



Research Article

Becoming a Tradition: Presentation of Ti Qin Opera in Funerals in Chongyang County, China

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Abstract

Ti Qin Opera, a popular local performing art in Chongyang County, Hubei Province, China, was mainly performed during the birthday celebrations of the local people and the Chinese Spring Festival to enliven the atmosphere. However, in the last two decades, Ti Qin Opera has been frequently performed at funerals, forming a new practice—the mourning ritual—which has been widely accepted by the locals and has become a tradition. In this regard, two questions arise: Why does Ti Qin Opera appear at local funerals? How did the mourning ritual become a tradition? This study applies an ethnographic approach to investigate the performance of Ti Qin Opera at funerals. The emergence of the mourning ritual in funerals is attributed to the emotional need for filial piety and the local people's competitive mentality. The family of the deceased believes that if other families hire a Ti Qin Opera troupe to perform the mourning ritual, their family should not miss out on holding this last event for the deceased. Ti Qin Opera performers rely on their reputation and prestige accumulated over the centuries, and acceptance by the locals is a key factor in making the mourning ritual a tradition. Increased economic status among the Chongyang people and, subsequently, better financial capacity to hire Ti Qin Opera troupes further contribute to the development of the mourning ritual tradition.

Keywords: Ti Qin Opera, mourning ritual, funeral, tradition.

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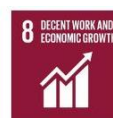
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Introduction

Ti Qin Opera originated from the Flower Drum Opera in Yueyang [岳阳], Hunan Province, and spread to Chongyang [崇阳], Hubei Province, in the late Qing Dynasty, where it was renamed Ti Qin Opera. Hu (2006) believed that Yueyang Flower Drum Opera artists Jiang Chuanyu, Peng Ruisheng and others led the troupe to Chongyang in 1889; when the troupe was disbanded, Jiang Chuanyu settled in Chongyang to teach the opera as a business and gradually formed the Ti Qin Opera.

Ti Qin Opera used to be performed only during the Chinese New Year and on important occasions such as company opening ceremonies, weddings, and birthday celebrations to liven up the festive atmosphere. Ti Qin Opera was not performed at traditional funerals in Chongyang County as it was a performance expressing happiness while funerals are often solemn and quiet, and laughter at funerals is considered taboo and disrespectful to the deceased. However, in the past twenty years, a phenomenon has occurred where the performance of Ti Qin Opera appears at funerals, and this has also been widely accepted, with an increasing number of local families hiring Ti Qin Opera when their loved ones pass away. At the same time, a new ritual emerged from the fusion of Ti Qin Opera with the local funeral ceremony: the mourning ritual. The mourning ritual gradually becomes a new custom and forms an essential part of the local culture during funerals.

Funerals in Chongyang County are usually held for three days. During this period, friends and relatives come to the house of the deceased to pay their respects. In traditional Chinese culture, worshipping the deceased is a cultural tradition and social custom. The process of worship usually includes entering the room where the coffin of the deceased is kept, offering incense [上香], bowing or kowtowing in front of the coffin of the deceased, and consoling the family of the deceased after the worship. At funerals, offering incense, bowing or kowtowing to the deceased is a way of honoring and commemorating the deceased so that the soul of the deceased can be appeased and comforted. Offering incense to the deceased has been practiced for thousands of years, and it originated from the religious beliefs and rituals during the pre-Qin period (Tong, 2022). On the second or third day of the funeral, a Buddhist monk or Taoist priest hired by the family member will come to recite Buddhist scriptures for the soul of the deceased. In Chinese folklore, when a person has passed away for three days, his soul is believed to be either punished or ascended to heaven. If the family of the deceased invites a monk or Taoist priest to recite Buddhist scriptures for him, this will redeem the sins of the deceased and accumulate virtues thus he will enter heaven when the soul leaves three days after death. The deceased was buried at the cemetery on the third day of the funeral.

