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SOME NEW THOUGHTS ON PRESERVING QUYI (FOLK SHOW) OF HENAN PROVINCE

Quyí (Folk Show) of central China's Henan Province has a long and rich heritage, and occupies a pivotal role in the cultural history of China. It is an excellent intangible cultural heritage of the peoples living in the Central Plains of China. However, nowadays with rapid development of various forms of modern arts and the influx of Western popular culture, this once flourishing art suffered a steep decline and is now on the verge of extinction. Therefore preserving and safeguarding this precious art form is an urgent task. Facing difficulties of the scarcity of resources and the lack of practitioners and enthusiasts, new ideas and new strategies are needed.

Along with structural cultural heritages, intangible cultural heritages are records of human civilization and represent the rich difference of human culture. The intangible cultural heritages of China are valuable spiritual treasures of the Chinese nation created over centuries of social practice, and are vital components of our excellent cultural tradition. They bear witness to the vitality and creativity of the Chinese nation and reflect the aesthetic ideals, ethnical value, special way of thinking and cultural awareness of the Chinese people. Protecting the intangible cultural heritages is vital to safeguarding China's cultural identity and cultural sovereignty. The preservation and transmission of the intangible cultural heritages is important to give Chinese nationals at home and abroad a sense of cultural and social identity and belonging, and helps enhancing the national cohesion. However, globalization and socialist modernization are threatening many cultural traditions and many intangible cultural heritages are in danger of being marginalized. The opening social environment adversely affects the protection and transmission of intangible cultural heritages and cultural heritages that are transmitted orally, by imitation or by other means are facing serious challenges. Many traditional arts are on the verge of dying out.

Quyí (folk show) is a traditional Chinese folk performing art rich in local flavour, including ballads sung in dialect, musical storytelling, comic dialogues, clipper-talk. It enjoys a wide and extensive popularity and its language is easy to understand and sometimes humorous [2]. Because of its social and entertaining and knowledge values it has steadily developed to be a vital part of the Chinese folklore. Quyí is an old art form that is still widely popular among the populace, therefore it is a living heritage and part of modern arts, which demonstrates its vitality. Henan province, which is located in the central plains of China, has been one of the birthplaces of the Chinese civilization and a vitally important region throughout history. It is the renowned home to Quyí, and this ancient art form is deeply influenced by the fine traditions and rich cultures of the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River. As the valuable intangible cultural heritage of the peoples living in the central plains, Quyí bears witness to thousand years of splendid culture. Henan province was once known for the wide variety of Quyí, and its large repertory as well as the numerous Quyí troupes and practitioners. Among them four forms are highly influential, namely the *Henan zhui zi* (a kind of ballad sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument called *Zhuizixian*), *san xian shu* (story-telling with the accompaniment of a three-stringed instrument), *da diao qu zi* (a kind of ballad singing), and *he luo da gu* (story-telling with the accompaniment of a drum and various other instruments). *Majie shu hui*, the famous national folk art fair, held annually in a place called Majie in Baofeng county, Pingdingshan, Henan Province is a grand cultural event which attracts thousands of Quyí practitioners from various parts of the country to perform and compete. This spontaneous gathering of Quyí practitioners and enthusiasts is inscribed on the first National List of Intangible Cultural Heritages by the State Council in 2006.

Social development tells us culture based on special human society always carries on special characters of the time and the condition. It appeared in a certain historical period and influenced by human activities of the time. On one hand, it reflects the society and human ethos of the time, on the other hand, it served people of that time [4]. The emergence and development of the art of Quyí in Henan province is closely related to the fact that for quite a long time in Chinese history

Henan was the nation's political, economic and cultural center and generations of people in Henan have helped to write the splendid history of the nation. In the early days of Chinese civilization Henan was the national centre both in terms of geographic location and national politics. This is a land that nourished a variety of art forms such as mythology, fables, folk songs, *gu meng shuo chang* (performance by blind musicians in the Zhou Dynasty), *ji xiang ge chang* (singing while striking an instrument called «Xiang»), and *pei you biao yan* (performance of comedians) etc. and this is the place that has been marked by a high degree of cultural exchanges [5]. These various art forms competed and cross-fertilized one another and the resulting amalgam became known as Quyi. Originating from the Han Dynasty, Quyi became a sophisticated art during the Tang Dynasty in the 700s and reached high technical achievements in the Song Dynasty. The various genres sprung up in the Ming Dynasty and gained sustained development during the Qing Dynasty. Some of the present day practitioners of Quyi trace their lineage to masters of Quyi in the Qing Dynasty [5, № 2]. At present about 50 genres of Quyi are still alive and they are art treasures widely enjoyed by the populace.

