

Persistence and Innovation: The Overseas Publicity of Jiangzhou Drum Music

Ji Lingzhu

Taiyuan Normal University
City of Jinzhong
030619 Shanxi, P. R. China

Zhao Beichuan

Beijing Language and Culture University
City of Beijing
100083, P. R. China

Abstract

Jiangzhou Drum Music, now Chinese National Folk Art Treasure, originates from folk drum music in Xinjiang County, Shanxi province. As a cultural ambassador of China to the world, the drum music has been at show in over forty countries and provided people in the world a unique genre of performing art. The successful dynamic inheritance has drawn attention of the scholars from different research fields in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan: music, history and culture etc. Yet, there has been no relevant study on its overseas publicity. Based on the examination of written documents, such as research articles, news reports, county records, personal handwritten collections of the inheritors and local artisans, and various forms of field investigation, interviews, show-watching, rehearsal observation, the present research tries to make an in-depth study of the factors which promote publicity of the drum music. It is hoped that the international publicity of Jiangzhou Drum Music can become an example for other traditional Chinese folk art forms.

Key Words: Jiangzhou Drum Music; Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe; folk culture; overseas publicity

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About the authors

1. Ji Lingzhu, corresponding author
Associate Professor in Foreign Language Department, Taiyuan Normal University, City of Jinzhong, 030619, Shanxi Province, P.R. China margaretlingzhuji@aliyun.com

Research areas: English language teaching and overseas publicity of Shanxi Folk Culture

2. Zhao Beichuan,
Postgraduate student majoring in translation in Beijing Language and Culture University.

Introduction

As natives of South Shanxi, we have been quite familiar with the drum sounds of our home town for different festivals in Chinese lunar calendar and life rituals like weddings and funerals in the villages, and proud of the famous classical Jiangzhou drum music pieces adapted and modified from the folk drum music in the villages of southern Shanxi, *Price of Qin Reviewing His Army*, *the Lady Generals of the Yang Family*, *the Mice's Wedding* and *The Rolling Walnuts* etc. However, we were shocked by the video clip of Jiangzhou drum music piece, *The Rolling Walnuts*, played by Percussion Ensemble from the University of Minnesota. Although there are only 18 drums (without any other percussion instruments), the sound effect produced was similar to a symphony of different kinds of percussion instruments. The eighteen American percussionists mastered most of the beating techniques of Jiangzhou drum music. If only judged from the sounds of the music, people would had thought it was played by Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe drummers.



Figure1. *The Rolling Walnuts* by Percussion Ensemble from the University of Minnesota
Picture taken from the web video clip by the first author

The music piece was adapted by professional Chinese musicians based on folk drum music piece “*The Rolling Walnuts from the Roof*” in Xinjiang County, Shanxi Province, and first played by women drummers of Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe. Their performance seemed to bring the audience to a rural courtyard in Xinjiang County, telling them a story of walnut farmers in the villages of southern Shanxi with the sounds of dry walnuts rolling down from the sloping tiled roof and sharing happiness after harvests with the farmers.



Figure 2. *The Rolling Walnuts* played by the lady drummers of Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe
Courtesy of Mr. Jin Qiao¹

While appreciating the performance of the two groups of percussionists, we cannot help asking the questions: How could the Jiangzhou drum music piece be played by an American university percussion ensemble? How did the Jiangzhou drummers from the villages in Xinjiang County, Shanxi Province go across the world and play their wonderful drum music in the music halls of other countries, and won many fans across the world?

Then authors scrutinized existing research findings on Jiangzhou drum music from scholars of different perspectives, which can be put into the following categories: 1) historical and cultural origin;² 2) characteristics of the music;³ 3) the inheritance situation;⁴ 4) differences and similarities between traditional and modern Jiangzhou drum music;⁵ 5) teaching situation and training of professional and part-time drummers⁶ etc. Some researchers mentioned the performance of Jiangzhou Drum music troupe in other countries as examples,⁷ which guided us to read newspapers, magazines, watch the relevant TV news reports, and interview the local artisans, county government leaders and folk music experts in person or via telephone, Wechat or QQ. On this basis, we managed to sort out the publicity of the folk music out of its original context to other places in China and the world, then try to excavate the internal and external factors which facilitated its spreading in the world.

1. The publicity of Jiangzhou Drum Music at home outside Xinjiang County and in the world

1.1 The establishment of Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe

If it had not been Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe, it would not have been possible for the music treasure to be appreciated by the people in other countries. In the 1980s, Mr. Wang Qin'an was the director of the Xinjiang County Cultural Center, his work took him to the villages and met some folk artisans. The more he got to know the folk music of the villagers, the more he found it valuable when he collected folk art works with his colleagues around the villages of Xinjiang. Knowing that this art was going down hill at the time, he decided to take some actions to save and protect the folk treasure. He spent four years on collecting the scattered folk drum music notes in over one hundred villages, watching the village rituals and interviewing the folk artists. Finally he collected over 30 complete and over one hundred fragmented drum music scores. Under his strong leadership, in nearly 20 years, the amateur drum band (Xinjiang County Farmers' Drum Team) developed into a professional art troupe (Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe) through painstaking efforts.