The funeral after the emergence of the Ti Qin Opera remains as a three-day event. During this period, friends and relatives of the deceased come and pay their respects to the deceased. On the second day of the funeral, the family of the deceased will hire the Ti Qin Opera troupe to perform. The Ti Qin Opera performers usually start to perform at 14:00 for two hours. After that, the family of the deceased will serve dinner to the guests. At 19:00, the mourning ritual hosted by the Ti Qin Opera performers begins and is usually held for one hour. Subsequently, the Ti Qin Opera performers continue to perform until around 22:00. On the third day, the family of the deceased still follows the tradition of hiring a Buddhist monk or Taoist priest to recite Buddhist scriptures

for the deceased. The Ti Qin Opera performers can also chant for the deceased as a substitute for a monk or priest.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach to ethnography study. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews and participant observation on March 12, 2021 in Xu's house in Dizhou Village, Chongyang County, Xianning City, Hubei Province. This study involved six informants whose names were coded with letters and numbers to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Informants A1 and A2 are officials of the Xianning Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Centre responsible for protecting and managing Xianning Intangible Cultural Heritage. Informants B1 and B2 are Ti Qin Opera performers with more than 30 years of experience, while informants C1 and C2 are scholars studying Ti Qin Opera for more than 10 years. The researcher participated in Mr. Xu's funeral and photographed and recorded the content related to the funeral with the consent of the deceased's family. The aim of the study is to investigate the reasons for the appearance of Ti Qin Opera in local funerals and how the mourning ritual becomes a tradition.

Ti Qin Opera Troupe

The Bai Lu Bao Chuang Opera Troupe [白露保创戏剧艺术团] mainly serves the villages in Chongyang County, performing at funerals, weddings, birthday celebrations and other folk events. There are about 20 performers in this troupe, depending on the performers needed for the repertory. It is common for performers to participate in different Ti Qin Opera troupes where they can arrange their performance schedule according to the agreed salary and performance time.

The director of Bai Lu Bao Chuang Opera Troupe [白露保创戏剧艺术团] would set up the stage before the performance (Figure 1). The instruments commonly used in the troupe are ti qin, yangqin, drums, gongs, and suona. The shaft of Ti Qin is made of wood, mostly pear wood, and the sound box is made of bamboo (Figure 2). The tuning pegs are mounted on both sides of the neck; the strings are pulled down through the nut; the sound box is covered with snakeskin, and the bow is the same as the erhu (Figure 3). The percussion instruments in the Ti Qin Opera consist of a dagu [大鼓], a bangu [板鼓], a xiaotanggu [小堂鼓], a daluo [大锣], a xiaoluo [小锣] and a bo [钹]. The three types of drums—the dagu [大鼓], the bangu [板鼓], and the xiaotanggu [小堂鼓]—are suspended on wooden stands and are played by one performer using two bamboo drumsticks (Figure 4). The daluo [大锣] and the xiaoluo [小锣] are both round brass instruments on stands played by one performer in the Ti Qin Opera (Figure 4). Bo [钹] is a traditional Chinese percussion instrument made of a pair of similarly shaped copper pieces. When playing, the musician holds the bo, a piece in each hand, and hits them against each other, making a clear and crisp sound (Figure 5). Suona [唢呐] is a traditional Chinese wind instrument mainly made of pear and sandalwood, and it is often used in Chinese folk funeral rituals (Figure 6). Yangqin [扬琴] is a percussion instrument with a wood frame. Modern yangqin usually has 144 strings in total. During the performance, the player holds a pair of yangqin hammers to strike the strings (Figure 7).



Figure 1: Setting up of the stage before a performance by the director of Bai Lu Bao Chuang Opera Troupe [白露保创戏剧艺术团]. (Photo: Li Shijie, March 13, 2021)



Figure 2: The sound box of Ti Qin that is made of bamboo. (Photo: Li Shijie, February 2, 2023)

