

The Teaching of Ying Ge Dance in China

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Abstract

The history of Ying Ge can be traced back to the middle of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), when folk songs and dances were already very active and were used for rituals and entertainment, and as a means of self-entertainment for the people. The emergence of Ying Ge can be traced back to the middle of the Ming Dynasty. In the year 1761, Chaozhou governor Wu Shuo Xun's Chaozhou Fu Zhi Volume XII "customs" contained: "farmers spring dozens of generations, rice planting in the field, the order of the drums, each drum a patrol, the group song actually made, even the day without end, the name of the rice-planting song. "Yang (秧)" of the Chaozhou dialect pronunciation and "Ying (英)" is quite similar, may be in the folk passed on, and changed over time to "Ying Ge". Originally, it was a form of performance involving both singing and dancing, hence the name singing Ying Ge. The complete performance consists of three parts: the front stage, middle stage, and back stage. Over time, the singing part was gradually abandoned, making the stick dance in the front stage the main performance, leading to the term Ying Ge dance. Due to the rather long history, the social and human factors that gave rise to the Ying Ge are very complex, and the lack of documentary records at that time, resulting in the origin of the Ying Ge has been subject to a wide range of opinions.

Keywords: Teaching; Ying Ge; Dance; China

Introduction

China is a land of long history and multi-ethnic coexistence. Thousands of years of history have left behind a rich and colourful intangible cultural heritage, such as traditional opera, music, dance, handicrafts and festive customs (Wang & Dong, 2007). The Chaoshan region, located in the eastern part of China's Guangdong province, has historically been a prosperous region. Chaoshan area is at the crossroads of the ancient Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road, and thus has a rich history of cultural exchange and fusion (Fei, 2007). In this historical context, Chaoshan Ying Ge, as one of the important forms of entertainment and cultural exchange among the local people, has a unique artistic style and cultural connotation by integrating elements of the Central Plains and overseas cultures. Ying Ge is usually presented as a mass artistic performance, mostly on important occasions such as traditional festivals, weddings and temple fairs (Yang, 2011; Liu, 2022). Dressed in traditional costumes and accompanied by melodious songs and beautiful dance movements, the performers show the unique cultural style of the Chaoshan area.

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With the rapid development of globalisation and modernisation, traditional intangible cultural heritage is facing serious challenges; in 2003, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, encouraging countries to safeguard and transmit their intangible cultural heritage. In China, the government and society have also gradually realised the importance of safeguarding and transmitting intangible cultural heritage, and have begun to strengthen the relevant safeguarding and research work (Jiang & Ai, 2001). As the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage, the study of Chaoshan Ying Ge has become particularly important in this context. Through in-depth research on the history, performance forms, inheritance status and social influence of Ying Ge, we can better understand and recognise this important intangible cultural heritage. At the same time, the research also helps to explore the inheritance and innovation paths suitable for the development of contemporary society, to protect and pass on the valuable cultural heritage of Chaoshan Ying Ge, so that it can continue to give full play to its unique artistic charms and cultural values in the modern society (Li, 2019).

However, the situation and problems faced by the transmission of Ying Ge in the campus environment may be different. With the development of modern society and the impact of cultural diversification, traditional culture is facing the challenge of transmission on campus. As a local traditional art, Chaoshan Ying Ge may face problems such as insufficient inheritance and lack of student interest on campus. Students are more inclined to contact new popular culture and art forms, which makes Chaoshan Ying Ge gradually marginalised on campus. Therefore, the inheritance and innovation of Ying Ge on campus has become a topic worthy of in-depth study. By studying the history and intangible cultural heritage of Chaoshan Ying Ge, we can gain a deeper understanding of its cultural connotation and traditional value, and provide theoretical support for its campus inheritance. At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to the current situation of the inheritance of Ying Ge on campus and to understand the students' knowledge and interest level in traditional culture (Wu, 2022). Through in-depth investigation and interviews, the problems and dilemmas of inheritance can be found, providing the basis for finding the entry point of inheritance and development. In addition, studying the heritage and innovation of Ying Ge on campus also requires exploring the possibilities of innovation (Li, 2019).