In June 1987, Shanxi Provincial Government held the first folk art festival in Taiyuan, asking the counties under its jurisdiction to select programs with local characteristics and perform in Taiyuan, the provincial city. To Mr. Wang Qin'an, this was a precious opportunity. He convened more than 20 folk drummers from villages in Xinjiang county and organized the "*Xinjiang County Farmers' Drum Team*", and led them to perform on the provincial stage. This was the first time the team had performed outside Xinjiang County. The two pieces of music they performed, *Prince of Qin Reviewing His Troops* and *The Rolling Walnuts*, later became world-famous drum music works. Their outstanding performance at the festival won themselves the gold medal in the competition, and the team was even appointed by the sponsoring committee to represent Shanxi Province in the "*Music Festival of Dragon Year*", which was to be held in Beijing in 1988. Mr. Wang Qin'an was extremely happy for the opportunity to spread the folk music outside Shanxi. On January 31, 1988, the team participated as the representative of Shanxi Folk Art Troupe in the closing ceremony of "*Dragon Music Festival of Dragon Year*". All the other participating groups attended the festival were first class professional troupes across China, whereas Xinjiang County Farmers' Drum Team was the only amateur music group which had the honor to be invited to the ceremony. However, their performance of *Prince Qin Reviewing His Troops* was a great hit, and was highly praised by the audience, professional percussionists and the art critic circle nationwide. After the Festival, Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe officially announced its establishment on the basis of Xinjiang County Farmers' Drum Team, with Mr. Wang Qin'an as the first director.

1.2 The path of publicity of Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe at home outside Xinjiang and abroad

After the *Dragon Music of the Dragon Year Music Festival*, the troupe had been invited to different places to perform in the early stage. They started from the temple fairs, weddings and funerals in the rural area of Shanxi to the music halls in the major cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai; During the show in the big cities, they received invitations from Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and other Asian countries. At the same time, the value of the music was more and more recognized by the international musical circle. Now people from over forty countries in five continents are able to appreciate the charming Jiangzhou Drum Music.

By reviewing literature, news reports and celebrities' comments, the places they had performed are organized for the first time in accordance to the geographical locations.

1.2.1 From a small county in south-western Shanxi to big cities

Beijing

As the highest-standard music hall in China, Beijing Concert Hall has always been positioned to present elegant art. However, in March 1996, the Beijing Concert Hall received its first amateur troupe of farmers, **Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe**. For the first time drum music played by farmers were on show in this splendid hall. This unprecedented concert naturally aroused people's hot discussion about whether or not the gongs and drums should be performed in the concert hall. Some cheered for these folk drummers, saying that the performance embodied the cultural heritage of the Chinese nation; while others held a skeptical view and compared it as street vendors selling roast mutton shashliks in a five-star hotel.

Ninety percent of the seats in the music hall were filled for that show. Almost all the capital art groups and many percussion players in colleges and universities were present. They were shocked by the high level beating skills of rural drummers. Mr. Liang Maofang, a professor at the Central Conservatory of Music, told reporters: "The drummers have a sharp feeling on music," "they have high-level skills," and "This is a world-class artwork." In an interview, Mr. Shu Chengyi, the chief percussionist of the Central Radio Symphony Orchestra, commented on the performance of drummers, "This is an 'amateur group' with professional drumming skills."⁸

CCTV reporters followed up the interviews. In the "*Literature and Art Wide Angle*" program, the reporters' interviews with Chinese and foreign audiences were broadcasted. Here are some of the comments: "I think it is very good, very rhythmic;" "Warm and joyful mood"; "Very good, the performance of Chinese folk drums is so natural and exciting"; "Authentic folk drum music, professional level".⁹

Shanghai

In June 1999, Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe brought their music to the Shanghai Grand Theater, the top modern urban theater in China and an overpass for cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries. The Grand Theatre was so attractive that even though they came from the countryside in the north, the attendance was still impressive. And the result was satisfying: the whole concert won thunderous applause.

The famous percussionist, Mr Li Minxiong, said happily on stage: "The audience's applause is the recognition for your playing, and also for the Chinese national percussion music. Your performance is successful! Everyone is too absorbed by your music to leave the hall until the end of the concert, and this is the best proof of your success."¹⁰ According to the reports from **Wen Wei Po Daily** and **Xinmin Evening News** on the next day, "They performed a shocking and exciting evening show of the *Drum Rhythm on the Yellow River*. The audience experienced the magic of traditional Chinese drum music."¹¹

1.2.2 From mainland to Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan

Hong Kong

In February 1995, drummers from the Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe were invited to **Hong Kong Arts Festival** and **the 6th Macau Arts Festival**.

The Hong Kong Arts Festival is a high-end international artistic event, which is usually held in the Grand Theater of the Cultural Center with more than 1600 seats, a modern art performance venue and also one of the first-class theaters in Southeast Asia. Performances are consecutively on show there, each ticket cost as much as 220 Hong Kong dollars. The venue was packed and during their performance, the audience was so impressed and moved that they applauded as many as 40 times, and the curtain call lasted for as long as six minutes before it finally drew.

The successful performance of the drummers introduced the folk music and small county in Shanxi to HongKong. Drum music brought about twenty years' cooperation and exchange in percussion music exchanges in performances and teaching between Xinjiang and Hong Kong. During the summer vacation every year, Hong Kong will send students to Xinjiang to engage in drumming and cultural exchange activities.

In autumn or Spring Festival every year, there will be drum music competition for drummers from Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and Xinjiang either held in Xinjiang county town or Hong Kong. The leaders of Xinjiang County government and drum music professionals have always taken the exchanging activities very seriously, and each year they warmly welcome the kids from Hong Kong with comfortable accommodation and catering arrangements, and drum music teaching and practicing schedule.