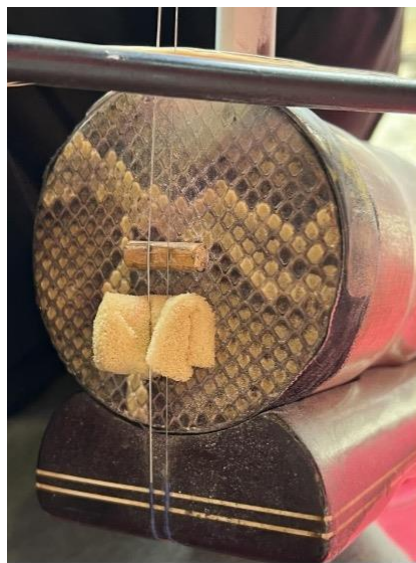


Figure 3: The sound box of Ti Qin that is covered with snakeskin. (Photo: Li Shijie, February 2, 2023)



Figure 4: The instruments (from left to right) daluo [大锣], xiaoluo [小锣], dagu [大鼓], xiaotanggu [小堂鼓] and bangu [板鼓]. (Photo: Li Shijie, March 13, 2021)



Figure 5: The traditional Chinese percussion instrument bo [钹] that is made of a pair of similarly shaped copper pieces. (Photo: Li Shijie, March 13, 2021)



Figure 6: The wind instrument *suona* [唢呐] that is often used in Ti Qin Opera. (Photo: Li Shijie, February 2, 2023)



Figure 7: A performer playing the yangqin [扬琴]. (Photo: Li Shijie, March 13, 2021)

Mourning Ritual by Ti Qin Opera

Events on the Second Day of the Funeral

The case for this study is the funeral of a deceased elderly man surnamed Xu, who passed away on March 12, 2021. The location of the funeral is Xu's house in Dizhou Village, Chongyang County, Xianning City, Hubei Province. The funeral was attended by the relatives and friends of the deceased. The mourning ritual which took place on 13 March 2021 was hosted by the Bai Lu Bao Chuang Opera Troupe [白露保创戏剧艺术团].

On the second day of the funeral, at 12:05, the deceased's family hosted a banquet in the courtyard of their house for their friends and relatives who came to offer condolences and the invited performers of the Ti Qin Opera troupe. After lunch, the performers started to set up the performance stage at 13:00. The costumes, musical instruments, audio equipment and props for the performance were previously placed in the truck in an organized way by the troupe director. When the side of the truck opened, the performance stage was assembled in a short time. At 13:30, the Ti Qin Opera performers started putting on their makeup and costumes, and the musicians tuned their instruments in preparation for the performance.

The Ti Qin Opera performance started at 14:00 with the traditional repertoire *He Wenxiu Sells Herself* [何文秀卖身]. The performance lasted two hours and ended at 16:00. Then, the family of the deceased held another banquet. After dinner, the mourning ritual began at 19:10 and lasted until 20:06. After the ritual, another Ti Qin Opera performance of *Tears of Mother and Child* [母子泪] began at 20:12 and ended at 24:00. Table 1 shows the summary of the events on the second day of the funeral.

Table 1: The events on the second day of Mr. Xu's funeral.

Time	Event
12:05	The family of the deceased held a banquet.
13:00	The troupe director set up the stage, and the performers put on their makeup and costumes. The musicians tuned their instruments.
14:00	Ti Qin Opera performers began performing the traditional repertoire <i>He Wenxiu Sells Herself</i> [何文秀卖身].
16:00	End of the performance.
17:27	Another banquet began.
19:10	The mourning ritual started, led by Ti Qin opera performers.
20:06	End of the mourning ritual.
20:12	Ti Qin Opera performers began performing the repertoire <i>Tears of Mother and Child</i> [母子泪].
24:00	End of the performance.

Process of the Mourning Ritual

The mourning ritual is generally divided into eight parts, with the specific content of the ritual being discussed between the family holding the funeral and the Ti Qin Opera performers. Table 2 shows the eight parts of the process of the mourning ritual at the funeral.

Table 2: The process of the mourning ritual at the funeral.