Historical origins of Ying Ge

At present, there are seven hypotheses about the origin of Ying Ge that have been documented:

1. Evolution from the Confucius Ceremony: The origin of the Ying Ge in the Chaoshan area has deep historical roots, and one of the hypotheses is closely related to the cultural background of the Confucius Ceremony. In the Confucius Temple of Chaoyang County, At the Confucius Ceremony held on the 27th day of the 8th month of the lunar calendar every year, a complete set of music and dance is displayed, in which dancers holding short mallets perform in a manner very similar to that of Ying Ge. On the 25th day of the 8th month of the lunar calendar, a large-scale Confucius Festival is held, in which the dance team expresses its respect for Confucius with a full set of music and a parade dance (Jiang & Ai, 2001).

It can be seen in Chao Yang County Records that the Dance System Chapter describes a dance procession for the Kong Festival, in which 36 people march in two columns, holding bamboo and wooden sacrificial vessels, at a steady and slow pace. This scene bears a striking resemblance to the slow-playing Ying Ge of Chaoyang's Mindan City seen today. The dance team of the Chaoyang Mindan City slow-boarding Ying Ge usually consists of 36 people holding long and thin Ying Ge mallets, dancing at a steady pace in the slow rhythm of gongs and drums, and presenting a solemn and heavy atmosphere through powerful blows, as if continuing the traces of the Confucius Festival of the olden days.

2. Influence of Opera: The second view is that the Ying Ge was inspired by the Waijiang Opera (a genre of Han opera). About 300 years ago, the Waijiang Opera performed the story of the heroes of Liangshanpo who attacked Daimingfu in disguise and rescued Lu Junyi during the Song Dynasty, which included both singing and dancing, and the performances were so moving that they were very popular with the local farmers. These operatic performances gradually spread in the Chaoshan area, where the peasants learnt to perform them and gradually cancelled the singing part and retained the main dance element, forming the stick dance, which is the main part of the Ying Ge.

As stated in the Report on the Survey of the Situation of the Ethnic Folk Art of Puning in 1986, the folk masses of Puning and Chaoyang counties generally believed that the Ying Ge originated from the opera, and that they developed from the interception of certain contents and performance scenes from the opera. Against this background, the Ying Ge team in Chaoshan area takes the story of the heroic heroes of Liang Shan Po attacking Da Ming Fu as its theme. The intervention of this story gave birth to the Ying Ge, whose attire and movements are related to this traditional opera story. Taking inspiration from the opera, the peasants learnt to play the story of the heroes of Liang Shan Po and developed it into a form of folk dance in the Yushen Race.

With the flourishing of opera activities in Guangdong during the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912), the Waijiang Opera (Han Opera genre) became popular in the Chaoshan area. Hundreds of performances by the Waijiang troupe prompted locals to form a Waijiang theatre troupe, which led to the rooting of Waijiang opera in the eastern part of Guangdong. In the Chaoshan area, especially in Chaoyang, Chenghai and Puning, the performance activities of Waigang Opera reached its peak. This historical fact justifies the influence of opera on Ying Ge. In Puning area, in the 1930s and 1940s, there were still some old Ying Ge classes, such as Zhenghexing class, Heshunxing class, Xinshunxing class, etc., whose names were very similar to those of the Waijiang Opera classes, which further proved that the origins of the Ying Ge had been far-reachingingly influenced by the opera (Huang, 2020).

3. Farmers' martial arts training against oppression: The origin of the Ying Ge is related to the history of farmers' martial arts training against official oppression. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, rural villages in the Chaoshan area had martial arts schools, but after they were banned, the peasants formed a dance-like activity by cutting long sticks short and combining them with the Nanquan horse stance. According to legend, the founder of Ying Ge, Cheng Zhi Skim, was a peasant who rebelled against the oppression of feudal landlords.

4. The theory of importation from the provinces: the Ying Ge and dances may have been imported from the provinces, and may be related to the drums and rice-planting songs of Shandong, and are also thought to be related to the flower drums of Hunan and the Fengyang flower drums of Anhui. This hypothesis emphasises the diversity of Ying Ge that may have been influenced by foreign cultures.

5. Evolution of traditional rural festivals: The evolution of the Ying Ge is linked to traditional rural festivals and festivals, especially the expression of prayers for good luck and good fortune through a variety of coloured paintings and artefacts. This suggests that Ying Ge may have their origins in the richness of traditional rural culture and celebrations (Li , 2019).

