

# The Origin of Xiping Folk Songs in Xiping, Henan Province, China

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**Abstract**— Xiping folk song is a form of folk music created and handed down from generation to generation by the masses in Xiping Town, Xixia County, Henan Province, China. There are different descriptions about the origin of Xiping folk songs in the existing literature, including "Baixi in the Han Dynasty" and "Tang Jiang ban Zi". But what exactly is the origin of "Xiping folk song"? At present, there is no clear definition in academic circles. Around this problem, this paper combs and compares these views through the method of historical literature research. Using the induction method, this paper makes an inductive summary of the existing Xiping folk song cultural phenomenon. The field investigation method was used to interview the artists of Xiping folk songs. The study found that Xiping folk songs may have originated from the entertainment Baixi in the Han Dynasty. "Tang Jiang ban Zi" is only a special performance group in the process of its historical development. War, commerce and immigration had a great impact on the formation of the cultural characteristics of Xiping folk songs. The research results further elaborate the possibility of the origin of Xiping folk songs and put forward their own views on the relevant conclusions. The research results will provide some theoretical support for the relevant research of Xiping folk songs, help the cultural connotation construction of Xiping Town, and be conducive to the in-depth theoretical research with Xiping folk songs as the theme.

**Keywords**— Xiping folk song; Baixi in Han Dynasty; Tang Jiang Ban Zi; Origin of folk songs; Intangible cultural heritage.

## I. INTRODUCTION

China is a multi-ethnic country. 56 ethnic groups have different languages and customs. On this basis, the folk songs are rich in content and different styles (MA, 2018). There is a saying among Chinese people that "different dialects within ten miles and different customs within a hundred miles". Different dialects and customs enrich the resources of Chinese folk songs (Luo, 2019). However, with the development and change of society, the original living soil of many local folk songs has changed and is on the verge of extinction, such as Mukam (AI, 2021) in Xinjiang, Yi Ma Kan (Xia, 2021) of Hezhen nationality, Sanxia folk songs (Xiao, 2018), etc. China attaches importance to national music. In recent years, it has established relevant institutions such as China Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center, and issued national, ministerial and local policy documents to inherit and protect local national music through intangible cultural heritage (Research Group on the

integrated development of intangible cultural heritage and tourism, 2021). In 2008, "Xiping folk song" was approved by the State Council and included in the second batch of national intangible cultural heritage list, heritage serial number: 579, serial number: II - 80 (Lin & Chai, 2019).

Xiping folk song, as a traditional music culture, with the development and change of society, its original living soil no longer exists. Under the impact of modern multimedia entertainment, fewer and fewer people can sing and perform Xiping folk songs, and they are too old, so Xiping folk songs are on the verge of extinction (Yang, 2015). In terms of academic research, when Xiping folk songs were included in the national intangible cultural heritage, the academic community began to have relevant research on Xiping folk songs, but the current research is still in the primary stage and the research results are scarce. At present, the research results mainly focus on the sorting and collection of Xiping folk songs and the inheritance and protection of Xiping folk songs, such as the book Xiping folk songs, and the paper on the protection of Xiping folk songs from the perspective of we media (Lin & Chai, 2020). At present, there is no special research on the origin of Xiping folk songs, but there are some relevant statements that need further verification.

On the origin of Xiping folk songs, different scholars have different descriptions. Some people believe that Xiping folk songs originated from the Baixi of the Han Dynasty (Wang, 2007), some people believe that they originated from the "Tang Jiang Ban Zi" of the Tang Dynasty (Zhao, 2010), and others believe that Xiping town gradually formed with the germination of capitalism in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Later, Xiping folk songs gradually formed in the cultural exchange between the north and the South (Chai & Lin, 2021). Moreover, most scholars only mentioned the above views and did not conduct more in-depth research. In order to find out the origin of Xiping folk songs, this paper plans to do further research on the basis of these views. It is hoped that through the analysis of the different origin theories of Xiping folk songs, the views of all parties will be more three-dimensional and intuitive. At the same time, this paper corrects some incorrect statements and interprets some doubtful views. So as to further excavate the artistic and cultural connotation of Xiping folk songs and let

people have a deeper understanding of the origin of Xiping folk songs, a national intangible cultural heritage.