Time	Part	Event	Description
19:10	1	Fireworks and music	The mourning ritual began with fireworks and the Ti Qin Opera performers playing music.
19:33	2	Portrait on stage	A male Ti Qin Opera performer and the family members of the deceased carried the portrait and memorial tablet to the stage.
19:35	3	Moment of silence	All participants at the funeral observed a moment of silence at the portrait and the memorial tablet.
19:37	4	A brief speech	A family member of the deceased gave a speech, and all the family members bowed to the memorial tablet.
19:44	5	Kowtow and weep	Four Ti Qin Opera performers led the family members to kneel, kowtow and weep.
19:55	6	<i>Hecai</i>	A male Ti Qin Opera performer held a <i>Hecai</i> [贺彩] session for the family of the deceased.
20:04	7	Returning the portrait	A male Ti Qin Opera performer and the family of the deceased brought the portrait and memorial tablet back to the coffin while the performers continued to play funeral music.
20:12	8	Evening performance	Ti Qin Opera performers started performing Ti Qin Opera.

Part 1: Fireworks and music.

The mourning ritual began with the setting off of fireworks in the open space next to the stage and the musicians playing the bo [钹], xiaotanggu [小堂鼓] and *suona* (Figure 8). It is a common funeral custom to set off fireworks to ward off evil spirits and bad luck and to keep the deceased's family safe. On the other hand, the sound of the fireworks is believed to reach the underworld and let the deceased know that they are remembered by the family. The Ti Qin Opera performers and musicians left the stage and a male performer led the family of the deceased to follow him to the coffin of the deceased, which was placed in the living room (Figure 9). Two other male and two female Ti Qin Opera performers follow the family of the deceased closely, dressed in white mourning clothes and headdresses made of cotton and linen. The attire of the five performers represented the respect of the entire Ti Qin Opera troupe to the deceased. The musicians continued to play funeral music while following the procession.



Figure 8: The musicians playing bo [钹], xiaotanggu [小堂鼓] and suona. (Photo: Li Shijie, March 13, 2021)



Figure 9: Family members entered the living room through the kitchen. (Photo: Li Shijie, March 13, 2021)

Part 2: Portrait on stage.

A male performer then offered incense to the deceased, bowed three times in front of the coffin and knelt. Afterward, he stood up and bowed three times while mouthing the words for the deceased to rest in peace. At this point, the eldest son of the deceased remained on his knees while the other family members stood behind the male performer. As the Chinese concept of family is that the eldest son is the inheritor of the family, he is required to take on more responsibility, which is shown at the funeral by maintaining a kneeling position in front of the coffin (Figure 10). Then, the Ti Qin Opera performer informed the two sons of the deceased to put the portrait of the deceased, the memorial tablet and the incense burner in front of the coffin on a tray, which they held in both hands. After that, the Ti Qin Opera performers ushered the families of the deceased to the stage through the side of the kitchen and placed the tray with the portrait and the memorial tablet of the deceased on the table at the center of the stage (Figure 11). The significance of this behavior was to bring Mr. Xu's spirit from his coffin to the stage so that he could see the funeral and the Ti Qin Opera performance. During this session, the music was continuous, with the musicians playing while moving behind the crowd.



Figure 10: The whole family gathered in front of the coffin. (Photo: Li Shijie, March 13, 2021)



Figure 11: The two sons of the deceased were holding incense, candles and the portrait of the deceased. (Photo: Li Shijie, March 13, 2021)

Part 3: Moment of silence.

Ti Qin Opera performers and the members of the deceased's family gathered on the stage and faced the audience. A Ti Qin Opera performer thanked those who attended the funeral, leading everyone to join in a moment of silence to Mr. Xu's portrait and memorial tablet (Figure 12). During the collective silence, those attending the funeral were not allowed to speak.



Figure 12: A Ti Qin Opera performer thanked those who attended the funeral. (Photo: Li Shijie, March 13, 2021)

Part 4: A brief speech.

The son-in-law of the deceased gave a speech, thanking the relatives and friends who came to the funeral and expressing his sadness for the deceased (Figure 13). The person who gave the speech at the funeral has a high social status and prestige in the family. After that, the Ti Opera Qin performers arranged for the family members to stand in two groups on either side of the stage and again bowed towards Mr. Xu's portrait and the memorial tablet.



Figure 13: The son-in-law of the deceased gave a speech to thank the relatives and friends who came to the funeral. (Photo: Li Shijie, March 13, 2021)

Part 5: Kowtow and weep.