Figure 3. Children from Hong Kong learning drum music skills in Xinjiang County during summer holidays
Courtesy of 360 pictures

Macau

On March 2nd 1995, Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe went to Macau to take part in the 6th Macau Art Festival. Mr. Yin Limin, who was in charge of the reception work, said: “that audience here in Macau is introverted and not used to applauding; usually they just leave the music hall when they dislike the show.”¹² There were many performing art groups from Macau, Portugal and other places attending this festival, but Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe had the honor to play the first music piece. The organizing committee of the art festival trusted that the drummers from Xinjiang would bring a good beginning. Under the pressure, the drummers performed their best. At last, the performance of the peasant artists conquered thousands of spectators present, successfully setting off the first shot for the Macau Arts Festival

Taiwan

China’s drum music king, Mr. Wang Baocan, contributed a lot to the spreading of Jiangzhou Drum Music in Taiwan. His name is a household word in Taiwan music circle. Shao Shufen, a lecturer in the Department of Chinese Music at Taiwan Art University, said: “Since ancient times, folk music especially gongs and drums music in Shanxi has always been very rich and diverse in varieties, and exquisite in playing techniques. But the reason why the drum music of Shanxi can be extended from one province to all China and even the world is because of the constructive and consistent efforts of Mr. Wang Baocan, who not only taught the essence of Shanxi gong and drum music, but also continued to compile teaching materials and compose new works.” In recent years, he traveled thousands of miles and devoted to spread Shanxi gong and drum music in Taiwan. During his 15 years as a visiting professor in Taiwan, Mr. Wang Baocan had taught nearly 300 students in the Department of Ethnomusicology in Nanhua University and trained more than 20 master percussionists.

Taiwan’s drum music has been booming in recent years, mainly because it draws extensively on the Chinese and Western percussion nutrients of different styles. Among them, the wave of Jiangzhou drum music brought by Mr. Wang Baocan has the lion’s share, and it has also had a profound impact on Taiwan’s young generation of percussion workers.

“Today, Jiangzhou drum music can be heard everywhere in Taiwan, and Chinese drumming culture has been well inherited and developed in Taiwan.” Mr. Wang Baocan said, “I hope that Jiangzhou Drum Music is not only performed on the mainland, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, but also at every corner in the world.”¹³

1.2.3 From China to other Asian countries

Malaysia

From August 1st to August 23rd, 1997, at the invitation of the Ken Ken Cultural and Education Center in Malaysia, the Troupe went to Malaysia to hold 12 tour charity performances themed “*The Dragon Pulse*”. They gave performance in Kuala Lumpur, Seremban, Malacca, Johor Bahru, and Segway in the south, Kuantan Perak on the east coast, Ipoh, and Penang in the north for the purpose of raising funds for culture, art, education, and charity.

Out of love for Jiangzhou Drum Music, the organizer spared no efforts to invite the troupe from distant China to Malaysia, and also invited the drum makers of the troupe in advance. The world's largest drum, jointly made by the two countries, with a drum body diameter of 3.97 meters and a drum surface diameter of 3.09 meters was used in this charity performance. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir attended the promotion ceremony of “The World’s Largest Drum” and enjoyed the performance with tens of thousands of spectators. Malaysian Supreme Head of State Gu Chahua and his wife, together with senior government officials and foreign envoys attended the first charity performance. As reported in Malaysia’s New Life News, “the world’s most exquisite drum art is in China, China’s best drum art is in Shanxi, and Shanxi’s best drum art is in Xinjiang.”¹⁴

Singapore

From June 1st to June 5th, 1997, at the invitation of the National Arts Council of Singapore, Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe and art performance groups from Japan, India, Russia, Caucasus and other countries and regions participated in *the Singapore Asian Performing Arts Festival*. They gave 15 performances in the main performance area “Festival Village”, with an audience of nearly 40,000 people, including Chinese Singaporeans and foreign visitors, as well as audiences who came from Philippines and Malaysia. The drummers conquered the audience of different nations completely with their enthusiasm and superb drum-beating skills.

South Korea

On December 27, 1997, at the invitation of the Ministry of Culture and Sports of South Korea, Jiangzhou Drum Music troupe, participated in Drum Art Festival held in Seoul, South Korea. Jiangzhou Drum Music troupe, representing the artistic style of the Yellow River Civilization in China, performed on the same stage together with the National Dance Company of Korea and the Daigoro Dance Company of Japan at the National Theater of South Korea. The national central theatre with nearly 3,000 seats packed with audience. The performance was a great success, and it was a wonderful feast for the people of Seoul.

The Korean culture and art community attaches great importance to this performance. On the first performance on December 29, Mr. Song Tae-ho, the Minister of Culture and Sports of Korea attended the opening ceremony and watched the first show. He spoke highly of the successful cooperation and wonderful performances.

In Korea, Jiangzhou Drum Troupe played more than a dozen music pieces, including *Prince of Qin Reviewing His Troops*, *Mice wedding* and so on, each of which has its own characteristics and won applause from Korean audience.

Japan

On November 12, 2005, at the invitation of Saitama Prefecture of Japan, Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe went to Japan for the first time and held three concerts at the Tama Theater, Simple Insurance Theater, and Art Theater in Saitama Prefecture.

Their drum music caused a smash hit in Japan and was highly praised by music professionals. The famous Japanese pianist Yuki Nakashima said: "Chinese drum music has such a spirit that it touches me so deeply and I feel so excited. The epic *The Yellow River Boatman* is the most impressive one for me; although I don't know the background of the story, the music itself is still so touching.

1.2.4 From Asia to other continents

Denmark

In September 1995, Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe was selected by the Chinese Cultural Ministry to attend the Aarhus Art Festival in Denmark.

Aarhus holds an art festival every year; in 1995, Aarhus held the first art festival with the theme of Asian Art, entitled “In the East”. Oriental art was chosen as the main theme to promote the understanding between the East and West peoples through cultural exchanges. More artists were invited than in any previous year: more than 100 Chinese artists, as well as artists from Thailand, Japan, Vietnam and so on, a total of over 300 people.

