

## OPERA PERFORMANCES IN THE MING DYNASTY COURT

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The court opera performances in the Ming Dynasty were carried out by specialized institutions and were closely related to various activities such as royal sacrifices and birthday banquets. Its development showed the characteristics of clear institutional division of labor and the gradual integration of performance content with folk opera. During the Ming Dynasty, the core court agencies responsible for opera performances were divided into the Zhonggu Department and the Jiaofang Department, each with distinct responsibilities. As folk opera matured in the late Ming Dynasty, the Zhonggu Department and Jiaofang Department inevitably introduced and studied folk opera works. The court provided exquisite costumes and props for opera performances, and the transfer of these materials to the public also promoted the development of folk opera actors' character creation and the pursuit of costumes and props.

*Keywords:* Ming Dynasty; palace; opera performance; Zhonggu Department; Jiaofang Department.

## ОПЕРНЫЕ ПРЕДСТАВЛЕНИЯ ПРИ ДВОРЕ ДИНАСТИИ МИН

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Придворные оперные представления в эпоху династии Мин проводились специализированными учреждениями и были тесно связаны с различными мероприятиями, такими как королевские жертвоприношения и праздничные банкеты. Развитие придворной оперы демонстрировало особенности чёткого институционального разделения труда и постепенной интеграции содержания постановок с народной оперой. В эпоху династии Мин основные придворные учреждения, ответственные за оперные представления, были разделены на департамент Чжунгу и департамент Цзяофан, каждый из которых имел свои обязанности. По мере развития народной оперы в конце династии Мин, департаменты Чжунгу и Цзяофан неизбежно вводили и изучали народные оперные произведения. Двор предоставлял изысканные костюмы и реквизит для оперных представлений, а передача этих материалов публике также способствовала развитию мастерства актёров народной оперы в создании образов и стремлению к созданию костюмов и реквизита.

*Ключевые слова:* династия Мин; дворец; оперное представление; департамент Чжунгу; департамент Цзяофан.

The Chinese imperial court has held ancestral temple sacrifices every year since ancient times. The sacrifices are often accompanied with music, singing and dancing. Songs and dances were often at birthday banquets held in daily life. The previous Dynasties created and supported institutions dedicated to those arts.

By the Ming Dynasty, the Zhonggu Department and the Jiaofang Department were responsible for matters such as ceremonies and entertainment in the palace.

**1. Zhonggu Department.** Throughout the ages, there has been a Jiaofang Department in the palace, which was in charge of matters related to the palace's acceptance of internal ceremonial prescriptions or other art - related issues. In the Ming Dynasty, it has been divided into two departments: Zhonggu Department and Jiaofang Department:

鐘鼓司，掌印太監一員，僉書、司房、學藝官無定員，掌管出朝鐘鼓，及內樂、傳奇、過錦、打稻諸雜戲 [1, p.1820]

“Zhonggu Department has one member of the eunuch status who was in charge of the seal. There is no fixed number of people in the headquarters deputy, execution room, and apprentice artists. It is in charge of the ringing of bells and drums when the Emperor goes to court, as well as various entertainment activities such as palace instruments, ChuanQi, brocades, and rice harvesting.

The Zhonggu Department was run by eunuchs; the eunuch Liu Jin was the most typical one of them. Because he held the post of Zhonggu Department, and by virtue of his position, he won the favor of Ming Xianzong and Ming Wuzong.

(劉瑾) 日進鷹犬、歌舞、角抵之戲，導帝微行。帝大歡樂之，漸信用瑾 [2]

“Liu Jin presented hawks, dogs, songs, dances, Operas, wrestling games, etc. to the Emperor every day to lure the Emperor to travel incognito. The Emperor felt himself very happy, and gradually he has been trusted Liu Jin and appointed him to arrange that incognito travelling.

During annual celebrations and autumn harvests, the Zhonggu Department was responsible for performing various skills, with more than 200 performers participating in various activities.