To sum up, the research aim of this study are as follows: first, sort out several statements about the origin of Xiping folk songs from the existing descriptions; Second, study and judge the existing theories about the origin of Xiping folk songs; Third, on the basis of comprehensive research, put forward personal views on the origin of Xiping folk songs.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Theory of folk song origin*

There are different views on the origin of folk songs in academic circles, such as "labor" theory, "witchcraft" theory, "courtship" theory, "imitating nature" theory, "language" theory and so on (Huang, 2016). The theory of "labor" holds that folk songs originated from human labor life. Human beings make the sound of "Hangyu" in labor, and the cheers made after labor may form an early folk song (Ji, 2021). The theory of "witchcraft" holds that folk songs are closely related to witchcraft, and folk songs are produced by primitive nations in witchcraft. The rise of singing and dancing began with ancient witchcraft (Zhao, 2021). The theory of "imitating nature" holds that human beings get inspiration from the sound of nature and create the original folk songs through imitation (Hu, Jin & Chen, 2020). The theory of "courtship" holds that folk songs originated from the chirping of animals when chasing the opposite gender, and the initial inspiration may come from the chirping of birds when courting (Kong, 2020). The "language" theory holds that human beings should have language first and then music. The initial singing was established on the basis of language and then formed folk songs (Shi, 2019). In addition, there are "religion" theory, "signal" theory and "game" theory in the current academic circles. The formation of these theories has a certain theoretical basis, but they can not fully explain the origin of folk songs, but exist as a theory. Tracing the origin of folk songs is a difficult problem academically (Han, 2020), as is the origin of Xiping folk songs. Based on the relevant viewpoints on the origin of Xiping folk songs, this paper intends to further explore the origin of Xiping folk songs by combining the above theory of the origin of folk songs with social research and the analysis of Xiping folk songs.

### *Xiping folk song origin theory*

At present, there is no mature theory on the origin of Xiping folk songs, but there are different opinions. To sum up, there are two different versions. First, "Baixi" theory in Han Dynasty. Wang Peili (2007) mentioned that Xiping folk songs originated from the folk entertainment Baixi, and folk songs belong to a kind of Baixi (Wang, 2007). During the traditional Spring Lantern Festival, there are a variety of folk entertainment and dramas to express people's joys and sorrows (Sun, 2015). Second, "Tang Jiang ban Zi" theory. Li Jin (2018) believes that Xiping folk songs have been popular since the Tang Dynasty, and there was a custom of "Huang Gong ban Zi" working together in the deep mountain area of Xiping town long ago. These change teams are called "Tang Jiang ban Zi". "Tang Jiang ban Zi" comes from a legend. It is said that after Li Yuan established the Tang Dynasty, in order to prevent the rebellion

of soldiers and generals and keep them in the deep mountain area on the border with Henan and Shaanxi to open up wasteland and farm fields, soldiers and generals sang labor numbers to unify the labor rhythm and boost morale. After work, they played puzzles and sang folk songs to ease their feelings (Editorial board of "Central Plains culture readings" series, 2018). This statement is called the "Tang Jiang ban Zi" theory of the origin of Xiping folk songs in this paper. Based on the above views, there are mainly the following two doubtful points that need to be further discussed and studied. First, what is the relationship between Xiping folk songs and the theory of "Baixi in the Han Dynasty"? Second, what is the relationship between Xiping folk songs and the theory of "Tang Jiang ban Zi"?

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper belongs to qualitative research. This research mainly use the methods of historical literature research, field investigation, case study, induction and reasoning. As a folk art form in Xiping Town, Xiping folk song is mainly transmitted by word of mouth, with few written records (Lin & Chai, 2019). At present, the origin of Xiping folk songs is a hypothesis or inference of scholars and scholars in recent years. In order to make a more convincing judgment on these views, this research will use the historical literature research method to have an in-depth understanding of the relevant views. The authors will collect more facts related to Xiping folk song activities through field investigation. This research will analyze the relevant Xiping folk songs through case study. This research will further demonstrate the relevant arguments and make my own judgment through the combination of induction and reasoning and theory. For data collection the authors take "Xiping folk song", "Luo Gu Qu", "Hua Gu", "Tang Jiang Ban Zi", "Baixi in Han Dynasty", "folk song", "labor theory" as the key words, and search for relevant early scientific research achievements through China HowNet database, readshow database, Wanfang database, superstar database, etc. as an important reference for this paper. The authors interviewed folk artists in Xiping Town, such as Wei Xiuju, Li Xianglan, Yao Shucheng, Wu Shaolian, Zhao Guohong, Tian Chengzhou and Niu Zhiliang, to understand the folk knowledge related to Xiping folk songs and collect Xiping folk songs.