As China’s cultural ambassador, Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe successfully won the recognition from the Danish people with their wonderful performances. Simonson (Mayor of Aarhus, Denmark): It was amazing that more than 30 people played at the same time with no conductor, and the performance was just so good that it is worthy of any praising words! For many years, it is the first time for us to appreciate such a good performance. I bet the Danish audience will have to wait for at least ten years for the same good music. This year, no other performance can compete with those by Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe from People’s Republic of China.

Skofo (Denmark Aarhus Festival Production Director): I have been organizing the Aarhus Festival for seven years, but I have never seen such impressive performance. This concert hall is generally good if a half of the seats filled. But this time their excellent performances helped us to sell out all the tickets. It is the first time for me to find so enthusiastic audience. Some people were very happy when they got tickets, while others felt disappointed because they didn’t. I just wonder why there are only a few performances scheduled for such good Chinese artists? This is something we didn’t expect. It is for sure that we may schedule more performances for them next time.¹⁵

The U.K.

The Edinburgh International Festival is an annual festival of performing arts in Edinburgh, Scotland which lasts for over three weeks in August. The Festival Director usually invites top class performers of music (especially classical music), theatre, opera and dance from around the world to perform .

At first, only some people came to watch the performance of Jiangzhou drummers because they were newcomers. But gradually people were amazed by their music, and there were more and more favorable reviews in the media, and everyone who watched the performance was amazed. Stephen Todd of Glasgow told Xinhua News Agency: “You Chinese are really incredible, just like doing magic. I never imagined that drums could be knocked like this before.”¹⁶

The time they performed in the UK coincided with the Beijing Olympic Games and the handover ceremony between the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2012 London Olympics. On August 22nd, major British cities held a grand celebration for the hosting of the next Olympic Games in the country. Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe participated in The Notting Hill Carnival, an annual event in London since 1966 in the streets of the Notting Hill area of Kensington, for two days in August. They played the drum music piece of *Female Warriors of the Yang Family* on the float parade and attracted a lot of viewers.



Figure 4: Performance of *Female Warriors of the Yang Family* in The Notting Hill Carnival on the float parade in 2008. Courtesy of Huang Fang.¹⁷

Morocco

In order to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Morocco, Chinese and Moroccan governments co-organized cultural exchange activities from October 29 to November 14, 1998. Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe had the honor to participate in the celebrations together with the Chinese government cultural delegation. They travelled more than 200 kilometers a day in their performing tours in cities such as Rabat, Casablanca, and Safi. The Prime Minister of Morocco, Yusuf, senior officials of various ministries, representatives of international organizations in Morocco, and delegations from various countries and people from all walks of life in Morocco watched the opening performance.¹⁸

America

On June 9, 2007, at the invitation of IAI International Performing Arts Company of the United States, Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe toured the United States and Canada for two months and gave 31 performances. Audiences in 25 cities of 17 states of the United States had the opportunity to enjoy the splendid drum music. They gave the first performance in Princeton University. It was the first time for the American audience to appreciate the Chinese percussion music that could touch the deep corners of their souls. They were shocked to see so many drummers performing at the same time for as long as two hours without a conductor. The president of IAI International Performing Arts Company witnessed such an exciting moment.

The Consul General of the Chinese Consulate in New York, Liu Biwei, and President Bush's Asian adviser, Mr. Huang Huaheng, drove through the rain for 4 hours and rushed to Philadelphia to watch the performance: "Your excellent drum music deserves the applause and praise you receive from the audience. I am confident you are able to spread Chinese drum culture to the world." Just as reported in *Sing Tao Daily*: "Drum music with full of traditional Chinese characteristics, coupled with dreamy high-tech lighting, makes drum lovers enchanted."¹⁹

After years of hard work, Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe has successfully innovated the Drum Music and the Troupe itself. In 2002, Jiangzhou Drum Music was included in the database of *the Representative works of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* on the recommendations of professionals in the music circle home and abroad. In 2006, Jiangzhou Drum Music was inscribed in the list of the first batch of **National Intangible Cultural Heritage** masterpieces by Chinese Ministry of Culture. Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe was awarded "National Model Group for Folk Art Performance" by the Central Propaganda Department and the Ministry of Culture.

2. Internal factors:

The folk drum music around Xinjiang County (Jiangzhou Prefecture in history), Shanxi Province has travelled so far to other areas in China, and further to the neighboring Asian countries and countries in other continents. It is very necessary for us to excavate the in-depth factors which empowered the music to travel so far.

2.1 profound historical and cultural deposits

Xinjiang is located in the southwest of Shanxi Province, north of the city Yuncheng, adjacent to Xiangfen County, at the bordering area of Shanxi, Shaanxi, and Henan Provinces, the golden triangle of an important birth place of Chinese civilization.

Shanxi province is famous for drums and drum music. Southern Shanxi is one of the cradles of ancient Chinese civilization with three major archeological discoveries: The Site of State Jin (BC 1033-BC376), Dingcun Site (Paleolithic artifacts) and Taosi Site (Neolithic Age), a part of Longshan Culture. There have been altogether 28 musical instruments excavated by now in Taosi Site: Seven pottery drums (土鼓 in Chinese,), eight Tuogu (鼙鼓 in Chinese, drum made of crocodile leather), four chime stones (磬 in Chinese, big percussion instrument made of stone/jade), seven pottery bells, one bronze bell, and one pottery Xun (ancient Chinese wind instrument), mostly found in the tombs of high-positioned people. From the numbers and positioning of the pottery drum, Tuogu and chime stone in the highest level tomb, we can infer the coexistence of the three kinds of percussion instruments and formation of their numbers: two Tuogus, one chime stone and one pottery drum. The different shapes, sizes and materials used to make these instruments could help the ancient musicians to produce magnificent ritual music. The discovery confirmed that drum-beating techniques reached a high level in Southern Shanxi in the Neolithic Age.



