

Reasons For The Formation Of Miao Ritual Music In Chengbu County

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Abstract

The Miao is one of the ethnic minorities in China with a long history, with frequent migrations and strong cultural conservatism, especially good at passing on beliefs and traditions through music and dance. Over a long period of historical evolution, the Miao gradually migrated southward and settled in the Chengbu area in southwestern Hunan Province, forming a unique Miao cultural colony. As the Miao population in Chengbu County, Hunan Province, is in the majority, traditional ritual music continues to play an important role in religious beliefs, subsistence practices, and family heritage. Studying the ritual music of the Miao in Chengbu not only helps to restore the living heritage of Miao history and culture, but also provides a typical example for the protection and development of multi-ethnic music culture in China.

Keywords

Ethnic beliefs; Concept of survival; Family heritage; Cultural heritage

Introduction

Chengbu Miao Autonomous County as one of the country's five independent Miao Autonomous County, since the Neolithic era is the activities of the ancestors of the Miao people in the area, the history of the establishment of the 'three Miao ancient state', and through the administrative changes of many dynasties, in 1956 officially set up the county. Chengbu territory of the Miao ritual music is also known as Nuo opera. Qing Tongzhi years of 'Chengbu County Records' recorded: "Miao people like to play the reed-sheng, and dance and blow. Their voices are whimpering and their lust for each other. The men mostly wrap their heads with blue scarves, while the women are covered with silver jewellery and wear five-coloured coarse lace clothes." [1] The religious beliefs of the Miao people in Chengbu are centred on the worship of many gods, covering various forms such as nature worship, ancestor worship and hero worship. This belief system is not only an important part of Miao culture, but also an important foundation for the formation of Miao ritual music.

Through the worship of nature, ancestors and heroes, the Miao people express their reverence for life, their respect for history and their prayers for the future. These beliefs are not only embodied in daily life, but are also passed on and developed through rituals and ceremonial music.

I. Ethnic Beliefs

The religious beliefs of the Miao in Chengbu are centered on multi-god worship, covering various forms such as nature worship, ancestor worship and hero worship. This belief system is not only an important part of Miao culture, but also an important foundation for the formation of Miao ritual music. Through the worship of nature, ancestors and heroes, the Miao people express their reverence for life, their respect for history and their prayers for the future. These beliefs are not only embodied in daily life, but also passed on and developed through rituals and ceremonial music.

1. Nature Worship: Fear and Prayer for Natural Deities

The Miao people live in a mountainous natural environment, where natural phenomena and objects play an important role in their lives[2]. They worship natural deities, such as the sun, moon and stars, mountains, rivers, rocks and trees, wind, rain, thunder and electricity, etc., believing that these natural phenomena and objects have supernatural power and are able to influence the lives of human beings. For example, in Chengbu Miao Autonomous County, the Miao people believe that the gods of mountains, water and land can bless them with good weather and good harvests. One of the most important parts of the Chengbu Miao's "Qinggutang" ceremony is the worship of natural deities. During the ceremony, the shaman will sing the "Invitation Song", the lyrics of which say, "Discus gourd opens the sky, the holy god has the feeling of descending to the mortal world. In the beginning of chaos, the people ate grass and vegetable roots", which expresses the reverence and gratitude to the nature spirits. In addition, the ritual also includes the "Treading on the Field Song and Dance," which is a dance and song to pray to the nature gods for a good harvest. According to field survey data, more than 60% of the rituals of the Miao people in Chengbu are dedicated to nature spirits. These ceremonies are usually held during the spring plowing and fall harvesting seasons every year, reflecting the Miao people's dependence on and reverence for nature.

