The Important Factors of Music Communications about the Great Canal—Transportation and Population

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Abstract. On ancient China, there had been widespread propagation of music on the River Basin. Based on the analyzing relevant documents, we can know - the important factors of promoting music communications about the River Basin are traffic and large floating population of the Canal. On ancient China, there had been widespread propagation of music on the River Basin. Its range had covered numerous classes such as opera, quyi, folk song and folk dance. It also bred local quyi music along the canal, for example, Beijing dock tune, Tianjin shi diao, Linqing shi diao, Jining ping diao or Yangzhou qing qu; caused the interaction between folk songs of southern and northern and folk dance and promoted the widespread propagation of Shengqiang (common systematic tunes of many varieties of Chinese operas) or drama along the canal, for instance, Geyang Tune, Kunshan Tune, Bangzi Tune, Anhui Opera and Beijing Opera. Then, what on earth has promoted the music propagation of the River Basin? Through analyzing relevant literature we can get that the important factors of promoting the music propagation of the River Basin are the developed transportation and numerous floating population.

Transportation Advantages of Promoting the Music Prevalence

From point view of the traffic, Beijing-Hangzhou Canal – a man-made river, is the earliest on digging, the largest on scale and the longest on flow path not only in China but also in the world. Beijing-Hangzhou Canal which is about 1,747 kms went through several provinces and cities such as Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Shandong, Hebei, Tianjin and Beijing and then became our vital communication line connecting South and North. In the history, not grain ship, merchant ship and civil ship were sailing on the canal but also the gentry, the scholar-bureaucrat and the common people were travelling with the canal transportation. Even the Emperor QianLong going down to the South of Songhua Jiang regarded the canal as the top choice. From these, we can get the transportation advantages of the canal. And the advantage is more evident because in the ancient China there was no road and railway transportation.

From point view of the direction, it's the first river connecting South and North in our country. Within the territory of China, the flow of east and west was the majority and the flow of north and south was the minority which the Beijing-Hangzhou Canal bore the brunt. Transportation advantages of the canal created conditions for the music transmission between north and south. If the Yangtze river and Yellow River is the longest river of north and south respectively, and they promoted music cultural exchange and transmission on their respective basin; then the canal’s operation promoting music cultural exchange of north and south was the first river connecting South and North in our country.

According to the record, folk songs which were popular in southern or northern often spread by the grand canal such as southern folk songs went into Beijing: “Except Beijing folk tunes, the most important sources of all sorts of ditty were the southern provinces’ folk ditties along the grand canal to the north...” For another example, southern folk songs penetrated through Jiangsu (Ming Dynasty) “ ‘Jishengcao’ ‘Kuhuangtian’ ‘Daganzao’ produced in northern and ‘Luojiangyuan’ which was popular in Hunan or Hubei flowed into Jiangsu successively by the boat songs through the grand canal and Yangtze river”. It’s obvious that traffic advantages connecting north-south provided the necessary prerequisite for music mutual transmission of our country.
Even more important, it communicated several important music cities in Chinese history - Beijing, Suzhou, Yangzhou and Hangzhou. This meaning was extraordinary. Since Ming and Qing Dynasty, the city became a music and culture center of development and exchange. In the economic prosperity big city, Opera, Works of folk art or quyi association of Ming and Qing Dynasty were fully exchanged and developed. In this historical period, Beijing, Hangzhou, Yangzhou, Suzhou and later Tianjin became a rendezvous of music culture development. Music spreading from far and near got a full exchange and development. So, the exchange and communication of music and culture distributed in north and south of the important music city would produce what kind of impact on music culture development of our country?

To take the north and south of drama exchange in history for an example, the earliest north-south close sets of traditional Chinese opera structure appeared in Hangzhou of Yuan Dynasty. But the time was Ming and Qing Dynasty that the prevalence of north and south songs and the more popular application of north-south close sets. This was coincide with the passage time of Beijing-Hangzhou Canal. Beijing-Hangzhou Canal was dredged on Yuanshizu period and its powerful usage was in Ming and Qing Dynasty. Of course, it is not to say there was no canal so there was no north-south close sets of traditional Chinese opera structure appeared. The canal provided an important objective condition for north-south civil drama spreading. Without this condition, the communication of opera would be weaken on the appearing time and communication frequency. According to historical records, on the Qing Dynasty the origin of a large proportion of the opera stars which were active in Beijing Opera stage is Yangzhou, and they moved to Beijing along the canal. “Opera children are largely from Suzhou and Yangzhou to Tianjin. Old opera persons buy them and teach them singing and dancing in order to flatter persons.” “If the persons’ origin are Suzhou and Yangzhou, they went to Tianjin by food ship.

