

The Research on the Current Situation of Inheritance of the Folk Dancing “Gun Long Lian Xiang” From the Perspective of “Intangible Cultural Heritage”

Tian Xinhe¹

¹School of Television, Communication University of China, 1 Ding Fuzhuang East Street, Chaoyang District, Beijing 100024, China

Correspondence: Tian Xinhe, School of Television, Communication University of China, 1 Ding Fuzhuang East Street, Chaoyang District, Beijing 100024, China.

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Abstract

“Gun Long Lian Xiang” is a popular kind of dancing in Enshi, Hubei. In recent years, the local government in Enshi has taken amounts of measures on promoting the protection, inheritance and development of this “intangible cultural heritage” program. In order to have a better understanding on the current situation of the inheritance of “Gun Long Lian Xiang”, the measures of in-depth interview and field survey are taken in this thesis. The author has made an interview with the “Gun Long Lian Xiang” inheritors of two generations, local people and staff in Cultural Center and Style Bureau and also collected a lot of materials in the form of video and literal data to make analysis. According to the research, “Gun Long Lian Xiang” has a sound dissemination effect in Enshi. It has become a way with the square dancing as the main carrier, which much enriched local people’s life. But meanwhile, there still exist some problems on the inheritance of “Gun Long Lian Xiang”, such as poor education for inheritors, tough living condition for folk artists, incomplete protection system and so on. Based on it, this thesis puts forward with some constructive suggestions.

Keywords: Gun Long Lian Xiang, inheritance, development, intangible cultural heritage

1. Introduction

This concept of “Intangible Cultural Heritage” rose relatively late in the international society. In 1972, UNESCO initially advocated to protect natural and cultural heritages as well as to protect intangible cultural heritages. UNESCO did not approve “the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage” until Oct. 2003 at the 23th General Assembly. In 2004, China became a member of it. In the next decade, the State Council approved 4 batches of list for national intangible cultural heritage and made a protection system with 4 tiers “National level + Provincial level + Municipal level + county level” as well as required the local government and related departments to conduct the principle “Give priority to the protection work, take the rescue work at the first place, emphasize the reasonable utilization and inheritance and development”.(quoted from Baidu Encyclopedia on 9 June, 2018)

Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture is located in the southwest of Hubei Province and in the intersection of Hubei, Hunan and Chongqing. There live totally 29 ethnic groups including Tujia, Miao, Dong, Han etc. Unique geographic location and the historic background of ethnic fusion promote the formation of cultural diversity in this region with rich intangible cultural heritages. Especially, among them, due to the simple actions and unadorned lyrics, “Gun Long Lian Xiang” is easy to learn and also popular with the public, which has become one of the most popular activity in those areas. You can not only see people dancing “Gun Long Lian Xiang” in the square. But schools can also invite folk artists to teach “Gun Long Lian Xiang” in schools. The government strongly advocates this traditional dancing, which brings vitality to “Gun Long Lian Xiang”. For a better understanding towards the problems existing in the inheritance process of “Gun Long Lian Xiang” and in order to provide some reference for the government’s next promotion work, this thesis adopts document analysis method, in-depth interview method and field survey method to conduct an in-depth research on the current inheritance situation of “Gun Long Lian Xiang” and to understand its cultural connotations in order to face the existing problems and put forward with some strategies and suggestions to promote the development of “Gun Long Lian Xiang”.

2. Brief Introduction to “Gun Long Lian Xiang”

2.1 Origin

The folk dancing “Gun Long Lian Xiang” actually is a derivative of the ethnic traditional dancing “Da Lian Xiang”. “Da” refers to hitting others and “Da Lian Xiang” means hitting Lian Xiang. According to the records in Xuanen, Enshi, “Da Lian Xiang” was earliest introduced to local villages and towns in Qing Dynasty by some floating people, which has a history of more than 200 years.