2. Ancestor Worship: Honoring and Inheriting the Ancestors

Ancestor worship is an important part of the Miao faith. The Miao people believe that the souls of their ancestors can bless their offspring, so they honor their ancestors and pray for their blessings through sacrificial ceremonies[3]. In the rituals of the Miao people in Chengbu, ancestor worship is reflected in the ancestor of the opening of the sky and the invention of the five grains of the ancestor of the Pan gourd, Chi You and other ancestors in the sacrifice. In the "celebration drum hall" ceremony, the sorcerer will one by one invite the ancestors of the Miao deities, from

the Pan gourd, Chi You to the clan's recent deceased, by singing the "invitation song" to recount the great achievements of the ancestors. For example, the lyrics of the song mention "thanking the great gods of all time, setting up drum halls to celebrate each other", expressing gratitude to the ancestors. According to field research, the ancestor worship ceremony of the Miao people in Chengbu usually lasts the longest and is the most solemn. In the "Celebration Drum Hall", the music and dance performances in the ancestor worship section account for about 40% of the time, reflecting the importance of ancestor worship in the beliefs of the Miao.

3. Hero Worship: Veneration and Memorialization of National Heroes

Hero worship is also one of the important elements of the Miao faith. The Hmong people commemorate, through sacrificial ceremonies, those heroes who have made contributions to the nation, such as Pan Gou and Chi You. These heroes are regarded as the protectors of the nation and can bring well-being and blessings to the Miao people. In the ceremony of "Celebrating the Drums", the Hmong people sing the "Song of Invitation" in honor of the hero Panzou. The lyrics of the song say, "Disc Gourd opened the heavens to the gods, and his three heads and six arms are strange shapes. Throughout the ages, only the Disc Gourd clan has been considered the founder of Qiankun", which expresses the admiration and remembrance of Disc Gourd. In addition, the ceremony also recreates the hero's deeds through dance and music to inspire future generations. According to fieldwork data, in the ritual ceremonies of the Miao people of Chengbu, the aspect of hero worship is usually combined with ancestor worship, and the proportion of hero worship in music and dance performances is about 30%.

4. Cultural Connotation of Beliefs and the Formation of Ritual Music

The multi-god worship belief system of the Miao plays a key role in the formation of ritual music. The object of faith, the rituals of faith, the myths explaining the faith and the taboos of faith together constitute the overall cultural phenomenon of the Miao faith. These beliefs not only influence the values and ways of life of the Miao people, but also promote the formation and development of ritual music. In the ceremony of "Celebrating the Drums", the melodies and rhythms of the ritual music are closely related to the beliefs. For example, the melody of "Invitation Song" is solemn and mysterious, and the rhythm is slow and steady, reflecting the reverence for the gods. On the other hand, the melody of "Stomping on the Field Song and Dance" is cheerful and enthusiastic, with a bright rhythm, reflecting the prayers for a good harvest. Field research shows that in the ritual music of the Miao in Chengbu, the changes in melody and rhythm are closely related to the nature of the object of faith. Ritual music for natural deities usually has a soothing melody and a steady rhythm; ritual music for ancestors and heroes has an exciting melody and a fast rhythm.

5. The normative role of faith in social life

Faith, as a special social consciousness that guides people's words and deeds, not

only influences the inner world of the Miao people, but also plays a normative role in their words and deeds. Through rituals and ceremonial music, the Miao people express their reverence and gratitude to nature, ancestors and heroes, and at the same time convey social values and moral norms[4]. In the ceremony of “Celebrating the Drums”, the lyrics not only express the reverence for the gods, but also educate people to honor their ancestors, be industrious and kind, and unite and help each other. These lyrics have become an important carrier for the moral education of the Miao society through the dissemination of the ceremony, regulating people’s behavior.

(1) Respecting the ancestors: passing on family and national memories

Ancestor worship is one of the centers of the “Qinggutang” ceremony. Through ancestor worship, the Miao people strengthen the cohesion of the family and the nation. The “Invitation Song” sung during the ceremony not only honors the ancestors, but also passes down the history of the family. The ancestors mentioned in the lyrics, such as Panzou and Chi You, are not only the national heroes of the Miao people, but also the spiritual symbols of the Miao people. For example: Discus gourd opens the sky and opens up the earth, the achievements of our ancestors will never be forgotten.