Figure 5. Pottery drum unearthed in Taosi Site
Courtesy of 360 pictures



Figure 6. TuoGu (crocodile leather drum) unearthed in Taosi Site
Courtesy of 360 pictures



Figure 7. Chime stone unearthed in Taosi Site (made of stone /jade)
Courtesy of 360 pictures



Figure 8. *The geographical position of Xinjiang County, Shanxi, China*

Xinjiang County is only twenty kilometers away from **Taosi site**, therefore the origin of Jiangzhou drum music can be dated back to the Neolithic Age, about 5000-4000B.C.

The written records and field investigation results show that the music embraced its first peak in Tang Dynasty (618-907A.D.), glorious in Chinese history economically, culturally and politically. Jiangzhou was a significant defending city of the capital Chang'an (today's city of Xi'an). As an important water and land wharf to the capital during that period, Jiangzhou prospered in handicraft and commerce. The national and regional economic power, and the open policy of Tang Dynasty provided Jiangzhou Drum Music the opportunity to exchange with other cultures and become more diverse in themes and creative tactics. According to historical records and other researchers, the famous Court music of Tang Dynasty, *The Prince of Qin Crashing the Enemy's Battle Line*, borrowed the music scores and playing techniques from Jiangzhou folk drum music. Then drum music pieces popular in Xinjiang County for generations, **Prince of Qin Reviewing His Army** (小秦王乱点兵 *in Chinese*), **Rain Praying Ritual of Emperor Li Shimin** (唐王出城 *in Chinese, drum opera*), and the folk drum carts, are all related to Emperor Li Shimin in early Tang Dynasty.²¹

However, some evidence from the field investigation brought some clues that the drum music may have experienced another peak during the much earlier historical periods than Tang dynasty. In the folk festive celebration in Wan-an Town during spring harvest praying in 2019, there was a horse-drawn drum cart with the big Chinese characters “耿王出征” (meaning the King of State Geng marching to the battle field). The drummers did not know the meaning, they only told us that the drum cart of their village had always hung this banner for generations. From the historical record, we found that State Geng(1524-661BC) was a vassal of Shang Dynasty in the bordering area between the present Xinjiang and Hejin Counties. This can be regarded as a piece of evidence proving that the origin of Jiangzhou Drum Music is related with the ancient battle drum. During the Spring and autumn and Warring state period, the drum music had already been famous throughout the country. This shows that Jiangzhou Drum music may have experienced several peaks of development in history, with the most records and traces left from Tang Dynasty.

2.2 The fertile folk land for Jiangzhou Drum music

Nurtured by the local history and culture, the drum music not only keeps performing its traditional role at the temple fairs and local people's life rituals, but also interacting with the contemporary folk activities: government sponsored festivals, folk arts competitions, cultural exchanges home and abroad, etc. There are drum music lovers and spontaneous organizations of drum fans in many villages. They spend their free time practicing at home, performing in the neighboring villages at temple fairs, weddings or funerals, taking part in the folk art competitions in county town or different cities. Their persistence has forged the vitality of Jiangzhou Drum Music consistently.

2.2.1 Temple fairs

Temple fairs(庙会 in Chinese) are Chinese religious gatherings for the worship of the Chinese folk gods and immortals. Drum music has played a major role in the sacrifices for thousands of years. Large-scale temple fairs in Xinjiang have usually been held around Chinese lunar New Year in early spring, harvest praying as well as carnival for the locals in slack season. Some temple fairs days fall on the birthdays or specific memorial days of the deities enshrined in the temples, which is common in Xinjiang county town area where residents do not engage in farming. In early years of Republic of China (ROC), there were still about 500 temples across Xinjiang County. As recorded in the *Xinjiang County Records* published in 1929, “once there was a temple fair, a lot of ritual activities as well as entertainments were on show, mainly different music pieces played by drums and gongs, land boat dancing, stilts...”²²

Some temple fairs in Xinjiang also served for rain praying. People used to pray for rain and good harvest in Dragon God’s Temple (龙王庙 in Chinese). In ancient China, due to the backward farming and irrigation technology, agriculture output was solely decided by the amount of rainfall, and rain-praying was a common concern of imperial governments and the local people. The ancients believed that the Dragon God (龙王爷 in Chinese) was in charge of rainfall, so they worshipped Dragon God with sacrifices of drum music in spring and autumn, trying to send their wishes for sufficient rainfall and good harvest to the Dragon Gods in heaven via the sounds of drums. In autumn they held temple fairs again to express their gratitude to gods. Except for praying for good harvest, the ancients also prayed for health and safety away from the evil spirits, and protection and peace from the deities and immortals during wartime.

Except drum music, there are other activities to reward their gods and immortals: incense burning, local opera performance, processions with clay figures of the gods on carts-drawn by horses accompanied with drum beatings throughout villages and cities, performance of musical and ritual troupes, offerings of different kinds of food and paper money brought to the temple by the temple-goers, and various donating activities. In temple fairs of Jiangzhou, drum music has been the lead for thousands of years.

2.2.2 Life rituals

Historically the development of Xinjiang County (Jiangzhou Prefecture in history) underwent three climaxes respectively during Qin and Han dynasties, Tang Dynasty and the Ming and Qing Dynasties till the Republic of China, being a manufacturing, commercial and cargo distribution center. People there lived a relatively affluent life, so they had a higher demand for spiritual life. The local festival celebrations and life rituals were more diverse and complex than other places during the same periods. In ancient Jiangzhou Prefecture, people even felt ashamed and lost the sense of belonging if there were no drum music for their weddings or funerals, no matter for the rich or the poor.