6. Nuo dance remains: proposed by Professor Kui Fu, stressed that Ying Ge is the remains of the ancient Nuo dance. Nuo dance is an ancient Chinese religious ritual, that Ying Ge may have evolved under the influence of this tradition, retaining elements of the ancient Nuo dance.

7. The rain-praying masquerade theory: The Ying Ge may have been inspired by the Shaoxing rain-praying masquerade, in particular the use of the good omen of Song Jiang, the "timely rain", to pray for rain. This theory attempts to link the origins of the yinggong to the rain-praying ceremony by citing a description in Zhang Dai's Taoan Mengyi (Memory of Taoan Dreams).

Basic Performance Forms of Ying Ge

The dance theme of Ying Ge is derived from the Water Margin (see figure 2.1), depicting the legendary story of the Liang Shan heroes who captured the civil Da Mingfu and rescued the imprisoned Lu Junyi. Its performance form consists of three parts: the front shed, the middle shed and the back shed, and incorporates various elements of martial arts, dance, music, singing and theatre. This art form has unique footwork, bodywork, legwork and formations, presenting the qualities of both earth style and martial dance. Its style is ancient, simple and majestic, rough and bold, mighty and warm, with deep artistic characteristics (Ling, 2021).

Chaoshan Ying Ge mainly interprets the theme story in which the heroes of the Water Margin make-up and sell their skills to attack Da Mingfu and rescue Lu Junyi. The original dancers 108 people, Ying Ge divided into the front in the back of the shed, generally the first 8 dancers dressed as Li Kui, Yang Zhi, Lu Zhishen, Wu Sung, Guan Sheng, Hu Yanzhuo, Lei Heng, Sun Erniang, with accurate names and corresponding image of the costumes; the back of the dancers do not necessarily correspond to one by one. Each dancer holds a colourful wooden stick about 1' 4" long and 4cm in diameter, and with the sound of gongs and drums, conch horns and yells, the two sticks hit each other and turn over, dancing as they go. The dancers at the back are dressed up as various kinds of jugglers, beating gongs and drums to accompany the singing, and some of them are also dressed up as tu opera, or added into the martial arts performance. There are a total of 18 sets of formation changes, such as Pink Butterfly Picking Flowers, Long Snake Advancing, Four Tigers Driving Together, Two Dragons Coming out of the Sea, Peacock Opening Screen, etc., which are rough and bold, robust and powerful. However, most performances of Ying Ge have been simplified, focusing mainly on the forecourt section, gradually abandoning the singing element and using mallets and drums as the main props. The most distinctive feature of the performance is that the dancers hold a foot-long mallet in each hand and perform the dance by knocking, hence the name "Ying Ge". This is a typical group dance of Han men with southern characteristics.

Traditional Ying Ge and dances are accompanied by percussion instruments. The percussion instruments commonly used by Ying Ge singing groups include big drums, medium drums, gongs, gongs (also known as moon gongs), cymbals (also known as small cymbals), Chin Tsai, and conch horns or Ngau Kok horns. The gongs and drums of the Ying Ge are divided into slow, medium and fast, and the most representative and popular one is the "Long Dong Guan", which is repeated with the strong and weak beats of the "Strong Competition" as the main rhythmic form. Formation of alternating weak and strong, rhythmic, strong, continuous characteristics, which is a kind of courageous movement rhythm (Zhu & Huang, 2023).

Educational Significance of Chaoshan Ying Ge

Chaoshan Ying Ge, as the most representative folk culture in Chaoshan, is hailed as the "Typical Dance of Chinese Manhood." This square dance integrates elements of drama, dance, martial arts, and more. In the social inheritance of Chaoshan Ying Ge, students play a crucial role in cultural preservation. Only by continuously promoting cultural development on campus can the culture be passed down. It can be said that the campus inheritance of Chaoshan Ying Ge aligns with the contemporary aspirations of student development (Li , 2019).