## IV. RESULTS

Folk song is a vocal music art created by the people at the bottom of society in the process of long-term material production, spiritual life and social communication (He & Lin, 2019). The emergence of folk songs is a long-term process. It will not be specific to a fixed point in time. Therefore, the key point to be discussed in this paper is what the origin of Xiping folk songs may have to do with? On the origin of Xiping folk songs, this research need to make further research on the following views. Xiping had ballads sung in the Han Dynasty and became popular in the Tang Dynasty. According to legend, it was related to "Tang Jiang ban Zi" (Zhao, 2010); Xiping folk songs originated from folk entertainment operas (Wang, 2007); Xiping established villages in the Han Dynasty and towns in the middle of the Ming Dynasty. Xiping city was established in

1743 (Xin, 2018). In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, due to war and trade, Jingchu culture and Sanqin culture converged to form Xiping folk songs (Wang Y, 2007).

*The theory of "Baixi in the Han Dynasty"*

Wang Peili (2007) said that Xiping folk songs came from the entertainment Baixi of the Han Dynasty. Zhao Jun said that Xiping had songs in the Han Dynasty and became popular in the Tang Dynasty. Wang Yiwen talked about the construction of villages in Xiping town in the Han Dynasty. The above descriptions are related to the Han Dynasty. According to the authors' reference and reasoning of historical materials, it is found that the emergence of Xiping folk songs may be related to "Baixi" in the Han Dynasty.

First, according to the records of Xixia County annals (2010), during the spring and Autumn period, there was a man horse piggyback road between Xixia, Xiping and Shangnan, which was opened as GuanZhai Avenue in the Han Dynasty, indicating that Xiping had certain geographical advantages in cultural exchange since the Han Dynasty (Xixia County Local History Compilation Committee, 2010). Wei Zhi An, the former head of Xiping town cultural station, commented on the geographical location of Xiping Town: "Xiping town has convenient transportation since ancient times. It leads to the ancient capital Xi'an in the west, Luoyang in the north, Wuhan in the South and Nanyang in the East"(Z. A. Wei, personal communication. October 4, 2021).

Second, Wang Peili's statement that Xiping folk songs originated from the entertainment Baixi of the Han Dynasty is reasonable from the current form of expression of Xiping folk songs. The word Baixi, originated from the Han Dynasty, is the general name of a program including magic, acrobatics, comedy, music, dance and so on. From the Han Dynasty to the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the northern and Southern Dynasties and the Song Dynasty, the appellation of Baixi has always existed, but the specific performance forms are different (Ma, 2019). From the performance process of Xiping folk songs, folk song singing is only an important part of the whole activity, not the whole activity (S. L. Wu, personal communication. January 30, 2019). Among the activities related to Xiping folk songs, "Gaoqiao" with acrobatic nature, "Cai Yun Wu" and "Zhuma" with dance characteristics, "Huajiao" and "Hanchuan" with funny performances are the main forms of expression (X. J. Wei, personal communication. August 18, 2017). "During the Spring Lantern Festival, dancing lions, rowing Hanchuan, carrying sedans and riding Zhuma are very lively" (X. L. Li, personal communication. August 18, 2020). These folk activities obviously have the characteristics of Baixi. Because Zhuma, Gaoqiao and other activities in modern social fire performances are the remains of Baixi in history (Li, 2017). Xiping folk songs are interspersed, which plays a role in communication and exchange with the audience.

Third, Han Yuefu is a dance organization in the Han Dynasty, which is responsible for collecting folk songs or literati poems for music (Li, 2020). There were a large number of folk songs in the Han Dynasty, and it is normal for Xiping area to have folk songs in the Han Dynasty.

Fourth, In response to the claim that Xiping folk songs originated in the Han Dynasty, Wei Zhengan said: "Han bricks were found by the Danjiang River" (Z. A. Wei, personal communication. October 4, 2021). In history, Xiping town was subordinate to Xichuan County for most of the time in terms of administrative division, which is very close to Xichuan County and Danjiang River. According to archaeological findings, the "Shuxie of the Han Dynasty" unearthed from the Han tomb in Xichuan has pottery figurines playing drums and scenes of "Baixi" performance. Moreover, in the unearthed Han brick portraits, there are also pictures of playing drums and trumpets. This shows that as early as the Han Dynasty, the performance form of Baixi appeared in Xichuan and its surrounding areas (An & Tan, 2016).

Therefore, it is possible that Xiping folk songs originated from the Baixi of the Han Dynasty.