Funeral marks the end of one’s life, regarded as the most important life ritual by the locals. The funeral ceremonies are more complex, and coffins and tomb chambers are better prepared than in other areas, which is explained by archeological discoveries. In the tombs of the Yuan Dynasty unearthed in villages of Nanfanzhuang and Zhaili in Xinjiang County, the tomb chambers were even better decorated than residential houses of the neighboring places. Jiangzhou Drum Music is more commonly played on funerals than on weddings. The funeral drum music contains elements of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, either mourning the dead by eulogizing his/her lifetime deeds and showing filial piety of his/her descendants, or warding off the evil spirits, or wishing the deceased a better future life.

2.2.3 Festival celebrations and business ceremonies

In the past, drum music in Xinjiang County had been popular among the villagers in temple fairs and life rituals. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, although the folk religious activities had been banned by the government as feudal or superstitious leftovers for a period of time, drum music has always been widely performed at weddings, funerals, business occasions, other festival celebrations and public events sponsored by governments at different levels, such as *China Farmers’ Harvest Festival* in Autumn, *Peach Flower Day* in spring etc.

Deep roots in the fertile historical and cultural soil and vitality in the folk life grant the music power to publicize and spread in different parts of the world.

2.3 The Charm of Jiangzhou Drum Music

Gong and drum music is the most widely spread national folk art with rich varieties: Chaoshan Drum music(潮汕大鼓in Chinese) in Guangdong Province, Long drum of Korean minority group (朝鲜族长鼓in Chinese) in Jilin Province, and waist drum in northern Shaanxi Province (陕北腰鼓in Chinese) and so on. Jiangzhou Drum music, with its colorful and rich artistic techniques and expressive power, became one of the outstanding representatives. Its representative works have impressed audience home and abroad, and also been highly praised by the music professionals. In *The Female Generals of the Yang Family*, the drummers' skillful beating, actions and the costumes created the battle scenes on the northern border against the nomadic invaders in Song Dynasty. In *The Chatting*, the four male drummers depicted the farmers' cheerful and humorous chat during the break of their farming work. In *The Mice Wedding*, drummers tell the audience a Chinese fairy tale: at late night while people are soundly sleeping, a group of mice had a wedding procession, everything decorated (the sedan chair for the bride, the horse for the bridegroom and all the musical instruments used etc) and all the mice dressed up , accompanied by happy drum and gong music. These pieces are either vivid and humorous, or grand, pastoral, powerful and brave, or guide the audience into wild and fanciful thoughts. Jiangzhou drum music has overtaken people's common cognition of drum music, since the drummers have discovered different sound ranges of drums and developed more than ten kinds of complicated beating techniques via changing the beating force, angle and speed: drum edge beating, drum nails rubbing, brushing drumheads, hitting the drum sides, knocking the metal rings and so on. The combination of multi drum beating skill produces a blending drum music of delicacy with brilliant varied musical features, and upgrades the drum music to a new level of an independent performing art to lead a concert.²³

2.4 Arduous Efforts made by Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe drummers in the course of transition and upgrading

From small villages in Shanxi to different countries around the world, Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe has earned a reputation in percussion music circle and set a good example for creative development of many other traditional Chinese art forms. In recent years, due to the impact of modern civilization, traditional Chinese folk music is in a state of decline with Jiangzhou Drum Music as an exception. The current success of Jiangzhou Drum Music is inseparable from the efforts made by Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe, the individual artists and the governments at different levels.

2.4.1 Overcoming funding difficulties

From the day the Jiangzhou Drum Art Troupe was founded, all the team members and their group leaders worked with selfless dedication and perseverance in order to achieve the dream of spreading Jiangzhou Drum Music to the outside world, and they overcame many more difficulties than they expected in the initial stage.²⁴

As an art group composed mainly of farmers, with neither government nor enterprise funding, the economic situation of Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe once plagued its survival and development. Although the art troupe had received praise and reputation both at home and abroad in recent years, it was once stuck in a state of being unable to make ends meet and borrowing money for subsistence.

In the early days, they rented the classrooms of a previous school or the old barracks of the army because they did not have their own buildings. At that time, the whole troupe, with more than 20 people, once squeezed into two classrooms in a rural middle school. Without extra money to buy beds , they just slept on the floor or on the desks or stools. Their rehearsal hall was the school playground in the open air. Every day they practiced from 6:00 am to 10:00 pm in either the hot sun, strong wind or even drizzling. Their skin peeled off under the scorching sun and countless drumsticks were broken. In order to solve the problems of shortage and excessive wear of musical instruments, they invented the method of practicing basic drum-beating skills on trunks and logs. Since they had no funds, the director, Mr. Wang Qin'an went around asking for financial supporting and led his troupe to save money by all means. Mr. Wang Qin'an spent all his monthly salary of 300 RMB and his family savings on supporting the Troupe. He borrowed money from relatives and friends, and sometimes even had to borrow usury to sustain the Troupe's daily expenditure. The members also understood the difficulties they encountered, and contributed as much as they could: asking their family members to do more farm work during the busy season, giving up the opportunity to make money on their own by doing other sidelines, donating money to the troupe (from their family savings or borrowed from their friends and relatives).

The embarrassing financial situation was related to the economy of the region. Xinjiang County is administratively affiliated to the City of Yuncheng in Shanxi Province, a grain-producing area. Although Xinjiang had been glorious in history, it gradually lost its economic advantages from the period of Republic of China. The previous “Seventy-two Trade” crafts center was reduced to an area with agriculture as the single economic mode. The county government could not afford to allocate any funding, and neither did banks approve loans for cultural institutions. Such financial environment is obviously detrimental to the survival of the art troupe. At the critical moment of the troupe, Mr. Wang Qin’an(2001) decisively proposed: “We shall go out of the small county, and to Shanghai to find our market and our way to survive, and seek for development opportunities.”