“Da Lian Xiang” has a long history, but no records can be referred as to the specific divergence time. So far, there are mainly two kinds of legends: one is that “Da Lian Xiang” can date back to the Eastern Zhou Dynasty. At that time, in the State of Qi, an orphan girl, Zhang Lianxiang, died of being beaten by her monster-in-law only for her late to cook the breakfast. Neighbour all redressed injustice for her and took the blowtube, which was used by her monster-in-law to beat her to death, to the street for redressing injustice. And they specially put a copper coin into it and recounted and imitated the way of Lianxiang’s monster-in-law to beat her. Since then, “Da Lian Xiang” has gradually transferred to a folk dancing and been inherited generation by generation. (Li Peizhi and Duan Guangxu, 2013)

Another legend is from the production activity of local people. In the past, people worked hard every day. They often suffered aching lumbus and limp legs because of overwork. So during their break time, they massaged their shoulders and legs to ease this discomfort. And gradually it has been developed to use the bar taken from the ground to beat the joints and eventually has developed as an unique dancing---“Da Lian Xiang”.

The dancing “Da Lian Xiang” has quickly integrated into the local culture since it was introduced to Xuanen, Enshi. And at the end of the last century, it experienced the improvement and innovation and developed to an unique ethnic culture---“Gun Long Lian Xiang”.

2.2 Development

As a kind of folk dancing, with the efforts of 3 generations of folk artists---Zhou Shuting, Hou Anxin and Liu Yongcheng “Gun Long Lian Xiang” was gradually developed into a brand new form of art with folk acrobatics and dramatic actions simultaneously.

“Gun Long Lian Xiang” was initially created by Zhou Shuting, born in Lijiahe, Xuanen. He learned “Ba Wang Bian” and “Lian Hua Luo” (two kinds of Chinese traditional art) from his teacher Yang Yunqing who was born in Huayuan, Hunan. After his studying, he combined the two into one and made a living as a performer in the border area of Hubei and Hunan. In those decades, Zhou introduced the Kongfu essence of folk acrobatics and local dramas into “Lian Xiang” and then created a new style of it with the combination of rolling, dancing and singing. Especially he added amounts of actions to imitate dragons and roll (Li Kangning, 2017) , which made it so attractive that he performed it in Beijing.

“Gun Long Lian Xiang”, created by Zhou, gradually became very popular in Lijiahe, Xuanen and attracted lots of artists to learn it from him, among whom Hou Anxin was the most outstanding one. Based on the Zhou’s version, Hou enriched “Gun Long Lian Xiang” again according to his own understanding towards it. He developed the dancing actions from 16 groups into 26 groups and finalized the design of “Gun Long Lian Xiang” and made it popular in Xuanen. Therefore, Hou became the only one second-generation inheritor of “Gun Long Lian Xiang”.

Among Hou’s third-generation apprentice, nobody made some innovative development, but they make Hou’s version popular in Enshi. And Liu Yongcheng was the only one lineal apprentice who was named for teaching “Lian Xiang” dancing and selling it. “Gun Long Lian Xiang” inheriting team, organized by Liu, won amounts of awards in municipal and prefecture-level contests and won the appraisal from the society.

2.3 The Connotation of Dancing Actions

It is found by the author, during the field survey, that among the local artists of “Lian Xiang” in Xuanen, Enshi, the word “Lian Xiang” refers to “Gun Long Lian Xiang” itself but also props used in dancing.

As a prop, “Lian Xiang” is made of bamboo with the length of 1 meter. In the making process, people will polish the bamboo smoothly and then dig 4 tiny holes in this both sides of it. And they will bunch 12 copper coins by iron wire and implant to the holes, totally 24 coins, which stands for the 24 solar terms. On the two ends of the bamboo stick, people will attach red spicas. When using, people should hold the middle part of “Lian Xiang” and move their body and play rhythmically. When the coins strikes the stick and the stick hit people’s body, it will make an orderly and pretty sound. (Li Peizhi and Duan Guangxu, 2013)

As a kind of folk dancing, dancers hold a “Lian Xiang” and rhythmically strike the wrist, shoulder, back, waist, leg, knee and thigh with the tempo of music. Dancers move their bodies and sing to attract audience. In the 1950s and 1960s, during the Spring Festival, in the villages of Enshi, all family will invite a “Lian Xiang” team. Performers will enter the

master's house and sing according to the situation of this family, in which performers will draw the best wishes for their families. Now, with the development of society, more and more people learn "Lian Xiang" in different squares and most of them sing lyrics with vitality and express their hope to the beautiful life.