Henan Quyi is seen as one of the most splendid cultural creations of the peoples of the Central Plains. It has been refined over centuries to stand out prominently among all performing arts in China. Quyi is a highly expressive performance art involving literature, music, dance, acting, props and sets. Its cultural heritage value is embodied in its long tradition and the comprehensive scope and the diversity of contents and musical morphology as well as its high level of sophistication. Of the various genres some are bold and unrestrained and others are melodic; some feature long epics while others are mildly erotic romances and stories closely related to daily life. They complement each other and add to the diversity of the art form. Quyi is the most important entertainment among the working people and plays a distinct and honored role within the society. Since its emergence Quyi is endowed with ideals and emotions and reflects the cultural pursuits, mode of thinking, rituals, social practice and ethnical values of the people it serves [5, № 4]. It is widely circulated and enjoyed by people from various strata of society. For ages it has been an important means of moral education and recreation for the common people, and in some cases it represents the sole source of knowledge about the outside world, and will still be so in a long time.

Both its past glory and wide circulation testify to Quyi's pivotal importance in the cultural history of Henan province. It is the valuable intangible cultural heritage of the people living in the Central Plains. However, in the information age, the advance of science and technology, the development of transportation and communication and the economic globalization have dealt a heavy blow to many folk arts. The influx of foreign cultures, especially the widespread of the broadcasting media, televisions and movies and the Internet have put Quyi in the danger of being marginalized as fashion changes. The interest of young people in Quyi is gradually declining and there are fewer and fewer Quyi practitioners with a stagnant market. Quyi, together with many other cultural traditions, is facing the danger of dying out. This once splendid art form has lost its vitality. So preserving and protecting Quyi is an urgent task for us. Just what to do to transmit and perpetuate Quyi are problems we are going to face in the long run [1].

The usual way of conducting a research is to combine literature search with field work or practice. Yet in research work on Quyi, a major difficulty is the scarcity of records. Despite its long prosperity Quyi is considered crude and unattractive by the elites because it caters to the common people. In its long history it has been disdained by the ruling classes and the literary men. There are very few written records on Quyi. The traditional art is passed on orally from master to protégé. Research finds that many of the aria lyrics and acting techniques survive only in oral tradition. Much of this knowledge depends on some old masters who are in their seventies. When they die, these arias and repertory will be lost. Therefore the focus of the conservation plan must be based on these living connoisseurs and professionals. If we do not see to it that these lyrics and techniques are vigorously safeguarded and transmitted intact to younger actors, they will be lost forever, and with it a valuable part of our national heritage will be gone. Luckily in recent years *government* at all levels has attached great importance to rescuing intangible cultural heritages. In 2009 the Conservatory of Music of Nanyang Normal University conducted a research on «Endangered Quyi Genres of Henan Province». The findings of the research reveal that the situation is quite serious. The lack of educational programs and theoretical research and the passing away of the old masters and young people's indifference to

this traditional art form are serious problems. And the urgent need to video-tape performances of the old masters is of top priority in the protection and preservation of the intangible cultural heritages. Some experts suggest that Henan should use the experience of other regions for reference, for example the weekend cross-talk clubs of Beijing, the Quyi Performance Halls in Tianjin, and the Liu Laogen Grand Stage (performance halls set up by the most famous Chinese comedian Zhao Benshan to promote Errenzhuan – the Two-person Comic Show which is very popular in the North eastern part of China). These are all venues to the enjoyment of traditional art performances. They believe that the existing tea houses in Zhengzhou, capital of Henan province, where people go for the enjoyment of tea and dramas are a success and this mode could be used in promoting Quyi. Setting up tea houses for people to sit down and watch Quyi performances while enjoying a cup of tea is an idea that is worth trying and adhering to.

Yet there is a problem with this approach. Nowadays many people are simply not interested in traditional art performances. Young people often find Western popular culture irresistible and traditional theatres are ignored. So even with various performance halls and tea houses, how can we guarantee a large audience? And is it enough protection that we do have audiences and Quyi lovers to enjoy the performance? One thing must be clear that the key to the preservation of Quyi is to perpetuate it. And the difficulty we are facing now is that there are few people who are interested in learning the art of Quyi acting and singing. We are now facing the danger of losing these cultural treasures after the old generation of practitioners pass away. So the real difficulty here is to perpetuate Quyi and ensure its unbroken transmission from one generation to the next. And scholars and preservationists have struggled with how to best achieve this goal.

In 2003, UNESCO adopted the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* which provides a very useful guide for the States Parties to comply with. Article 2 of the convention promulgates that the purpose of safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage is «transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education». And in 2005 the State Council of China issued a policy document *Directives on Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Our Country* which stipulates the principles for the protection of intangible cultural heritage «preservation with timely rescue; reasonable use of the intangible cultural heritage resource; ensuring transmission and succession [3]. These provide useful guides for Henan in regard to its efforts of protecting Quyi. Children in China have a heavy workload during the 12-year education prior to college and folk arts like Quyi are not on the school's curriculum. It is really a shame that generations of youth grow up who have never seen a Quyi performance. After entering universities, due to their ignorance in this regard, students are usually attracted by the fancy ideas of pop music and Western music that they know nothing about and on the contrary pay no attention to folk arts. Hence it is very clear that our educational programs about Quyi fall far short of its splendid achievements and cultural values. University educational programs about traditional culture including Quyi should have been an important venue for cultivating Quyi talents and enthusiasts. This lack of educational programs on Quyi throughout compulsory education and college education periods greatly accounts for the decline of Quyi. University students are the hopes of the nation and the responsibility for carrying on the fine traditions of the Chinese nation falls on their shoulders. The future of intangible culture depends on the education of younger generations. The greater their awareness of these treasures, the more attentive they surely will be to their protection. Culture is the spiritual bond that ensures the continuity of our Chinese nation and the determining factor of whether we are truly strong or not. Culture can profoundly affect the progress of our country's development and change the destiny of our nation. As we often say what's unique for a nation is also precious for the world, we must never sever the cultural vein of our nation. So we need new initiatives to ensure the unbroken transmission and rejuvenation of these treasures and that initiative is to add Quyi study to university curriculum and rescue Henan Quyi with educational programs!