Both the Ti Qin Opera performers and their families knelt. The Ti Qin Opera performers knelt in the middle of the stage, holding the memorial tablet of the deceased, while singing and crying through the piece *Weeping Father's Spirit* [哭父灵], an expression of respect and sadness for the deceased (Table 3). This is accompanied by the sounds of music and firecrackers (Figure 14).

Table 3: The approximate lyrics of *Weeping Father's Spirit* [哭父灵].

Chinese	English
一见灵位好伤心 爹爹教训永记在心 今日却已阴阳两隔天 越思越想心越痛。	I was very sad when I saw the memorial tablet I remember my father's advice But today I am separated from my father The more I think about it, the more my heart breaks.
哭声天来喊声爹 勤俭朴素过光阴 喊爹不见爹应声 只见灵位不见人。	I cry out for my father My father lived a frugal life I cannot see my father answering me I can only see the memorial tablet but not the person.
千思万想哭爹爹 天伦之乐未享受 一世劳碌受奔波 哪个能忘养育恩。	I think of my father and cry for him He never enjoyed the happiness of his family He has been working hard all his life I cannot forget the love that raised me.
人生在世父母尊 不孝父母枉为人	We should respect our parents in life If we do not express filial piety to our parents, we cannot be a human being
吉日要葬风水地 今后相见在梦里。	My father needs to be buried in a good place on a good day I will only see my father in my dreams.



Figure 14: Ti Qin Opera performers knelt on the stage and sang *Weeping Father's Spirit*. (Photo: Li Shijie, March 13, 2021)

Part 6: Hecai.

Hecai is usually performed after the completion of some religious rituals or ceremonies to wish for blessings or liven up the atmosphere. On one hand, *Hecai* is a blessing for the deceased in the afterlife. If the deceased was a businessman during his lifetime, the performer would bless the deceased to become the richest man in the area in the afterlife. If the deceased was a teacher, the performers would wish that the deceased would become a great teacher in the next life. Apart from that, *Hecai* is also a blessing for the family of the deceased, mostly on happiness, wealth, and good luck.

During the *Hecai* session, the family members and the Ti Qin Opera performers changed their position from kneeling to standing, keeping in two lines on either side of the stage. Then, two male Ti Qin Opera performers began to chant the blessing. One performer recites the blessing while the other responds with "Oh, yes!" and other exclamations (Figure 15). Table 4 shows the content of *Hecai* at the funeral.



Figure 15: Ti Qin Opera performers performing *Hecai* [贺彩]. (Photo: Li Shijie, March 13, 2021)

Table 4: The approximate content of *Hecai* at the funeral.

Chinese	English
伏以天地开张，日吉时良。	The day is auspicious and the time is excellent.
时良时良，听我言章	On this wonderful occasion, listen to what I have to say.
世上只有爹娘好，爹娘恩情比天长。	Only our parents are the best to us in the world, and their kindness is longer than the heavens.
养儿育女艰辛苦，光辉典范永流芳。	Parents raise their children with hardship and suffering, and their glorious stories will be passed on forever.
在生尽孝道，死后厚祭葬。	We should respect our parents while they are alive and hold a grand funeral when they die.
福人登福地，大发又大旺。	Parents are blessed people; when they die, they will go

<p>请问孝家要富还是要贵？</p> <p>富贵富贵，听我言章。</p> <p>科学种田粮满仓，年年有余奔小康。</p> <p>求福如东海，求寿添海屋。</p> <p>求丁百子图，求财富春江。</p> <p>恭喜孝家富贵双全，百世其昌，荣华富贵万年长！</p>	<p>to a blessed land where they will live in abundance.</p> <p>May I ask the members of the family of the deceased whether they want to be rich or powerful?</p> <p>Rich and powerful, listen to me.</p> <p>Scientific farming will fill your barn with food, and you will have a prosperous life every year.</p> <p>Pray for good fortune in life and long life for the elderly.</p> <p>Pray for prosperity for your family's children and grandchildren and for much wealth for your family.</p> <p>Congratulations to the family of the deceased on their wealth and prosperity and on their long life of glory and prosperity!</p>
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Part 7: Returning the portrait.