"Gun Long Lian Xiang", derived from "Da Lian Xiang", was enriched with new cultural connotations in the past decades. In Chinese, "Gun" refers to "rolling" and "rotating" and "Long" means "dragon". "Gun Long Lian Xiang" literally means rolling like a dragon. It refers that dancing actions contain amounts of elements of "dragon" and "rolling". Around this two elements, folk artists created a series of difficult actions like "three nods at a step", "double dragons embracing the column", "sleeping dragon rolling" and so on, which ingeniously combines "Lian Xiang" and "Lian Hua Luo" into a whole and develops the Allegro actions with the efforts of the inheritors of the first and second generation.

3. The Current Situation of Inheritance of "Gun Long Lian Xiang"

3.1 Existing Protecting and Inheriting Measures

Based on the interview to Mr. Hou Anxin, the second-generation inheritor of "Gun Long Lian Xiang" and the author's collection and analysis on the related pictures and texts, the author found that since 1950s, dozens of experts and scholars, from Beijing, Wuhan, Chongqing and so on, have conducted some effective researches on "Gun Long Lian Xiang" in the way of interview, recording and filming to Lian Xiang Art Troupe. But the local government in Xuanen did not put "Gun Long Lian Xiang" into the county-level list of intangible cultural heritage until 2006. From then on, the local government has taken a series of measures on the protecting and inheriting "Gun Long Lian Xiang".

3.1.1 The Collection of Video Material

Between 2007 and 2008, in order to further the work of cultural protection, Xuanen Cultural Center made a general investigation as to the intangible cultural heritages within the scope of Xuanen and put priority to the "Gun Long Lian Xiang". The government conducted an in-depth investigation and collected amounts real-time materials (video, record, picture, text) of the performance and training of "Gun Long Lian Xiang" in different occasions. And "Gun Long Lian Xiang" was successfully put into the second batch of the provincial intangible cultural heritage list. Besides, Enshi Style Bureau began to sort out all related materials and recorded 15 items selected into the national intangible cultural heritage list, 62 provincial items, 124 prefecture-level items and 331 county-level items.

3.1.2 The Launching of "Go to the Community, Campus and Institution" Activity

"Go to the community, campus and institution" activity. (Liu Xuecheng, 2015) Since 2008, in order to build the cultural brand "one county, one brand", "Gun Long Lian Xiang" was treated as a key program. The local government, Xuanen Mass Cultural Center actively organized various "Gun Long Lian Xiang" competitions to encourage people from all walks of life to participate in. Those activities won the active responses from all local "Lian Xiang" teams and also successfully attracted more people to learn and experience "Gun Long Lian Xiang", which set a firm foundation for the further promotion of "Lian Xiang" in Enshi.

In the process of building the cultural brand--"one county, one brand", "Gun Long Lian Xiang" successfully entered the local primary and middle school and became an essential part of students' campus life together with radio gymnastics. Besides, since 2015, Xuanen Cultural Center began to host the "key member" training of "Lian Xiang" to the cultural "key members" from the governmental institutions in the counties of Enshi, which did help to output talents to other regions and also set a firm foundation for the further promotion of "Gun Long Lian Xiang".

Under the inspiration of people in Xuanen, "Lian Xian" became popular in Enshi. Enshi Cultural Center and Style Bureau also began to hold different contests to encourage people to participate in playing "Lian Xiang" and to promote it as a kind of mass culture and a pop culture.

3.2 Existing Problems in Inheritance

3.2.1 Lack of Cultural Height

During the field survey, according to the interview to the learners of "Gun Long Lian Xiang" in the squares and the visit to the members of "Lian Xiang" teams, the author found that in the consciousness of local people, "Gun Long Lian Xiang" is only another form of square dancing. Although there exist some difficulties and interests in learning "Lian Xiang", few people will care the history and cultural connotation of this dancing. And most of the interviewee only treat it as square dancing but not art.