Compulsory or elective courses on Henan Quyi can be added to university curriculum to give students a chance to get in touch with the profoundness of this art form and to stimulate interests among those who have not heard of Quyi before. They must understand that they are the ones who are going to ensure, or not, the vitality and transmission of these art treasures to the next generations. Globalization has created an international culture that is about likelihood but Quyi represents the rich differences of our culture throughout history. They must realize that these

heritages are important to give people a sense of identity and belonging. They also link our past and present.

As for music majors in universities who have a sound base in articulation and vocalization and performance, specialized courses can be opened to them. They are to study the unique regional features and characteristics of Henan Quyi and the various genres in addition to learning about the emergence and development of this art form. In this way some of them will become professionals and connoisseurs who can sustain and perpetuate Quyi. This is not just a protective method of Quyi but also widens young people's vision and improves their civility and cultural level. It will also help raise their awareness about the threats to our cultural treasures and foster a new thinking on civilization, bringing attention to their duty to the people of the past, present and future to make sure they do not lose these examples of human history.

Rescuing intangible cultural heritage through teaching programs is a wholly new approach and we have applied it to our teaching practice. We have opened courses on *ban tou qu* and *da diao qu* (both of which are genres of Henan Quyi) for our undergraduates who entered university in 2009. We have invited Song Guangsheng, who is the foremost master of *Nanyang ban tou qu* (which is inscribed on the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage) and Huang Tianxi who is the premier master of *Nanyang da diao qu* to be guest professors of the Conservatory of Music of our University. In June, 2010 a Quyi program entitled «Red Plum Blossom in the Snow» took part in the competition for the 6th «Peony Award» (for Quyi performance in China) on behalf of our university and won the Nomination Award. In May 2011 the same program was recommended by the Federation of Literary and Art Circles of Henan Province to take part in the «Gala Celebration Marking the 90th Anniversary of the Founding of the Communist Party of China» co-hosted by the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles and Chinese Quyi Artists Association. The program, as the only one performed by university students, won wide acclaim for its unique vocalization and creative art direction and demonstrated the achievement of our teaching programs.

Henan Quyi is the valuable art treasures created by our ancestors and has been transmitted and perpetuated for ages from one generation of artists to the next. It is an important part of our cultural heritages and an essential component of cultural diversity. The Chinese nation has rich and profound cultural reserves and our forefathers created a splendid civilization. The traditional Chinese culture, both extensive and profound, starts far back and runs a long course. Carrying forward these fine cultural heritages is showing respect for our national history and safeguarding the national dignity is showing patriotism. Henan Quyi has a long and rich heritage and reached a high level of sophistication, yet now its safeguarding has become a top priority. Urgent measures are needed to keep it alive. We must not be complacent and indulge in the past glory, instead, we must advance with times and innovate and revive Quyi vigorously as the market has changed. We hope that Henan Quyi can draw on other forms of theatrical performance and incorporate the strong points to attract the interest of a new generation of Quyi lovers and yield brilliant results in the new era!

The preservation and protection of intangible cultural heritages is of tremendous significance to our efforts in adhering to the scientific outlook on development, safeguarding the cultural safety, improving the overall quality of the people and building a harmonious socialist society. We must realize that our work in safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage has just begun and it is our sacred and unshrinkable responsibility to transmit and perpetuate Quyi, this precious folk art form. We must work strenuously and do everything in our power to formulate detailed and feasible conservation plans by exploring the different methods undertaken by people in different regions in this regard.

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ЛЮ МИНГТ

**ПРОБЛЕМЫ ОХРАНЫ И РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИИ НЕМАТЕРИАЛЬНОГО
КУЛЬТУРНОГО НАСЛЕДИЯ
НА ПРИМЕРЕ ФОЛЬКЛОРНОГО ПРАЗДНИКА
ПРОВИНЦИИ ХЭНАНЬ**

Праздник Цюйи, являясь элементом традиционного национально-культурного наследия китайского народа, занимает одно из центральных мест в истории Китая. В наши дни в связи с быстрым развитием различных форм современного искусства и влиянием западной культуры традиционное народное искусство Китая находится на грани исчезновения. Поэтому его сохранение и защита являются первоочередными задачами как государства, так и специалистов по охране традиционных форм культуры, свойственных народам Центральных равнин Китая.

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