After the *Hecai* session, the performers led the family of the deceased from the side of the kitchen into the living room to the coffin. The male Ti Qin Opera performer placed the portrait and the memorial tablet back to the front of the coffin with the incense burner and bowed twice. Musicians followed them, playing instrumental music, mainly gongs and *suona* (Figure 16).



Figure 16: The performer led the family of the deceased to place the portrait and memorial tablet back to the front of the coffin with the incense burner. (Photo: Li Shijie, March 13, 2021)

Part 8: Evening performance.

The Ti Qin Opera performers returned to the stage and the evening performance began. They performed the repertoire *Tears of Mother and Child* [母子泪], which required 11 performers (Figure 17). This work is considered suitable for funerals as it describes the story of family kinship and the separation of life and death. This story is about the poor family of the main character. The

main character takes care of her sick mother until she passes away. As the main character cannot afford her mother's funeral, she goes begging to organize it. Figure 18 shows a part of the script of the repertoire.



Figure 17: Ti Qin Opera performers performing the repertoire of *Tears of Mother and Child* [母子泪]. (Photo: Li Shijie, March 13, 2021)

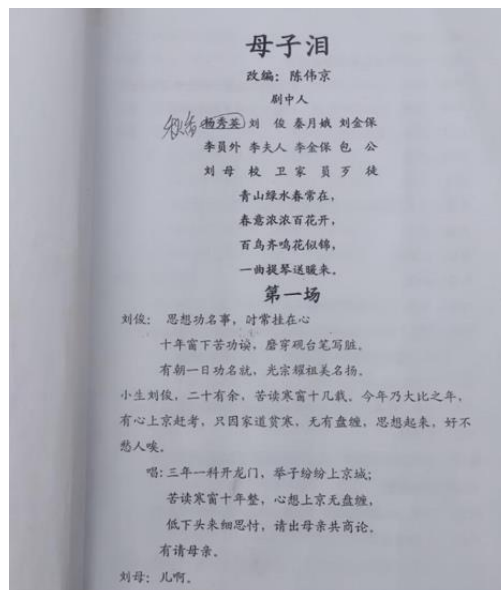


Figure 18: The script of the repertoire of *Tears of Mother and Child* [母子泪]. (Photo: Li Shijie, March 13, 2021)

Mourning Ritual Becoming a Tradition

Death is an inescapable theme in human culture, and funeral is a culturally prescribed way of dealing with the phenomenon of death to meet the needs of different ethnic groups depending on the domination of beliefs (Qi, 2008). Funerals are important to the local community's culture as they are occasions for the deceased's family to express their sadness and receive comfort and sympathy from their relatives and friends. Villagers gather at funerals, and their main purpose of participating in the funeral is to mourn for the deceased.

The Chongyang people accepted the behavior of the Ti Qin Opera performers at the funeral and regarded the mourning ritual as a new local tradition. A local practitioner pointed out that “Chongyang people hire Ti Qin Opera troupes to perform at funerals, but previously there were no Ti Qin Opera performances at funerals, and there was no weeping ritual” (B1, personal communication, March 13, 2021). An officer of the Xianning Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Centre stated that Ti Qin Opera performance at funerals is a new behavior: “Ti Qin Opera used to be performed only at birthday celebrations for the elderly, and we would hire Ti Qin Opera troupes to perform at Chinese New Years to liven up the festivities. I've never seen Ti Qin Opera performed at funerals, but now it's a popular behavior at funerals” (A2, personal communication, April 20, 2022).

This can be termed a process of traditionalization which is interpreted as a complex process of constructing the emergent using ancient information from the past (Anne, 2005). Baumann (2004) argued that the process of traditionalization should not be understood simply as a desire for old traditions but an invention of a particular group to construct associations between current discourses and behaviors and those of the past in order to gain cultural sovereignty. The mourning ritual embodies the process of becoming a tradition in the context of the changing needs of the local society, economy, and emotions. The factors that led to the new mourning ritual becoming a recognized tradition at funerals are the emotional need for filial piety, the competitive mentality among the Chongyang people, the prestigious reputation of Ti Qin Opera performers, and the improved economic status of the Chongyang people.