It was not easy to get established in the show circle of Shanghai. They encountered another series of difficulties: financial strains and improper performing style for Shanghai market. They struggled and survived.

2.4.2 Innovating the music and performing techniques

Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe has adopted a very sensible approach to the traditional drum music heritage, that is, to keep innovating and improving the Music. They did not retain their traditions invariably, a kind of gradual change and innovating on the basis of keeping the essence of the folk music system. Mr. Wang Qin’an, director of Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe, explained their artistic feature as “derived from tradition, but higher than tradition”, “Our drum music is meant to be shown on the modern stage and for the contemporary audience, not to be only displayed in the museum.”²⁵

Their most famous classical work, *King Qin Reviewing the Troop*, is adapted after traditional Music of *Prince of Qin Crashing the Enemy’s Battle Line*, the early version of the national music of Tang Dynasty. But it is by no means the same as the Tang national music, but a new type of music that has absorbed the essence of traditional folk drum music and upgraded by professional musicians. The music piece is composed of traditional drumbeats, the development methods, as well as the structural principles of comprehensive reproduction that are common in Western music. Another famous piece, *The rolling walnuts*, is based on the local drum music piece, *Rolling Walnuts from the Roof*. Although it adopted the local drum playing skills, “multi-technique drum-beating” (花敲鼓 in Chinese), it also has undergone a lot of professional artistic adaptation. The traditional multi-technique drum-beating had little changes in beating speed and the use of strength, with monotonous and dull sound effect. Twenty-four drums, two splints, and two clappers had been used. But the revised formation of the band only includes 8 drummers and 1 splinter. The improved composition assisted drum performance to transform from the squares and streets to stages. Moreover, in the revised version, slow, medium and fast drumbeats are used alternately and constantly empowering the expressive power of the music. Besides, the coexistence of traditional features and modern elements in the new drum music is more and more favored by audience of different age groups, and various cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

The creative transformation of the traditional art is actually a remoulding process: the changes of music itself (themes and techniques), personnel organization in the band and even the music function.²⁶ This is a very difficult and arduous choice for the folk artists facing the surviving challenges in modern society in and outside their regional context, very similar to the rejuvenation of an ancient civilization in modernization. However, only through continuous and painstaking innovation in the form and content of the art, can Jiangzhou Drum Music, the ancient folk art, maintain its vitality in the rapidly developing modern society.

Meanwhile, their efforts in composing new works rewarded. With the selfless help of many professional musicians such as Wang Baocan, Jing Jianshu, and Huai Hai in Taiyuan, An Zhishun in Xi’an, Li Zhengui in Beijing, Li Minxiong and Zhou Chenglong in Shanghai, the troupe has successively composed and played many pieces of drum music including *Prince of Qin Reviewing His Troops*, *The Rolling Walnuts*, *Mice’s Wedding*, *The Heaven Waterfall*, *Roaring of the Tiger And the Dragon*, *Delightful Earth*, *The Legend of Drumming Mountain*, *The Bull Against the Tiger*, *Military Orders Against the Jin Army*, *The Speaking of the Loess*, *The Chat* etc. They are composed on the basis of the folk art, but far beyond it in both drum-beating techniques and themes expressed. Performed both in the square as popular entertainment and on the stage as high art, these excellent works have touched the hearts of hundreds of millions of audience home and abroad, laid a solid foundation for the troupe’s survival and development in the contemporary show business circle.²⁷

3. External Factors

3.1 Assistance from individuals in and outside the music circle

Except for the artists who helped the Troupe compose new works, there were also brokers and sound engineers who made significant contribution to the spread of Jiangzhou Drum Music. Experts from both print media and electronic media worked shoulder to shoulder to record and disseminate the drum music. The publication of the album *Jiangzhou Drum Music* (絳州大鼓 in Chinese) in 1993 by China Music Press sent an audio-visual feast to the percussion music fans in the world.

At an international conference of modern composers held in Hong Kong in October 1988, Taiwan musician Mr. Hu Jinshan watched the video of “*Dragon Year and Dragon Music Week*” and was immediately attracted by the charm of Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe. After the meeting, he flew to Beijing and visited Mr. Piao Dongsheng, secretary general of the Chinese National Orchestra Society who was in charge of the “Dragon Year and Dragon Music Week”. With Mr. Piao’s accompany, he went to Xinjiang County, the home of Jiangzhou Drum Music. They were so shocked by the live performances of peasant drummers that he determined to record the drum music played by them and recommend it to the outside world.

However, it was not an easy task to record for the Drum Troupe in Xinjiang County, far away from big cities with no necessary equipment or a dedicated place. The effect of the first recording was not satisfying. But it was just this tape with unsatisfactory sound effect that introduced Jiangzhou Drum Music to Hong Kong Chinese music producer Mr. Yu Zhaoke and sound engineer Mr. Feng Weiguo (Leo). With no hesitation, they both decided to re-record this “national music treasure” for fans across the world.

In the summer of 1992, a group, led by Mr. Yu Zhaoke and Mr. Feng Weiguo, who had just named their studio “Wave Motion Productions”, brought heavy recording and video equipments and travelled thousands of miles to Xinjiang County, together with the famous music producer Mr. Hu Jinshan.