Schools are the main carrier of inheriting culture and progress, and have the function of helping the inheritance and future development of Chaoshan Ying Ge. On the one hand, the article studies the inheritance of Chaoshan Ying Ge in schools, and on the other hand, it analyses the current situation of the inheritance of Chaoshan Ying Ge in schools in accordance with the new national policy. On the other hand, it analyses the current situation of school inheritance of Chaoshan Ying Ge in the light of the new national policy, finds out the shortcomings and takes measures to deal with them, and provides some suggestions for the inheritance of Chaoshan schools. It is also to enrich the teaching resources of art education and training, and to introduce new forces. Art education is beneficial to promoting students' healthy and happy growth, enriching after-school activities, enhancing ethnic cohesion and pride, and improving the quality of life of students. It also strengthens students' sense of trust and confidence, lays a solid foundation for the inheritance of songs on campus, and ultimately better protects the inheritance of regional songs in Chaoshan. The songs of the Chaoshan region will be better preserved and passed on (Li & Huang, 2021).

Teaching Ying Ge- Module Basic Movements

Teaching Focus:

1. Fundamental movements and technical essentials for gripping and striking with the Ying Ge hammer.
2. The five basic step patterns of Ying Ge and their corresponding technical essentials.
3. Key technical points for coordinating basic movements frequently used in Ying Ge, involving the synchronization of hands, feet, head, and eye expressions.

The basic movements for hammer striking in Ying Ge fall into three categories: "Solid Strike," where the performer firmly holds the Ying Ge hammer without releasing or rotating, also known as the "Dead Strike"; "Dynamic Strike," where the performer continuously rotates the Ying Ge hammer with finger movements during the dance, requiring flexibility for controlling the hammer's rotation, hence referred to as the "Dynamic Strike" (see figure2.5); and "Semi-Dynamic Strike," an intermediate style that involves wrist rotation without full

finger rotation or maintaining the grip of the thumb and forefinger while releasing other fingers, such as the middle, ring, and little fingers, with a quick grip at the end – hence the term "Semi-Dynamic Strike" (Wu, 2022).

Representative Movements of Ying Ge: Left and Right Tipping Steps. Preparatory Position: Stand with both feet open, shoulder-width apart, and toes slightly turned outward.

The first beat: Left hand grasps the hammer and swings it from bottom to top to the upper left side of the head; right hand grasps the right hammer and swings it from bottom to top, left hand grasps the left hammer and swings it from top to bottom. The right hammer strikes in front of the chest and follows the left hammer to lift upward until the hammerhead goes backward, and the hammer tail goes forward (experienced performers can smoothly perform an internal rotation hammer). Stamp the left foot on the ground and raise the right leg naturally, bending the knee to approximately 90°.

The second beat: Slightly lower the left knee and complete the right tidying step.

The third beat: Left hand grasps the left hammer from bottom to top, right hand grasps the right hammer from top to bottom. The left hammer strikes in front of the chest after the right hammer, following the right hammer to lift upward until the hammerhead goes backward, and the hammer tail goes forward (experienced performers can smoothly perform an internal rotation hammer). Stamp the right foot on the ground and raise the left leg naturally, bending the knee to approximately 90°.

The fourth beat: Slightly lower the right knee and complete the left tidying step.

Musical Accompaniment

Ying Ge is accompanied by percussion instruments. Commonly used percussion instruments in Ying Ge teams include large drums, medium drums, Su gongs, Yun gongs, cymbals, Qinzi (a type of small cymbal), conch shells, or ox-horn trumpets. The drumbeats of Ying Ge are divided into slow, medium, and fast beats. The terms slow, medium, and fast refer to three aspects: the type of beat, the name of the beat, and the speed. Slow beats have two variations: three beats and four beats, characterized by a slow speed and deep sound. Medium beats have three variations: seven beats, eight beats, and ten beats, played at a moderate speed. The playing style of fast beats varies more, depending on the performance style and changes in formations. In both medium and fast beats, conch shells are often added.

There is a saying: "Music is the soul of dance." Generally speaking, it is advantageous to choose music that aligns with the style and thematic content of the dance piece for choreography. Especially when dealing with stage creations based on traditional culture, handling folk music that has been consistently used in traditional culture should involve both inheritance and development. It is necessary to walk the path of development while inheriting, and even more crucial to return to the roots after development (Lin, 2018).