Expressing the emotional need for filial piety

The mourning ritual became a tradition due to the need among the local people to display the emotion of filial piety. Under the influence of Confucianism, the Chinese culture has a recognized tradition focusing on filial piety (Zhang, 2009). In China, funerals are a necessary ritual for families to pay tribute to the deceased and a way to demonstrate filial piety for others to follow social rules. It costs a lot of money and effort to hold a grand funeral, but the practice of holding rituals for the deceased has been continued as it is deeply rooted in the traditional culture. If the family of the deceased does not hold a funeral, they will suffer from moral condemnation from society.

In Chongyang County, when an elderly person passes away, the descendants of the deceased will hire a Ti Qin Opera troupe to perform to fulfill their filial piety to the deceased. A practitioner stated that “employing the Ti Qin Opera troupe to perform is the last thing the family of the deceased can do for the deceased, and they wish the spirits of the deceased to witness their grief” (B2, personal communication, March 13, 2021). The mourning ritual is held to allow the participants to express their feelings of sadness for the deceased. This also allows them to release the grief in their hearts, as an experienced scholar of Ti Qin Opera added that “the local people believe that the Ti Qin Opera performances can soothe the souls of the deceased so that the deceased can rest in peace in heaven” (C1, personal communication, February 1, 2023). The mourning ritual in Chongyang County funerals reflects the need for communal emotions. At funerals, participants can feel the group's collective cohesiveness and affection, which are rarely found on other occasions.

The competitive mentality among Chongyang people

The competitive mentality among the local people has led to more people hiring the Ti Qin Opera troupes to perform at funerals, thus forming the tradition. Competition is a common social phenomenon in which people try to measure their value and success by comparing themselves with their neighbors, relatives, and friends in terms of their material wealth, social status, and lifestyle. Social comparison theory suggests that the more important the dimensions one perceives as important, the more likely people are to make comparisons and vice versa (Tesser, 1998). Material wealth and social status are usually of high value to farmers as they are almost at the lower class regarding economic income and social status (Lu, 2014), in which they desire psychological superiority and satisfaction gained through comparison.

In rural China, competition is intensifying, including contending for recognition from the villagers through funerals. A Ti Qin Opera practitioner pointed out that “when the villagers observed other families hire the Ti Qin Opera troupes to perform at their funerals, they also desire to hire a Ti Qin Opera troupe to perform at the funerals of their family members as an ostentatious display” (B1, personal communication, March 13, 2021). An officer added that “villagers desired to have their family’s funeral to be of a higher standard than that of the other families, even if it cost more money” (A2, personal communication, April 20, 2022). If a family does not hire a Ti Qin Opera troupe to perform at their funeral and hold a mourning ritual, the family will be looked down upon by the village community and even alienated. Through having the Ti Qin Opera troupe perform at the funeral, the family of the deceased gains psychological satisfaction and a sense of belonging to the community.

In the development of the Ti Qin Opera, the competitive mentality among the locals is an indirect behavior that changes the form of the funeral, which has contributed to the innovative content and dissemination of Ti Qin Opera. In this context, the mourning ritual gradually transforms from a new element at funerals to a recognized tradition.

Prestige reputation of Ti Qin Opera performer

In the Chinese funeral culture, the family of the deceased is required to wear white mourning clothes during the days of the funeral, which is not allowed on other occasions. Although the Ti Qin Opera performers are not part of the family of the deceased, they wear white mourning clothes and headdresses, and they offer incense and kowtow to the deceased to express their sadness to the family members. The Ti Qin Opera performers are welcome to participate in funerals because of their decent behavior on stage, expressing respect and blessings to the deceased and the family.

Secondly, the Ti Qin Opera performers carefully chose suitable pieces for funerals, mostly on the theme of sorrow. As a respect to the family, the director of the troupe would discuss in advance with the family of the deceased to determine the repertoire. Local practitioners said they would recommend appropriate Ti Qin Opera works according to the preference of the deceased's family. The repertoire performed at Mr. Xu's funeral, *Tears of Mother and Child*, resulted from their

discussion in advance with family members. This approach made the deceased family felt the importance of the Ti Qin Opera members being attached to the funeral and the troupe gained the family's appreciation when they witnessed them performing their best at the funeral (B1 & B2, personal communication, March 13, 2021).