During the reign of Ming Shenzong (明神宗, 1572 CE – 1620 CE), the activity of the palace troupe expanded. In addition to being responsible for various traditional palace activities, the Zhonggu Department also was to study folk Opera. That so-called “folk Opera” was the “Yiyang (弋陽), Haiyan (海鹽) and Kunshan (昆山) accents”, which were popular among the people at that time.

In the late Ming Dynasty, performances in the palace became more and more frequent. Ming Shenzong even set up a new “Yuxi Palace”, where nearly 300 actors concentrated themselves in “Folk Opera”.

“In order to be filial to his biological mother, Ming Shenzong set up Sizhai, equipped with more than 200 attendants, and asked them to learn Opera both inside and outside the palace. Every time the Queen Mother came to the courtyard, Ming Shenzong would bring over newly composed Operas from outside the palace for the Queen Mother to watch. For example, they once performed “Hua Yue Ci Huan Ji” (華嶽賜環記).”

內廷諸戲劇俱隸 (鐘鼓司), 皆習相傳院本, 沿金元之舊, 以故其事多與教坊相通, 至今上始設諸劇於玉熙宮, 以習外戲, 如弋陽、海鹽、崑山諸家俱有之。其人員以三百爲率, 不復屬 (鐘鼓司), 頗采聽外間風聞, 以供科譚 [3, p. 798–799]

“All Operas in the palace are under the jurisdiction of the Zhonggu Department. They all learn Operas passed down from generation to generation and follow the old system of the Jin Dynasty and Yuan Dynasty. Therefore, the responsibilities of Zhonggu Department are mostly the same as those of the previous Dynasty.”

Now the Emperor began to place the stage in Yuxi Palace and arranged for people to learn Opera outside the palace, such as Yiyang, Haiyan, Kunshan and other Operas. The staff of Yuxi Palace is allocated to 300 people and was no longer affiliated with the Zhonggu Department. It attaches great importance to adopting rumors and anecdotes from outside the palace and uses them to make jokes.”

**2. Jiaofang Department.** In addition to the Zhonggu Department, the Jiaofang Department, which had been affiliated to the Ministry of Rites, was responsible for the music and dance in the Ming Dynasty palace. In addition to accompanying banquets with songs and dances, it was also responsible for Opera performances.

The official position of the Jiaofang Department was the ninth rank. Their work was used to perform singing and dancing performances on occasions mainly such as receiving tribute envoys from foreign countries in the palace, honoring banquets for scholars, ending the term of the chief minister, and special favor banquets. Even when Hanlin Academy(翰林院) officials held their meetings, the Jiaofang Department was in charge of it:

(教坊司), 專備大內承應。其在外庭, 維宴外夷朝貢使臣, 命文武大臣陪宴乃用之。蓋延唐鴻臚寺, 宋班荊館故事, 所以柔服遠人, 本殊典也。又賜進士恩榮宴亦用之, 則聖朝加重科制, 非他圖可望。其他臣僚, 雖至貴倨, 如首輔考滿, 特恩賜宴始用之。惟翰林官到任, 命教坊官俳供役, 亦玉堂壹佳話也 [4, p. 271–272].

“Jiaofang Department was responsible for the internal performances of the palace. When foreigners came to pay tribute and court officials were to accompany the foreign envoys at the banquet, the Jiaofang Department was also responsible for providing performances, which made an external responsibility of the Jiaofang Department.

The establishment of Jiaofang Department was a continuation of the old system of Honglu Temple (鴻臚寺) of Tang Period and Banjing Hall (班荆館) of Song Period. The purpose was to convince foreigners. This was a special grace. In addition, Jiaofang Department was also used for entertaining scholars. That was because that Dynasty had attached great importance to the imperial examination system, and other systems had no comparison with that.

