showed a trend of prosperity. From the investigation, it is found that there are many reasons for this splendid of Dongbei Dagū art.

3.1. Economic development, ushering in the development of Dongbei Dagū

The last years of the Qing Dynasty and the early years of the People's Republic of China were the golden age for the development of Dagū art in Northeast China, which was closely related to the economic and social development at that time, especially the development of urban construction and urban economy. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, Dagū music had been widely circulated in Northeast China ^[5].

There was no fixed performance venue for Dongbei Dagū singing at the beginning, and artists often carried simple luggage and stringed drums, before going to the countryside to perform from door to door. Since the late Qing Dynasty, the Dongbei Dagū gradually had a fixed venue for singing. At first, it was mainly in temple fairs. These performance venues were relatively fixed, with spacious places and large audiences, which made it easy for artists to perform and earn money. In the early years of the People's Republic of China, many Dongbei Dagū artists began to move into the cities from the countryside one after another. They walked through the streets and played Dagū at the end of the streets and alleys, attracting audiences, and were often invited to sing in a large courtyard.

In the late 1920s, entertainers began to perform in teahouses one after another. Through investigation, we learned that in the early years of the People's Republic of China alone, there were as many as 75 teahouses in Shenyang, and the number of entertainers reached hundreds at the time.

3.2. The lyricist joins in enhancing the artistic taste of the Dongbei Dagū

The artistic achievements of the Dongbei Dagū, in addition to the contributions of artists and stringers, also benefited from a large number of talented writers and critics. Most of the traditional opera of the Dongbei Dagū comes from "Zidishu", which is a literary script of vocal music created by the Manchu Eight Banners in the Qing Dynasty. It took more than 150 years for "Zidishu" to rise, and during this period, a large number of writers and works were produced. During the popular period, the members of the Eight Banners royal family took it as an honor to write "Zidishu", and even formed a poetry club focusing on writing "Zidishu." The Poetry Society has cultivated many excellent authors of "Zidishu", which played a decisive role in the prosperity of "Zidishu" and the Dongbei Dagū in the late Qing Dynasty ^[6].

3.3. The government attaches great importance to promoting the development of Dongbei Dagū

The prosperity of any art form is related to the advocacy and encouragement of the ruling class, and the Dongbei Dagū is no exception. In 1911, after the victory of the 1911 Revolution and the founding of the People's Republic of China, folk art such as the Dongbei Dagū began to be valued by the local government. In 1913, the Fengtian Education Department established the Fengtian Model Storytelling Library, which was attached to the Pingci Gushu Research Institute. On the one hand, it recruited researchers, and on the other hand, it compiled and printed ancient and modern singing books for artists to sing and promote national culture. These organizations are not only artists' guilds but also new institutions for researching vocal music and cultivating artists.

4. The Period of weak of Dongbei Dagū (1949 - 2000)

The reasons for the decline of Dongbei Dagū are complex and diverse. Changes in economic forms and social life, changes in people's production and lifestyle, and the corresponding changes in ideas, value orientations, and aesthetic tastes in the ideological field have all affected the weakening of this vocal music art.

4.1. Changes in the ecological environment

On October 1, 1949, around the founding of the, the social status of artists changed fundamentally, and the Dongbei Dagū was once revived. Taking Liaoning Province as an example, on March 8, 1949, on the eve of the founding of the People's Republic of China, with the help of the government, artists established the Shenyang Art Music Association and created and rehearsed several repertoires reflecting the content of life in the new era, was welcomed by the audience. In 1956, after the promulgation of the literary and art policy of the Hundred Flowers Campaign launched by the Chinese government, Dongbei Dagū recovered and developed even more. Most of the folk art teams in cities and counties in Liaoning Province have professional performers of Dongbei Dagū^[7].

However, since the 1950s and 1960s, the country's literature and art policy has also appeared in some wrong orientations, taking music and art simply as a functional propaganda and educational tool. For a time, performance places such as teahouses, bookstores, and wine shops that were popular in urban and rural areas were banned, while some artists scattered among the people were called up to form special performance organizations, and art groups, making folk artists embark on the so-called "Professionalization." They call on and organize artists to create works that sing about new life, sing about the People's Republic of China, at the same time, reflect new people and new things, and perform on the same stage with other forms of music in the theater^[8].

In a sense, these measures do have a positive significance in the era. However, today, half a century later, when reflecting on academic culture rather than system or ideology, it is true that what people can hear and see everywhere naturally "survives" in folk vocal music forms have suddenly become theatrical, stage-oriented, and professional performances. On the other hand, some have become a program or segment in music and dance performances. The variety of the performances has become more and more narrow, and the creative passion and inspiration from the audience and life have also been annihilated, which violates the inherent laws of folk art creation and appreciation. It then cuts off its close connection with the people, and thus loses its specific audience group, making this art form gradually enter the bottleneck following the changes of the system. Changing the roots and conditions for the survival of a certain folk art is tantamount to canceling this folk art^[9].

4.2. Era of multicultural select

The Dongbei Dagū is a product from both farmers and urban leisure culture. It has the characteristics of a rhythmic libretto, stable melody with many drawls, relatively fixed form, single performance form, and simple musical accompaniment means. The aesthetic orientation is corresponding to the public ^[10].

With the vocal music development of China that has transformed from a planned economy to a market economy, people's traditional production and lifestyle have changed, and the survival and development space of Dongbei Dagū has disappeared step by step ^[11]. Especially after entering the information age, some popular music, Internet culture, entertainment sketches, film and television dramas, karaoke and other entertainment cultures have emerged. They filled various performance places and media, and new art appreciation groups have emerged in social life and aesthetic orientation, and present a trend of multicultural choices ^[12]. The vast majority of young people feel strange and difficult to accept traditional ethnic folk art, which has become a huge obstacle to the survival and development of ethnic folk art such as the Dongbei Dagū ^[13].

The Dongbei Dagū from its origin, to its most glorious era and lastly, to its weak era, has undergone over 200 years of temporal and spatial evolution and has become one of the earliest, most influential, and widely spread vocal music in Northeast China ^[14]. The Dongbei Dagū has distinct regional characteristics and a strong base in the people. It is widely welcomed by people for its active and living atmosphere, beautiful singing style, and enjoyable performance form, which has produced extensive influence to the people ^[15].

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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