



The Integration Characteristics and Cultural Connotations of Folk Songs in the Middle and Upper Reaches of the Yellow River

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DOI: 10.32629/asc.v5i3.2437

Abstract: The Yellow River is known as the “mother river” of Chinese civilization, which not only nurtures the Chinese nation but also has unique cultural characteristics. Folk songs, as an important carrier of inheriting traditional Chinese culture, embodies the wisdom of the Chinese people and provide strong impetus for promoting social development. The middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River connect Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, the Inner Mongolian Plateau, Hetao Plain, Loess Plateau and other regions, forming an overall combination, organically integrating nomadic civilization and agricultural civilization, then a unique culture of the Yellow River basin has been formed. Along this cultural belt, cultural integration among multiple ethnic groups in various regions has developed a unique musical and cultural pattern in the Yellow River Basin. Therefore, studying the integration characteristics and cultural connotations of folk songs in the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River is of great significance for inheriting Yellow River culture and promoting traditional Chinese culture of folk songs.

Keywords: Yellow River culture; Yellow River folk songs; cultural channels; multidimensional integration

1. Introduction

According to the terrain characteristics and hydrological conditions of the Yellow River Basin, the Yellow River is divided into three sections: upper reaches, middle reaches and lower reaches. The upper reaches of the Yellow River flow through regions such as Qinghai province, Gansu province, Ningxia province and Inner Mongolia province, with a rich ethnic cultural system as a carrier, making it a shining star in China’s excellent traditional culture. Folk songs in the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River Basin are also very active, with unique characteristics in multiple regions. There are many types of folk songs in the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River Basin mentioned above, with distinct characteristics, including climbing mountain tune, Xin Tianyou, and so on.[1] It can be seen that a thorough analysis of the integration characteristics of folk songs in the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River and an exploration of cultural connotations of folk songs play an extremely important role in inheriting the cultural system of the Yellow River Basin.

2. The blending characteristics of folk songs in the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River Basin

2.1 Integration characteristics of upper reaches of Yellow River Basin

The main stream of the Yellow River and its upper reaches have nurtured the agricultural civilization of the Chinese nation. Many kinds of civilizations generated from the geographical space of this great river and become an important component of the traditional cultural system. In this section, the Longxi Corridor and the Northwest Corridor are extremely important constituent blocks, involving the Yellow River Basin including the Hehuang region and Taomin region. The main types of folk songs produced are Hehuang Hua’er and Taomin Hua’er. Although both types of folk songs belong to Hua’er, they are fundamentally different carriers of folk songs. Hehuang Hua’er is known as “Shao Nian” by local people; while Taomin Hua’er mainly uses Hua’er as its genre, but there are also certain differences in the process of dissemination. The Hehuang region of Yellow River Basin is located at the bottom of the valley, containing the main stream of Yellow River and its tributaries, such as the Datong River and Huangshui River, so it covers a very wide range, in which water resources are very abundant, with obvious advantages compared to other regions, and it is also the core area for economic prosperity and development.[2] However, from a cultural perspective, the culture of the Chinese nation presents a diverse and integrated development pattern, with cultures from multiple regions integrating together to form a unique Chinese cultural system. The Tao River and the Daxia River, as tributaries of the Yellow River, mainly flow through the southern part of Gansu province, in which terrain conditions are mostly valley basins, and with abundant water reserves, which play an extremely important role in the agricultural development. The long-term development of the Chinese nation is inseparable from the civilization origination and agriculture irrigation. Only with abundant water resources can Chinese civilization and a unique cultural

system be nurtured.