*"Tang Jiang ban Zi" theory*

Zhao Jun (2010) talked about "Tang Jiang ban Zi" when describing the causes of Xiping folk songs. At present, there are two theories about the origin of "Tang Jiang ban Zi". First, in 686 ad, Wu Zetian demoted Li Xian, the emperor of the Tang Dynasty, to Fangxian County. The soldiers and soldiers led by Li Xian opened up wasteland and cultivated fields in Fangxian County. In order to unify the labor rhythm and improve labor efficiency, the music form of "Hao Cao Luo Gu" was produced, which led to the habit of "beating drums and singing while planting" in Northwest Hubei, They are known as "Tang Jiang ban Zi" (Li & Li, 2016). Second, it is said that after Emperor Taizong Li Shimin calmed the world, he dispatched a group of soldiers to open up wasteland and cultivate land at the junction of Henan and Shaanxi. This group of people is called "Tang Jiang ban Zi". They are used to singing folk songs to each other and shouting "Hi" together to reduce fatigue (Shao, 2001). The above two statements are related to the soldiers of the Tang Dynasty and are called "Tang Jiang ban Zi".

Through literature search, it is found that "Tang Jiang ban Zi" later developed into a general term of mutual aid organizations for rural job change. "Tang Jiang ban Zi" focuses on weeding and is quite popular in the mountains and rivers in Guanzhong, Shaanxi Province. They don't say or sing when opening up wasteland, but they often sing some traditional and self-made tunes when hoeing the land to express friendship or joke with each other to improve labor efficiency (China Academy of financial Sciences, 2016). In Ziyang County, after "Tang Jiang ban Zi" developed into a farmer mutual aid organization, "Geshi" and the public sang "Luo Gu Cao Ge" in order to rush time and catch up with the progress. During the performance, the singer took the lead, sang some traditional folk songs and improvised new songs, accompanied by small drums, small gongs and small cymbals, combined the lead singer and assistant singer, and waved the hoe closely to the gongs and drums, which not only improved the labor efficiency, It also helps workers eliminate fatigue (Ziyang County chronics Compilation Committee. 2017).

In addition, Wei Z. A. (personal communication. October 4, 2021), the former head of Xiping town cultural station, said that during the large-scale collective labor in the last century, the

people of Xiping town would also invite those who can perform and sing among the workers to sing Xiping folk songs during the labor gap, so as to entertain the masses and alleviate labor fatigue, which is very similar to the performance of "Tang Jiang ban Zi". Wu Shao Lian, a villager in Xiguanzhuang, Xiping Town, once said: "in the past, there was a custom of changing jobs in rural areas during busy farming, and the changing team would relax, entertain and relieve fatigue by singing some folk songs during the labor gap (S. L. Wu, personal communication. October 6, 2021)." Niu Zhi Liang of Xiping street thinks that "Tang Jiang ban Zi" is just a legend in Xiping Town, and the "changing team" may exist in the early labor process of Xiping Town, but it is not suitable as the origin of Xiping folk songs (Z. L. Niu, personal communication. December 30, 2018). From the literature, the appellation "Tang Jiang ban Zi" is mainly used at the junction of Shaanxi, Henan and Hubei (Zhang, 2017), and Xiping town is also in this range. The singing activities of "Tang Jiang ban Zi" during and after work are similar to the folk interaction in Xiping Town, especially the accompaniment instrument described by "Tang Jiang ban Zi" is similar to that of Xiping folk song, "Luo Gu Cao Ge" and "Luo Gu Qu" are similar in terms of appellation, and the identity characteristics of "Geshi" are similar to that of "dengtou" in Xiping folk song.

Based on the above discussion, this research speculate that "Tang Jiang ban Zi" should really exist in history, but as the origin of Xiping folk song, this expression is not appropriate. This research think "Tang Jiang ban Zi" is a special performing group in the formation and development of Xiping folk songs. The performance of this performance group is similar to the current Xiping folk song performance, which is a folk performance with group nature (Chai & Lin, 2021).

#### *Other theories of origin*

There are different opinions on the origin of folk songs in academic circles. The viewpoint of "labor" theory holds that folk songs originated from the process of human production and labor, and "labor Haozi" in the classification of folk songs is the best example (He & Lin, 2019). Labor Haozi refers to a song with a call sign that sings with labor. The melody is simple, the rhythm is obvious, and the rhythm of music is consistent with the rhythm of labor, with regular rhythm and clear ups and downs (Zhang & Lin, 2020). However, in the existing Xiping folk songs, there is no obvious folk song with the musical characteristics of "labor Haozi". The authors think this may have something to do with the existing performance time, venue and function of Xiping folk songs At present, Xiping folk songs are mainly performed in villages and households during the Spring Lantern Festival, mainly singing minor tunes and folk songs, and mainly playing entertainment and communication functions (Chai & Lin, 2021). Obviously, labor Haozi is not suitable for this occasion, so labor Haozi has not been handed down and recorded in the existing Xiping folk songs. Yao Shucheng (personal communication. October 6, 2021) said that when he was young, he heard his parents sing labor songs when building the foundation of the house However, later, when building the foundation of the house, modern machines were used, and there was no need for people to work collectively, so