- Chiyu invented the five grains, and Miao tasted a hundred herbs before there were good medicines to cure all diseases.

These lyrics not only recount the great achievements of our ancestors, but also educate future generations to remember the contributions of their ancestors and to pass on the memory of the family and the nation. In this way, the Miao people strengthen their sense of identity with the family and the nation and regulate the behavior of family members so that they do not forget their origins.

(2) Hard work and kindness: promoting a positive attitude towards life

The lyrics of the “Qinggutang” ceremony also emphasize the importance of hard work and kindness. For example, the song “Treading the Fields” teaches people to work hard and cherish life by describing the hardships and rewards of labor. The lyrics mention:

- I haven't known the goodness of treading the field since the past, I don't pull the grass when the seedlings fall into the mud. /Later on, when I carried the funeral to the field, I realized that the seeds were full. /From now on, we have to tread the field, and the seedlings have three changes. /The leaves are fat and the root and stem become big, and the grains are full of joy.

These lyrics not only convey respect for labor, but also remind people that only through hard work can they obtain a good harvest. In addition, the lyrics emphasize the importance of kindness, reminding people to help each other and face the challenges of life together. This educational significance has been spread through the rituals and has become an important moral code in Hmong society.

(3) Unity and mutual help: strengthening social cohesion

The “Gyeonggodang” ceremony is not only an offering to ancestors and gods, but also an important social activity in Hmong society. By participating in the ceremony collectively, the Miao people strengthen the spirit of solidarity. During the ceremony, all villagers participate together and express their respect for the gods through choral singing and collective dancing, which also strengthens the cohesion of the group. For example, the Song of Inviting the Gods mentions:

- The Miao people are one family, blessed by our ancestors. /Mutual help and love will be passed on to future generations, and we will move forward together in unity. These lyrics not only express reverence for ancestors, but also convey the social value of unity and mutual help. Through the dissemination of the ceremony, this value has been deeply rooted in people's hearts and become an important behavioral norm in the Miao society.

(4) Promoting good and punishing evil: conveying moral values

“The lyrics of the ceremony also convey the moral concept of promoting good and punishing evil. Through the rituals, the Miao people warn people to do good and keep away from evil. For example, the lyrics mention:

- Good will be rewarded for good and evil for evil, the spirits of our ancestors bless the good. / If you do good deeds with a good heart, your children and grandchildren will be blessed.

This moral concept has become an important code of conduct for the Miao society through the spread of rituals. It not only regulates the behavior of individuals, but also maintains social harmony and stability.

(5) The far-reaching impact of faith on social life

Faith has a profound influence on the social life of the Miao people. Through rituals and ritual music, the Miao people not only express their reverence and gratitude to nature, ancestors and heroes, but also convey social values such as honoring ancestors, hard work and kindness, solidarity and mutual help, and promoting goodness and punishing evil. These values have become important moral norms of the Miao society through the dissemination of the rituals, which influence people's behaviors and lifestyles in a subtle way. In the Chengbu Miao's “Celebration of Drums” ceremony, the performance of lyrics and rituals is not only a religious activity, but also a kind of social education. In this way, the Miao people pass on their family and ethnic memories, moral concepts and social norms to the next generation, making them an important force in maintaining social harmony and stability.

II. Concept of Survival

The survival concept of the Chengbu Miao is one of the important foundations for the formation of their ritual music. The Miao people live in a mountainous natural environment, which provides them with both abundant natural resources and many survival challenges. In this environment, the Miao people have developed unique concepts of survival, which include reverence for nature, dependence on the land,

and the importance of group cooperation. These concepts are not only embodied in their daily lives, but are also passed down and expressed through the rituals and music of the “Celebration of the Drums”.

1. Fear of Nature

The Miao people live in mountainous areas, where the natural environment has a direct impact on their survival. They are in awe of nature, believing that everything in nature is spiritual, such as the gods of mountains, water, wind, rain, thunder and lightning. This concept of reverence prompts them to pray for the protection of the natural spirits through rituals to ensure favorable weather conditions and a good harvest.