2.2 Characteristics of folk song integration in the intersection area of the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River Basin

The folk song style in the intersection area of the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River Basin is unique, with beautiful melodies and rich local characteristics. For example, the Hetao area of the Yellow River connects Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, and the folk songs in the intersection area of the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River Basin are mainly characterized by Climbing Mountain tune, “Shan Qu” and the “Xin Tian You”. A large area of plain is formed in this area, with fertile land and relatively mild climate. In addition, the irrigation of the Yellow River water makes the water conservancy system very advanced, with perfect agricultural infrastructure, promoting the comprehensive development of agricultural culture. The gullies and soil erosion in the Loess Plateau are severe, and the transportation there is also underdeveloped, which makes the local agricultural and economic development relatively backward. There are significant differences in climate conditions between the two regions mentioned above, which leads to obvious differences in political and economic aspects. Cultural communication and integration can be achieved through ethnic geographical corridors.[3] Folk songs are able to vividly depict the local landscape and people’s living conditions through language techniques such as metaphor and overlapping words. This manifestation of regional culture not only enriches the connotation of traditional Chinese culture, but also endows folk songs in the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River with unique artistic charm.

The Yellow River is an crucial transportation channel, and it also integrates music and culture from multiple regions, giving birth to a unique cultural belt with the Yellow River stream as a link, in which a integration system of folk music with distinctive characteristics that other regions do not possess is nurtured. For example, Hequ county in Xinzhou City, Shanxi Province is located east of the Yellow River and is an important tributary of the Yellow River. Hequ folk songs is a unique musical form developed by the integration of three regions, permeating the cultural elements of Inner Mongolia and northern Shaanxi folk songs. However, due to the characteristics of geography, culture, and history of the region, a distinctive folk song style has been formed. The Hequ folk song “哥哥你走西口，妹妹我实在难留” is still popular, especially in western Inner Mongolia region, northern Shaanxi province and other regions, which is of great significance for the inheritance and promotion of folk songs culture in the Yellow River Basin.

Early people lived around the area where Yellow River flows through. Due to rivers, the water reserves was relatively abundant and can meet people’s living needs, resulting in a relatively large number of residents. As an important transportation channel, the Yellow River exists as an important carrier of cultural dissemination, whether it is for business owners or dock workers. For example, the multi-ethnic community in the Yellow River Basin has always been the main body for singing Hua’er, especially in the northwest region where the lifestyle habits of multi-ethnic communication, interaction and integration have formed a mindset of valuing commerce over agriculture, which has made the residents of this region have a strong sense of integration with other regions. It has also made some ethnic minorities in this area an important group in Chinese history who went out for business. “黄河上走了个宁夏，包头的街道里站了……固原的城是个砖包的城，青石头啦铺哈的大路。” This is a folk song that has been passed down for a long time, which also shows that the multi-ethnic people in this region are good at business, just like flowers, with seeds that can take root and bloom.

3. The cultural connotation of Folk Songs in the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River Basin

3.1 An important carrier of cultural integration among various ethnic groups

Folk songs have gradually formed over a long history of multi-ethnic development, reflecting the spiritual beliefs, philosophy of life, and production methods of the Chinese nation, they are of great significance for the dissemination and promotion of culture. Folk songs in the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River are also carriers of historical and cultural heritage. Many of these folk songs are descriptions of historical events, historical figures, and mythological legends, these historical and cultural information are passed down from generation to generation. These folk songs not only record history, but also inherit it, allowing future generations to understand history and feel the wisdom and emotions of the Chinese ancestors through their singing.

In the long-term development stage of tradition Chinese culture, diverse cultural forms have jointly influenced and integrated, forming a unique cultural system with Chinese characteristics. The ethnic culture in the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River is very abundant. As a channel for cultural inheritance and integration, the exchange of folk song culture

through the Yellow River Basin is very smooth, and multiple cultures integrated together to form a cultural system, achieving the promotion and inheritance of national culture. In the process of cultural integration among various ethnic groups, whether it is language, music, folk customs, or production methods, the smoother the compatibility will be, the smoother the construction of cultural systems will also be. Culture is a unique characteristic of each ethnic group and an important measure to enhance national identity.[5] The folk songs culture in the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River integrates multiple ethnic cultures, making the Chinese nation united and getting along more friendly, providing strong support for building a modern harmoniously society and strengthening the sense of community among the Chinese nation.