Due to the long history and extensive inheritance of the Ying Ge, folk artists from all over the world have given it different characteristics and genres in their creations. Analysing the basic hitting method of the mallet, we can divide the Ying Ge into three different hitting characteristics, such as vertical hitting, oblique hitting and double throwing hitting. Based on the rhythmic pattern of the music, the songs are divided into three main genres: slow, medium and fast.

Slow-paced Ying Ge: Represented by the cotton city of Chaoyang and Pingdong, this genre is distinguished by its unhurried musical rhythm (see figure2.7). The sound of the drum is "隆(long), 隆冬(long dong)"; the small cymbals sound like "查(cha)"; the gong sounds like "匡(kuang)". In slow-paced Ying Ge, slightly longer mallets are employed, with each strike consisting of three or four beats, colloquially known as "three strikes" or "four strikes," and sometimes referred to as "intoxicated strikes." During the dance, performers skillfully use the undulation and force of the waist to propel the upper body, creating a steady forward movement. Performances often feature teams moving in a single or double column or in circular formations, maintaining coordination with the relatively simple and slow-paced musical rhythm and melody. The music reflects a majestic and solemn ambiance, reminiscent of the stability and grandeur of Mount Tai. Due to its simple and ancient dance form, it is generally considered one of the earliest forms of Ying Ge (Li & Huang, 2021).

The musical rhythm of slow-paced Ying Ge is characterized by a slow tempo in the beats of the drum and a deep resonance.

Represented by regions such as Jinpu, Chengjiao, Wulian Township, Heping, and Feigang, Middle-paced Ying Ge showcases distinctive musical characteristics. The sound of the drum is 隆冬(long dong) or 冬(dong); the cymbals sound like "仓(cang)". In comparison to Slow-paced Ying Ge, Middle-paced Ying Ge has a slightly faster rhythm, typically involving sets of 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, and 13 strikes. This results in a more varied and flexible mallet striking technique. The performers in this genre often take on the role of emulating the character of Song Jiang, dressing accordingly and assuming the role of drum conductors within the percussion ensemble. Coordination is achieved through head gestures, directing the team's progression and adjusting the formations of the choreographed movements. The choreography is rooted in elements like the "Big War Horse" from Southern Fist, maintaining stable yet powerful mallet strikes and showcasing a vigorous and agile style. Diverging from the simplicity of Slow-paced Ying Ge, Middle-paced Ying Ge features more elaborate and colorful formations, adding layers to its musical expression (Liu, 2018; Huang, 2020).

The drum tempo in Middle-paced Ying Ge is moderate, with strong and resonant beats.

Fast-paced Ying Ge: Represented by regions such as Puning Nanshan and Chaoyang Xiqi, the musical style of Fast-paced Ying Ge primarily revolves around rapid drum beats that are quick yet maintain a sense of orderly precision. The gong and cymbals are played together 壮争(zhuang zhengzheng). The wooden mallets used in this style are shorter and thinner, providing a versatile and dynamic striking technique. The choreography includes a variety of patterns, incorporating changes such as dual and quadruple mallet strikes, resulting in a vibrant array of formations within the entire performance ensemble. Occasionally, the performance may feature the Qianzhi Snake Dance, seamlessly integrating both as a guiding element in the forefront and as an interlude within the ensemble, adding a dynamic dimension to the overall presentation. Fast-paced Ying Ge seeks a balance between dynamic movement and static poise, with precise hand-eye coordination, powerful mallet strikes, and the impressive combination of swift strikes and rapid recoveries. This style vividly portrays the heroic scenes of sacrificing oneself in battle, capturing a magnificent aura and stirring the hearts of the audience (Zhang, 2022).

Conclusion

Ying Ge performers are all characterised by their faces, which are not only inspired by opera, but also unique, with each face showing a distinctive personality, different from each other. Some of the faces highlight some of the famous and distinctive characters in Water Margin, such as Li Kui, Guan Sheng, Qin Ming, Lu Zhishen, Wu Song, and Shi Qian. Other faces do not clearly refer to a particular hero, but vividly show the character's personality through the image, some of them are powerful and righteous, some of them are resourceful and humorous. There are also some faces that are as exaggerated as ghost faces, like the ghosts in the opera Zhong Kui Marrying Sisters, which are twisted, ugly, and hideous, and although they are very exaggerated, they do not look horrible.

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