As for officials, unless there used to be special circumstances, the Jiaofang Department was to get ready. For example, when the term of appointment of the prime minister was up, the Jiaofang Department was to be in. In another situation, when Hanlin officials held their meeting, they also let the Jiaofang Department to be responsible for their banquet music. That was also something that the Hanlin Academy could be proud of."

In addition to singing and dancing performances, Jiaofang Department offers Opera too. In the early Ming Dynasty, ZaJu still had a strong influence in the north, and the court loved ZaJu too. Ming Taizu liked “Pipa Ji” very much, but because he did not like its own Southern tune, he ordered the Jiaofang Department to change "Pipa Ji" to the Northern tune. With the accompaniment of the musical instruments Zheng(箏) and Pipa(琵琶), the song was sung in a ZaJu style:

(明太祖)日令優人進演... 色長劉杲者, 遂撰腔以獻, 南曲北調, 可於箏琵琶被之; 然終柔緩散戾, 不若北之鯁鱗入耳也 [5, p.240]

“Ming Taizu asked actors to perform “Pipa Ji” every day... Liu Gao (劉杲), an official in charge of musicians in the Jiaofang Department, wrote a composition of his own, which had been formed with a script from the South and a tune from the North. Nevertheless, Ming Taizu always believed that the tune was too soft and not as powerful as the sonorous ones of the North.”

Thus, we can conclude that as early as the reign of Ming Taizu, the Jiaofang Department has already been responsible for performing Operas. At that time, the performances of the Zhonggu Department and Jiaofang Department musicians had their foundations on Northern Opera mainly.

However, after the Ming Xianzong and Ming Xiaozong periods, Southern Opera became popular among the people, and various tunes in Yuyao, Haiyan, and Yiyang became quite popular one after another.

Since the Ming Shenzong, Kunqiang (昆腔) has become even more popular. The tone and system of folk Opera have undergone tremendous changes, and the tastes of the court and Emperors had been updated accordingly.

In the Ming Dynasty, in addition to being responsible for the internal performance activities of the palace, the Jiaofang Department also supervised folk Yue Hu.

When the number of personnel of Jiaofang Department in the palace was insufficient, folk Yue Hu made a reserve and supplement.

It was not just the palace troupe size be flexibly adjusted, it also enabled exchanges between palace and folk Operas.

Once the Jiaofang Department had been mixed with folk Yue Hu, the folk performance methods and content made a significant impact on the palace life, and that forced the palace to put special regulations about it:

樂戶統於 (教坊司), 司有一官以主之, 有衙署、有公座, 有人役刑杖簽牌之類, 有冠有帶, 但見客則不敢拱揖耳 [6, p.6409]

“Yue Hu is under the management of the Jiaofang Department. The Jiaofang Department is an official department with government offices, officers, slaves, torture instruments, interrogation tools, etc. Staff can also wear official clothes, but when meeting guests, they should not bow down.”

During the Ming Dynasty, Ming Shenzong ordered the inner court to study “folk Opera” also, and all kinds of folk Operas became available. After that, even the palace troupes performed Southern Operas. The Emperors of the Ming Dynasty loved Southern Operas, especially ChuanQi, which had promoted the vigorous development of folk Operas.

There should be a strict distinction between the cases of responsibility of the Jiaofang Department and Zhonggu Departments. If there was a banquet in the inner court, it should all be subordinate to the Zhonggu Department; if there was a performance in the imperial court, the Jiaofang Department was in charge.

However, in the late Ming Dynasty, as the development of folk Opera had become more and more mature, it made an inevitable trend for both Zhonggu and Jiaofang Departments to introduce and learn folk Opera works.

In addition, various costumes, props, equipment, etc. for Opera performances in the palace became even more sophisticated because they had been supplied and supported by the royal department.

In addition, those exquisite costumes and props were introduced to the people, and naturally, they got possibilities to play many different roles. Especially those, who had good family and big financial resources, strived to pursue the gorgeous and novel Opera costumes and props.

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