3.2 A record of the development history of the Yellow River Basin

In exploring the origins of ancient Chinese civilization, the Yellow River civilization clearly occupies a pivotal position. A deep understanding and analysis of the artistic and cultural values nurtured in the region is crucial for the excavation and protection of folk songs in the Yellow River Basin from the perspective of intangible cultural heritage. The Yellow River Basin not only carries a profound sense of patriotism, but also plays an irreplaceable role in the exploration and protection of its cultural heritage for the continuation of the historical memory of the descendants of Yan and Huang and the inheritance of human civilization. The story of Da Yu controlling the flood reflects the firm belief and unity of our ancestors in facing natural challenges; Literary works such as the Yellow River Cantata and Yellow River Suite during the period of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression elevated the image of the Yellow River into a symbol of national cohesion, transcending its natural geographical boundaries and becoming a spiritual symbol of the entire Chinese nation facing adversity and moving forward courageously. Those passionate slogans and melodies, such as “Defend our hometown, defend the Yellow River, defend the whole of China”, have long been internalized as national spiritual nourishment, inspiring the Chinese nation to constantly move forward in the process of struggle. From this, it can be seen that different historical and geographical environments have nurtured diverse forms of civilization, and the Yellow River not only marks the starting point of civilization, but also a microcosm of the suffering and resistance history of the Chinese nation[4-5].

3.3 Rich aesthetic culture contained by the folk songs

There is a variety of musical styles in these folk songs, with both vigorous, bold and relaxed characteristics, as well as soft, simple and profound charm. Xian Xinghai wrote in *A Study of Folk Songs*, “These labor songs tell us that the source of China’s emerging music in the future is more valuable than all exaggerated and superior music...”. Both the grand and subtle tunes demonstrate the unique aesthetic pursuits of the people in the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River Basin. The melodies and lyrics of these folk songs are full of poetry and beauty, allowing people to obtain the enjoyment of beauty and sublimation of spirit in the process of appreciation.

In addition, folk songs in the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River Basin is also a portrayal of life and culture of local areas. Many of these folk songs describe the daily lives, labor scenes, and festival celebrations of the local people. For example, “Yellow River Hao Zi” is a major carrier of folk songs, with practical functions of coordinating and directing labor. It is sung by people when participating in collective and cooperative activities, in order to unify labor rhythm, coordinate labor movements, and regulate labor emotions. A large number of folk songs, such as Yellow River Boatman’s Song, are sung by the public to resist the suffering and fate. These folk songs are true reflections of the emotional world of the local people, expressing their love for life, praise for labor, and celebration of festivals, as well as reflecting their attitudes and values towards life.

3.4 The unique cultural inheritance methods

In order to fully leverage the leading role of the government’s cultural department, it is crucial to build a comprehensive cultural inheritance and support system, which aims to provide necessary services and technical assistance for the prosperity of local folk song art. The government should actively consolidate its leadership position in the cultural field, deepen cultural system reform, actively intervene in the exploration and protection of local art forms, and systematically record and preserve traditional art. At the same time, the government is expected to conduct interviews with senior artists to support the cultivation of a new generation of artistic talents and ensure the effective implementation of traditional art teaching and assistance. Through this approach, China’s rich local folk song art can return to the public with a brand new appearance, ensuring that in the process of rapid economic development, cultural and artistic protection and inheritance are equally valued. Moreover, diversified protection and inheritance methods should be adopted, such as text recording, audio-visual production, image shooting, recording collection, interview organization, etc., to ensure the comprehensive preservation of folk songs art. Policies should provide economic subsidies to inheritors to ensure the sustainability of art teaching activities. Local governments should also focus on utilizing traditional festivals to deeply explore their cultural connotations, actively organizing tourism and cultural festivals and folk songs themed activities, in order to promote the dissemination and development of culture and art.

4. Conclusion

Folk songs in the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River Basin are a very important component of the Chinese nation folk song culture, consolidating the excellent culture of various ethnic groups. However, under the current development of urbanization, the folk songs culture in the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River Basin is showing a trend of extinction. Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to the excavation, collection, organization and research of folk songs in the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River Basin, explore the integration characteristics and cultural connotations, formulate feasible development paths, thereby furthering the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese culture.

Acknowledgments

Project Fund: Northwest Minzu University 2024 Graduate Research and Innovation Project (Project Number: 31920240127-8).

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