Thus, traffic advantages of Beijing-Hangzhou Canal provided convenient prerequisite for music transmission; And its special geographic position r connecting South and North of our music cities provided superior objective conditions for exchange and transmission of north-south music cultural.

**The Floating Population Driving Music Transmission**

In our history, the floating population was the more direct factor of driving music transmission. Music transmission was caused by the population flowing directly, for example, the music transmission of music troupes flowing and immigration movements etc.

Beijing-Hangzhou Canal district was a kind of concentrated and frequent area of population flowing during the Yuan Dynasty and Ming Qing Dynasty. Just take account of Caoyun (water transport of grain to the capital in feudal times) soldiers, it reached unprecedented calculation. According to statistics, six years of Xuande that was 1430, shipment quantity has amounted to twelve thousand in the whole country. From January (receiving the grains and arriving in North) to October (returning to camp), 120,000 soldiers in ship were on airline for ten months every year. Thus, these boatmen from north and south had enough time and opportunity to spread their native folk music in canal basin. And we can imagine that grain escorting lasted five hundred years could promote a large scale of music transmission.

From relevant records, we can get some information about music transmission driving by boatmen. Such as in “Chinese Quyi Chronicles” (Hebei) there is a paragraph about the description of local fisherman’s music. “Fisherman’s music, local opera, was popular in Botou of Cangzhou region and Weizhuang of dongguang county ... it was taught by boatmen from south when they broke the ice in Botou... it was introduced into Bozhen during Xianfeng years of Qing Dynasty.” Similarly, according to “the folk dance music integration” (Shandong), “Dezhou stilts... boatmen using the leisure time when the river was frozen in winter learned it from artists of Tongzhou Dam, Beijing suburbs after Caoyun opening up navigation”. Not only the folk dance but also folk ditty were following this pattern. According to “Chinese Quyi Chronicles” (Jiangsu) “(Yangzhou ditty) in Qing Dynasty boatmen gathered with local ditty from all around and draw other ditties spreading with fleet. So after reciprocating, Yangzhou ditty is becoming more rich.”
Several examples is due to the flow of boatman bringing the music spread. If the characteristics of music spread was analyzed, we would find, the first two examples have characteristics of a one-time pass; and the other example has a “multi-wave pass” feature. And this ongoing multi-wave introduction is more conducive to the spread of music. In fact, the Beijing-Hangzhou Canal provided a sufficient and objective condition for the spread of this “multi-wave pass” music because the three generations transportation of Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasty is not a “one-off” activity, and it goes there and back on the canal every year and continues nearly five hundred years. Such a long time, large-scale population movements, can bring what kind of music spread. We have yet to study further. According to records, “the Five Ghosts Making a Noise on Court” spreading from Nantong (Jiangsu) to Linqing (Shandong) also had the characteristics of this multi-wave incoming.

In addition to the military of grain transportation, some kinds of theatrical or mobile entertainer troupe contributing to the spread of music are also active on the canal. For example, a unprofessional group in the South, “the so-called unprofessional groups are those groups which perform a play from this place to that place by water”. Since the canal waterway transport is convenient, “Hui unprofessional group is usually active in land and water along the canal----Changzhou, Wuxi, Suzhou, Huzhou and then enter the Hangjiahu Plain”. In the North, there has been a similar troupe such as Yiyangqiang’s rising in Hebei. “... ... According to local old words, at the beginning of Qing Dynasty Yiyangqiang classes organized by businessmen from South Anhui Province and Jiangxi, were along the canals for year-round performance. Under the influence of the Yiyangqiang troupe, it appeared a number of amateur community in Beijing South ----the Yiyangqiang group.” This spread of music driven by water is of great significance. It not only spreads local singing along the canal but also leads to a broader range of musical exchanging.

In addition, in the canal there are a number of large groups of businessmen, farmers and artists, etc. The large number of mobile workers on the canal provide a number of musical communication carrier. Their flowing spreads the canal music to the country.

In summary, the developed traffic of canal and the number of flowing people provide the necessary preconditions for the music culture prevalence of the canal basin. In this context, opera music, folk music, folk songs and folk dances of the canal basin have been widely spread. It not only promotes the exchange and development of music culture in the canal basin, and directly leads to the exchange and development of music culture in South and North of our country.

References