Sacrificing nature spirits is one of the important parts of the “Qinggutang” ceremony. For example, the ceremony will sing the “Invitation Song”, in which the lyrics refer to ancestors and deities such as Panzou, Chi You, and Miaowei, expressing reverence for and gratitude to the natural deities. This concept of reverence for nature is not only embodied in the lyrics, but also reinforced through the performance forms of the ceremony. For example, the dance movements in the ceremony imitate natural phenomena, such as wind, rain, thunder and lightning, as a way to express reverence for the power of nature.

2. Dependence on the land

The land is the foundation on which the Miao people rely for their survival, and they have deep feelings for the land. In the rituals of the Miao people, the land god is one of the important objects of worship. The Miao people pray for the fertility of the land and a good harvest by sacrificing to the land god.

The “Treading on the Field Song” in the “Celebration of the Drum Hall” ceremony is a typical embodiment of this concept. The lyrics of the song say: “In ancient times, people did not know how to tread the fields, and the seedlings did not pull grass when they fell into the mud. Later on, when I carried the funeral to the field, I realized that the seeds were full. From then on, we have to step on the field, and there are three changes in the seedlings once we step on them. The leaves are fat, the root and stem are thick, and the grain is full of joy.” This song not only expresses the dependence on the land, but also teaches people to work hard and cherish land resources through singing and dancing. This concept has been passed down through rituals and has become one of the important values of the Miao society.

3. Emphasis on group cooperation

The Miao people live in mountainous areas, where the living environment is relatively hard, so they attach great importance to group cooperation. In the rituals, group cooperation is not only reflected in the organization and implementation of the rituals, but also in the performance of music and dance. The “Celebration of the Drum Hall” ceremony is an activity in which the whole village participates, and all villagers prepare offerings such as sweet wine, glutinous rice and fat pigs, and sing and dance together during the ceremony. This group cooperation not only

strengthens the cohesion among villagers, but also reinforces the performance of the ceremony. For example, the dances in the rituals are usually performed by more than one person, and through the form of collective dances, the respect for the gods is expressed, while the sense of belonging to the group is also strengthened.

(1) The “Invitation Song” and the reverence for natural deities

In the “Celebration Drum Hall” ceremony, the shaman will sing the “Invitation Song”, in which the ancestors and deities mentioned in the lyrics, such as Discus, Chi You and Miao Father, are not only the object of faith of the Miao people, but also a symbolic expression of their faith in the power of nature. Through the singing of the lyrics, the Miao people express their reverence for the natural gods and spirits, and at the same time convey their respect for and awareness of the protection of the natural environment.

(2) The Song of Treading Fields and the Dependence on Land

The Song of Stomping on Fields is one of the most important performances in the “Celebration of the Drums” ceremony. The lyrics tell the history and significance of stepping on the fields, teaching people to work hard and cherish the land. For example, the lyrics say: “Young men and women must work, don’t follow the example of the floating family. Each one must tread the field to have a good harvest in the fall.” This educational significance has become one of the important values of the Miao society through the dissemination of rituals, and reflects the dependence on and reverence for the land of the Miao people.

(3) Embodiment of Group Cooperation

The “Celebration of the Drum Hall” ceremony is a village-wide event in which all villagers prepare offerings and sing and dance together during the ceremony. This kind of group cooperation not only enhances the cohesion among villagers, but also strengthens the performance of the ceremony. For example, the dances in the rituals are usually performed by more than one person, and through the form of collective dances, the respect for the gods is expressed, while the sense of belonging to the group is also enhanced.

The survival concept of the Chengbu Miao is one of the important foundations for the formation of their ritual music. Through their reverence for nature, their dependence on the land, and their emphasis on group cooperation, the Miao people have not only formed a unique way of survival in their daily lives, but have also passed on and expressed these concepts through the “Qinggutang” ceremony and its music. These concepts of survival have not only influenced the behavior of the Miao people, but have also become important values of the Miao society and important carriers of cultural inheritance.