Liu Yongcheng, Hou Anxin's lineal apprentice, held the view that it is the right way for the inheritance to develop "Gun Long Lian Xiang" from the height of art. Therefore, he expressed, for many times, his hopes to cooperate with colleges in Enshi. It is his and also such folk artists' biggest dream to let "Gun Long Lian Xiang" enter the classroom of college and become the elective class for college students in Enshi.

3.2.2 Tough Living Condition for Folk Artists

In the interview, Hou said that as a provincial inheritor of “Gun Long Lian Xiang”, every year, he can get the subsidy of 6000 yuan, given by the government. And he should follow some related obligations that he should provide free teaching service for all learner of “Gun Long Lian Xiang”. The author paid a visit with his tens of apprentices, most of whom had no way to treat the inheritance of apprentice as their own career. So far, only his linear apprentice gave up his thirty-year work as a watchmaker and went to Enshi with his wife and now teach “Lian Xiang” every day in the squares. For living, Liu learned how to make “Lian Xiang” under the guidance of Hou, his master and sell on the street. But so far it takes too much time of Liu and his wife in teaching “Gun Long Lian Xiang” without any pay. Their income can only meet their basic living needs.

3.2.3 Imperfect Protection System

In the interview, Qin Hong, the vice curator of Enshi Cultural Center and Li Peizhi, the former curator of Xuanen Mass Cultural Center both expressed that “intangible cultural heritage” is a hot term in China, but in Enshi the launching of “intangible cultural heritage” work went slowly. And lots of “intangible cultural heritage” items were not recorded by experts and disappeared in the dust of history. And many experienced artists did not find their inheritor but passed away in succession. The worker of “intangible cultural heritage” in Enshi are also competing against the time. What’s a pity. The cultural construction just starts and many positions are not distributed clearly. Even in 2014, the construction project of Enshi Cultural Center did not finish completely. And many “intangible cultural heritage” protection items are still ignored till now.

4. Strategy and suggestion

4.1 Emphasize the Function of “the Second Transmitter”

It is found in this research that although “Gun Long Lian Xiang” has won a great mass foundation and the local cultural departments have collected the materials of the past decades in the form of video and text. But in the interview with Qin Hong, the vice curator of Enshi Cultural Center, she still expressed his concerns on the cultural inheritance of “Gun Long Lian Xiang”. Qin said that Lijiehe, Xuanen is the origin place of “Gun Long Lian Xiang” and Zhou Shuting , the first-generation inheritor , had lots of apprentices and each of them played it with their own style. But although they had great passion towards “Gun Long Lian Xiang”, they are old men now. And Qin said that it is necessary to record their dancing actions in time and play the role of “the second transmitter”. The word of “the second transmitter” is from physical education terminology, which refers to the player responsible for second transmitting the ball in volleyball competition. This position requires that the player can use and also use expertly the skills and change in accordance with the situation. (quoted from Baidu encyclopedia, 9th June, 2018). but in cultural field, “the second transmitter” refers to the people spreading culture through different accesses (video, sound, text, oral account) to record the cultural art and spread to others.

According to the field survey and interview, the author thinks that the government should enhance the measures to protect the folk artists and take “first aid” to their cultural achievements and sort out them one by one. It is unable to only depend on the commercial discs or other spontaneous entertainment. Cultural workers should play the role of “the second transmitter” and borrow the experience from the senior to sort out and issue the materials of “Gun Long Lian Xiang” in the form of video and text from the professional angle. If possible, it is suggested to make it as an academic work to preserve the cultural art value at the maximum.