Mr. Feng Weiguo (Leo), known as the top recording engineer in Hong Kong, demonstrated his exquisite recording skills and high professional ability during the more than a week of recording in Xinjiang. Under the difficult conditions of hot weather, inconvenient transportation, noisy environment, and insufficient power supply, through “single point pickup method”, he completed the first episode of the album *Jiangzhou Drum*. The first and second episodes of *Jiangzhou Drum* were hits for music professionals and fans at home and abroad since they first came out in 1993 and 1994. More than 50,000 albums was sold in Southeast Asia alone, and the album became the first “platinum record” for traditional Chinese drum albums, and it had been the number one spot on the sales charts of ethnic music albums in Taiwan and Hong Kong for a long time.

“It has been 12 years since I went to Xinjiang County, Shanxi in the summer of 1992 to record the first album of *Jiangzhou Drum Music*. I still remember that when I was standing for the first time in front of Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe, I was completely shocked by their drum performance. I was trembling with excitement at that time, because I have never watched such wonderful and moving drum show in my life. It was so touching that as if I even heard the drumbeats from Tang Dynasty.”²⁸ Mr. Feng Weiguo (Leo), the sound engineer of *Jiangzhou Drum*, described how he felt when he got in touch with the drum music played by Jiangzhou Drums Music Troupe.

3.2 Support from government

In the Spring Festival of 2002, when the Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe first arrived in Shanghai, the Yalin Group funded them to play at the “Spring Festival Concert” held at the Shanghai Concert Hall. During the consecutive performances from the first day of the Chinese New Year to the seventh day, the Deputy Mayor of Shanghai, Mr. Gong Xueping, and leaders of the Cultural Bureau attended the concert. Mr. Gong Xueping held a meeting on the spot, saying that we must promote the national culture “... Whether it is from Shanxi or elsewhere, Shanghai is always open to welcome...” These words gave Director, Mr. Wang Qin’an, great encouragement. A Teacher, Mr. Li Minxiong, from the Conservatory of Music wrote to the Chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference suggesting that the Shanghai government provide more help for the troupe because they represented traditional national music. Soon after, the leaders of the Cultural Bureau and the other departments concerned soon came to discuss with Director Wang and promised that they would help the drum troupe to overcome difficulties and establish in Shanghai. The leader of Nanxiang Town in Shanghai, Mr. Wang Qixing, helped them to find a suitable place to settle down.

Director Wang said, “Thanks to the openness and inclusiveness of Shanghai, we were lucky enough to receive support and help from the government and make many friends from different circles. Everyone was confident to take root in Shanghai.” In 2003, Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe was even awarded the Model Group of Shanghai Mass Cultural Activities.²⁹

The Troupe also received a lot of recognition and support in Shanxi. It was rated as one of the top ten cultural brands in Shanxi in 2008 and won the *Special Contribution Award for Cultural Construction* of Yuncheng City Committee in February 2009, and the title of *Shanxi Province Advanced Unit of Cultural Work* in 2010. In order to protect and develop this international-level intangible cultural heritage, the local government invested 12 million RMB to set up a drum training center and rehearsed a large drum show *Female Warriors of the Yang Family*.

The county government of Xinjiang not only provided financial aid to the Troupe but also encouraged the Music to be included in school curriculum. For example, in 2007 the government of Xinjiang County began to implement the educational policy of “encouraging school education of Jiangzhou Drum Music”. Xi Jie Experiment Primary School took this opportunity to teach students drum music. Before 2009, the teaching content concentrated on the classic Jiangzhou drums music works. After 2010, they paid more attention to cultivating students’ experience of musical emotions, and the correct art view except the basic training of drum-beating skills. Moreover, they taught them the cultural content of Jiangzhou Drum Music as well. Therefore, wherever the students go, they are the obligatory conveyors of the drum music and Chinese culture.³⁰

Conclusion

As a traditional folk music genre, Jiangzhou Drum Music has already extended its influence to nearly every continent in the world. Deeply rooted in the traditional and historical cultural deposits, it has constantly gained the long-existing vitality in the folk life. Such vitality, coupled with the hard work done by Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe, individual artists and grassroots leaders in local governmental organs, has provided a strong support for the successful publicity of the Drum Music both at home in areas outside Shanxi and abroad in other countries. The examination of this publicizing process (based on the geographical locations) will enlighten the Chinese folk art workers and leaders for upgrading strategies of overseas publicity, broaden the horizon of the Chinese foreign publicity personnel, and provide some constructing suggestions for the inheritance, development and publicity of other forms of traditional Chinese Arts.

The overseas publicity of Jiangzhou Drum Music has aroused academic attentions and lively discussions on the issue of inheritance and innovation of traditional culture in modern society. Just as the saying goes, pearls are everywhere but not the same as the eyes for them. If it were not for the first Director of Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe, Mr. Wang Qin’an, the national treasure would have been forgotten. Maybe it is still scattered in the folk activities of the small villages in Xinjiang County, withering day after day; since many precious Chinese Art forms have already lost in the long river of history. China has never lacked of cultural heritages, but has often in need of wise people who can recognize the cultural treasures and have the courage and persistence to discover, exploit and upgrade them to cater to the aesthetic demands of contemporary world. As discussed above, the Troupe has adopted a very sensible approach to the traditional drum music heritage, that is, to innovate and improve the Music on the basis of traditional drum music. There have always been different views on how to inherit and develop traditional cultural heritage. A widely spread one is that traditional culture is undergoing the strong impact of modern culture and foreign culture. To maintain the purity and authenticity of traditional culture, it is necessary to cut off the contact between traditional culture and the outside world as much as possible to achieve the goal of “keeping the original and prohibiting any outside influences”. But Mr. Wang Qin’an, the first director of Jiangzhou Drum Music Troupe, insisted on innovating the folk drum music and keeping with the pace of the time to satisfy the appreciating standards of modern audience. After all, as the living environment keeps changing, the art has to adjust itself to the needs of modern society.

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