III. Family Inheritance

Family inheritance is one of the important mechanisms for the formation and development of Miao ritual music in Chengbu County. In the Miao society, family is not

only the basic unit of social organization, but also the core carrier of cultural inheritance. Ceremonial music is passed down orally and mentally within the family, which not only preserves the original characteristics of the music, but also strengthens the cultural identity and emotional ties between family members.

In the family heritage of the Chengbu Miao, the elders are usually the inheritors of the ritual music, and they pass on the musical skills and cultural connotations to the younger generation through oral transmission. For example, Yang Changxin, a non-hereditary bearer of the Muye Blow Song, was born into a family full of artistic atmosphere, and his father, Yang Guangqing, is the representative bearer of the Muye Blow Song, which is known as "A Leaf of Jiangnan". Under the influence of his family, Yang Changxin has been interested in the art forms of mountain songs, lusheng, and wood-leaf blowing in the Miao culture since he was a child, and has mastered the skills of wood-leaf blowing under the guidance of his father.

Family activities of the Miao, such as rituals, marriages and festivals, are important scenes in the transmission of ritual music. During these events, family members participate in musical performances together, which not only enhances family cohesion, but also provides opportunities for the younger generation to learn and practice[5]. For example, in the "Qinggu Tang" ritual activities, family members sing ritual songs together, such as the "Sun Song" and the "Song of Sending God", etc., which are passed down through the leadership of the family elders and the participation of the younger generation.

Family inheritance is not static, but is constantly adjusted and innovated with the development of the times. For example, Yang Changxin, on the basis of inheriting the traditional skills of his family, has opened a farmhouse "Xinpuli" and an ethnic culture museum, combining Miao music culture with modern tourism, attracting the attention and participation of more young people. In addition, Chengbu Miao Autonomous County has further expanded the influence of family heritage by organizing training courses for non-genetic inheritors and inviting family inheritors such as Yang Changxin and Chen Yanhua to teach Miao songs and traditional instrument playing skills.

Yang Changxin is the non-genetic inheritor of the Muye Blow Song in Xiaotuan Village, Dankou Town, Chengbu Miao Autonomous County. He not only inherited his father Yang Guangqing's skills, but also opened the "New Shop" folk farm in the family's old house, turning it into an important base for the inheritance of Miao culture. Here, Yang Changxin has attracted a large number of tourists and young people by organizing cultural activities and teaching wood leaf blowing songs, injecting new vitality into the inheritance of Miao music culture.

Chen Yanhua is the inheritor of the provincial intangible cultural heritage of the June 6 Mountain Song Festival in Chengbu, and is known as the "Queen of Mountain Song". She has passed on the singing skills and cultural connotations of the Miao songs to the younger generation through family inheritance. At the June Rock Flow-

er Mountain Song Training Base in Chang'an Ying Town, Chen Rock Flower regularly organizes mountain song training activities, training one batch of young mountain song inheritors after another.

Family inheritance has an irreplaceable role in the formation and development of Chengbu Miao ritual music. It not only preserves the original ecological characteristics of the music, but also provides a solid foundation for the continuation of the culture. However, with the acceleration of the modernization process, the family inheritance is also facing many challenges. On the one hand, the younger generation's interest in traditional music is gradually weakening, resulting in a lack of successors; on the other hand, the way of inheritance within the family is relatively closed and lacks extensive social exchanges, which restricts the dissemination and development of ceremonial music.

IV. Conclusion

Family inheritance is an important way for the continuation of Chengbu Miao ritual music. Through the inheritance of masters and disciples within the family, the practice of music in family activities, and the innovation and development of family inheritance, Miao ritual music has been able to revitalize itself in modern society. However, in the face of the challenges of modernization, how to maintain the tradition of family inheritance while incorporating modern means of education and cultural dissemination will be the key to promoting the sustainable development of Miao ritual music in Chengbu in the future.

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