In addition, the Ti Qin Opera has built up a good reputation in Chongyang County for more than a century. Ti Qin Opera has a large audience and the performers are well-accepted. When the Ti Qin Opera elements were added to funeral rituals, the locals were positive and welcoming. Performers gain experience and fame by performing at funerals in Chongyang County, enabling them to be well-trusted by the families of the deceased when performing the mourning ritual.

At funerals in Hubei, Taoist priests and Buddhists chant sutras for the deceased, and the local people believe in the power of these monks or Taoist priests. Ti Qin Opera performers mastered these chants through learning, and they gradually replaced the monks and Taoist priests at the funeral. This is because the Ti Qin Opera performers have three advantages over the monks and Taoist priests. Firstly, Ti Qin Opera was performed in the Spring Festival in the early days, then at weddings and birthday celebrations to express the happiness of Chongyang people, and now at funerals without exclusion. Secondly, the Ti Qin Opera performers can sing these sutras with a melody that can create a more approachable atmosphere of the funeral compared to the abstract chanting of monks and Taoist priests, and this gains further trust from the people. Thirdly, monks and Taoist priests are religious people who are expected to observe religious rules in secular rituals, and thus, they usually do not eat meat or drink alcohol; contrastingly, Ti Qin Opera performers communicate with the families of the deceased in a relatively casual manner, and they can blend in with the secular environment. Consequently, the community considers Ti Qin Opera performers qualified and accepted to lead the mourning ritual on stage.

Improved economic status of Chongyang people

The rapid growth of China's economy in the last 20 years has improved the lives of the Chongyang people. From 2002 to 2020, the revenue of Chongyang County has risen dramatically from 0.55 billion RMB in 2002 (Chongyang County Finance Bureau, 2002) to a peak of 120 million RMB in 2019 (Chongyang County Finance Bureau, 2019). The financial income of Chongyang County has doubled 20 times in 20 years, and therefore, the improved fiscal health of the Chongyang County government enables the provision of financial assistance to support the development of Ti Qin Opera.

The cost of hiring a Ti Qin Opera troupe to perform at a funeral is not less than 5,000 RMB. In addition, the family holding the funeral serves meals to the relatives and friends who attend the funeral, which is another considerable expense. The GDP per capita in Chongyang County has increased from RMB 3,000 in 2002 to RMB 30,000 in 2022 (Chongyang County Bureau of Statistics, 2022), and the income of local residents has increased tenfold in 20 years, giving them adequate income to pay the salaries of the Ti Qin Opera performers. A researcher stated that "the demand for Ti Qin Opera troupes has increased as the local population's income have increased, leading to constant competition between different Ti Qin Opera troupes for performance opportunities" (C2, personal communication, February 1, 2023). The Ti Qin Opera performers also paid more

attention to their performances and were eager to make their performances more attractive in order to increase their income and chances of being hired. In the process, the characteristics and approaches of the Ti Qin Opera performers in leading the mourning rituals in funerals make the families of the deceased feel that it is worthwhile to hire them.

Conclusions

The mourning ritual is a new element in the funerals of the Chongyang people and is made up of eight parts led by the Ti Qin Opera performers. The mourning ritual emerges from the local people's emotional need to express their filial piety to the deceased through mourning rituals. Secondly, local people are influenced by the competition mentality, and hiring a Ti Qin Opera troupe is an act to display their family's wealth and social status to others. At the same time, the people of Chongyang have been attending Ti Qin Opera performances for hundreds of years, and the reputation of Ti Qin Opera performers has enabled them to gain the trust of the families of the deceased to participate in funerals. In other words, the local people recognize the professionalism of Ti Qin Opera performers and accept them as hosts and performers at funerals. As the living standards of the Chongyang people improved, they could afford to hire Ti Qin Opera for performances. Although Ti Qin Opera has not appeared at funerals in the past two decades, the mourning ritual has gradually become a tradition among the local people.

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