4.2 Combination of Cultural and Economic Value

Ethnic culture is an essential belt to promote the ethnic harmony and plays an active role in improving the development of intangible cultural industry in ethnic areas and does help to achieve the protection and inheritance of ethnic culture as well as the multinational development. (Fu Shiqiu, 2017) There is no doubt that “Gun Long Lian Xiang” has a profound cultural value as an intangible cultural heritage. Meanwhile, the promotion of “Gun Long Lian Xiang” will bring huge economic profits to the local people. According to the field survey, the author found selling “Lian Xiang” has become an important industry. Li Peizhi, the former curator of Xuanen Mass Cultural Center, said there exists a huge market in Enshi, which attracts amounts of businessmen to invest. It promotes the development of this industry to teach and sell “Lian Xiang” in different counties and regions in Enshi and Hubei. In 2016, the economic value of “Lian Xiang” in Xuanen is 2 million yuan. Therefore, the government should actively guide to combine the cultural and economic value. At the same time, measures should be taken to promote the development of economic industry and achieve win-win situation. Taking a bird view of some mature “intangible cultural heritage” items within the scope of whole country, many ones all meet the market requirement, for which self-profit in operation take an essential part to intangible cultural development. (Wangying , 2017)

4.3 Establish the “Modern Apprenticeships” Mechanism

The “modern apprenticeships” mechanism refers to the talent training mode which advocates the cooperation of colleges and enterprises and the joint teaching between teachers and masters and put students’ skill training as the major. So far, the inheritance of Suzhou Kesi (Chinese silk tapestry) has set a good example. “Gun Long Lian Xiang” can borrow the experience of Suzhou “Kesi” to adopt “modern apprenticeship” mechanism, combining colleges, enterprises and inheritors. Colleges are responsible for the talent training. Inheritors provides the most excellent faculty. Enterprises provide the internship and employment opportunities. But there exists some difference between “Gun Long Lian Xiang” and Suzhou Kesi. Compared with the dancing itself of “Gun Long Lian Xiang”, the value of selling “Lian Xiang” creates more. In fact, selling and teaching “Lian Xiang” supplement each other. The government needs to integrate resources and support the cooperation among inheritors, enterprises and art academies, aiming to cultivate amounts of excellent talents of “Gun Long Lian Xiang” and also inherit this intangible cultural heritage. And it is also hoped to produce the high-quality “Lian Xiang” and form its own brand and industrial chain to find the foothold for intangible cultural heritage.

4.4 Emphasize the Promotion Function of Colleges

Regionalism and nationality are main characteristics of intangible cultural heritage, which decides that good inheritance can not leave the unique environment and ethnic culture. However, as the gathering place of knowledge, culture and science and technology, local colleges are always regarded as the center of local education and culture and have advantaged regional culture background, which decides that colleges have responsibilities and obligations to protect and inherit the intangible cultural heritage in this region. (Zhang Jianguo, 2018)

Hubei University for Nationalities, as the only one college in Enshi, has respectability and obligation to let “Gun Long Lian Xiang” enter the classroom and create a good cultural atmosphere for intangible cultural heritage with the assistance of local government and related departments. And it should also put emphasis on the academic researchers in related fields and establish studio to encourage students and teachers to actively participate in the practice “Gun Long Lian Xiang” and activities of innovation and scientific researches.

5. Conclusion

Enshi “Gun Long Lian Xiang” has a long history and rich contents. Although it has become a very popular mass culture in Enshi, it still needs for the protection and rescue of experts and scholars and inheritance generation by generation. At the end of 2016, 15 items have been selected into the national intangible cultural heritage list, 62 into the provincial list, 124 into the prefecture-level list and 331 into the county-level list. Besides, the development of “Gun Long Lian Xiang” even enhance the local economic development, which attracts more businessmen to invest and sell “Lian Xiang” for all learners of “Gun Long Lian Xiang”. It has formed a new industrial chain. Therefore, the government should borrow the experience of “Gun Long Lian Xiang” to spread more information about local intangible cultural heritage to the local people and develop the mass culture popular with the local people as well as promote the construction of “cultural city” in Enshi. Based on the promotion situation of “Gun Long Lian Xiang”, the author discoveries a huge market of it in Enshi, which lets us witness that there still exists the hotbed for traditional culture.

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