there was no need to sing labor songs. No one can sing these folk songs now, and these songs are not suitable for performing and singing in villages and households during the Spring Lantern Festival. However, labor-related songs can be found in the social survey of Xiping folk song works. For example, Wei Xiuju (personal communication. May 30, 2021) sang in Xiping folk song "picking tea". In February, tea trees sprouted and sisters were preparing to pick tea. My sister picked more tea leaves and my sister picked less tea. They went home together happily. Yu Xinhua (personal communication. October 5, 2021) sings in the Xiping folk song "winter ploughing" that when ploughing in winter, the big grass should be removed, and the crops can grow well. When ploughing, if the ploughing is deep, the soil will be relatively loose, so as to maintain the water content of the soil and prevent drought. The singing contents of the two Xiping folk songs are obviously directly related to labor. Wang Peili, former party secretary of Xiping Town, believes that Xiping folk songs are oral poems created collectively by the working people of Xiping and handed down from generation to generation (Wang, 2007). The "working people" he emphasized has a certain relationship with the "labor" theory. In short, the theory of "labor" has a certain possibility related to the origin of Xiping folk songs.

In addition, Wang Yiwen said that Xiping village was built in the Han Dynasty and Yecheng town in the middle of the Ming Dynasty. Xiping city was established in 1743. It was one of the four famous towns in Xichuan County at that time. Due to war and trade, Jingchu culture and Sanqin culture converged here, forming Xiping folk song (Wang, 2007). From the perspective of immigration, Zhao Jun said that at the end of the Ming Dynasty and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, six southward immigrants from Shanxi Province and immigrants from Anhui Province and Hubei Province in Jiangnan region met in Xiping Town, forming Xiping folk songs with integration characteristics (Zhao, 2010). Chai Zhanhong and Lin Lijun (2021) believe that war, commerce and immigration are important factors in forming the integration characteristics of Xiping folk songs. The above views are more inclined to describe the environment of Xiping folk songs. This research is more inclined to Chai Zhanhong and Lin Lijun. The authors think that war, commerce and immigration will affect the music characteristics of a place, which is not appropriate as the origin theory.

#### V. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

For the first time, this paper makes a more detailed interpretation of the origin of Xiping folk songs and the theory of "Baixi" in the Han Dynasty, "Tang Jiang ban Zi" and other theories, so that readers can have a clearer understanding and understanding of these problems. This study holds that the emergence of Xiping folk songs should be a long process, and its current manifestation is similar to Baixi in the Han Dynasty. "Baixi in the Han Dynasty" theory can be used as the main point of view of the origin of Xiping folk songs. Although "Tang Jiang ban Zi" was originally a legend, the title of "Tang Jiang ban Zi" has been continued and has become the title of the collective labor group of the common people during the busy farming period, and this title is real in Xiping town and its

surrounding areas. From the perspective of the origin of Xiping folk songs, "Tang Jiang ban Zi" is more a performance group of Xiping folk songs in a specific environment, and it is not appropriate to become the origin theory. War, commerce and immigration will affect the musical characteristics of a place, which is not appropriate as the theory of origin. The theory of "labor" has certain rationality. This paper studies and analyzes the existing theories on the origin of Xiping folk songs from a micro perspective, discusses the relationship between Xiping folk songs and "Baixi in the Han Dynasty" and "Tang Jiang ban Zi", and promotes the research depth of Xiping folk song theory.

*Research limitation and future study*

The formation of Xiping folk songs is a long-term process, and this art form is spread by oral and heart instruction, without much written materials. In addition, as a folk art, Xiping folk song is unlikely to be concerned and studied, and there is a lack of relevant reference materials. The above limitations have brought great difficulties and uncertainty to this study. Most of the folk artists participating in Xiping folk song activities are older, and most of the young people know little about Xiping folk songs or are not interested, which brings great challenges to the field investigation of this study. In particular, many old artists have been unable to clearly express their views, which also brings uncertainty to the research results. Based on the current situation that Xiping folk songs are on the verge of extinction, it is urgent to seize the time to organize experts and scholars to carry out rescue protection. Establish a linkage learning and research mechanism for government staff, experts, scholars, folk artists, ordinary people, schools, villages, towns and communities, so as to protect and inherit Xiping folk song culture.

*Statement of conflict of interest*

The content of this interview is only for academic research, not for commercial purposes, and has been agreed by the respondents. There is no copyright dispute and potential conflict of interest.

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