

TRÒ MA - A UNIQUE ART FORM THAT NEEDS TO BE PRESERVED AND PROMOTED

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The article studied Trò Ma in order to clarify the profound human value of children's "filial piety" to their parents when their parents pass away. At the same time, the research results clarified the differences in Trò Ma of Muong ethnic groups in Thanh Hoa, thereby suggesting solutions for relevant organs to preserve and promote this art form that is being lost.

Key words: Trò Ma; performing art type; Muong ethnic groups in Thanh Hoa.

1. Introduction

Tro ma, also known as "Tro Dam Ma" or "Cheo Ma", is a type of performance at the funeral of the Muong people in Thanh Hoa. Tro Ma is organized into wards with a leader called "Mr Kho" (the boss of the game). Mr. Kho was born in a family with Mr. No (the game's ancestor). According to the old custom, wards were only allowed to attend the funerals of the elderly (from 60 years of age or older). Every time he served a funeral, Ma's ward has to burn incense and ask Mr. No's permission. To the Muong in Thanh Hoa, when parents die, children have to invite Ma's ward to sing and perform tricks, to repay filial piety and dispel the sad, gloomy atmosphere of the funeral.

From 1945 onward, Tro Ma was active in many Muong villages in Thanh Hoa, especially in Ba Thuoc and Cam Thuy districts. Along with the changes of society, up to now, only one ward remains in Coc village, Thach Minh village, Cam Luong commune, Cam Thuy district.

2. Research overview

Over the past 10 years, Tro Ma has been interested and exploited through a number of large and small projects under different views.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism signed a decision for Vietnam National Academy of Music to implement a project to restore and preserve Tro Ma in Coc village, Cam Luong commune, Cam Thuy district. This is a work done meticulously from the pre-station stage to practice, recording and making a film . According to a scientific report of Vietnam National Academy of Music, the preserved footage is extremely valuable because it contains the images about the last generation that still holds the ancient system of Tro Ma. They are in their 80s or older. Arguably, the restoration was quite successful and achieved high results in terms of conservation quality. Previously, the preservation project of Tro Ma by the Department of Culture and Information of Thanh Hoa also performed the task of collecting, mainly preserving in terms of documents. The written and audio materials provided by the Thanh Hoa Department of Culture and Information and the Music Institute have timely preserved the ancient system of writings, handed down by the artists themselves.

In terms of research, up to now, there have been some articles writing about the aspects of the culture, content and Ma's performance from different views.

The article *Tro Ma in the funeral of the Muong in Thanh Hoa* published in the Art and Culture Magazine No. 399 (September 2017) gave an overview of the origin and performance of the Tro Ma. According to the author: "Besides cultural and artistic forms, Tro Ma-a form of performance at funerals is also one of the typical features of the Muong people in Thanh Hoa" [1]. The article Tro Ma in the funeral of the Muong people posted on Baothanhhoa.vn commented: "The funeral custom can be considered a miniature stage of the folk performances of the Muong people" [2].

From the perspective of experts, a number of restoration projects and small research papers have partly shown the general appearance of Tro Ma.

3. Research approach and methods

To clarify the appearance of Tro Ma as well as issues related to conservation and promotion, the author of the article uses a number of methods: (1) Theoretical research methods including analysis, comparison and synthesis to research and analyze documents and investigation results, thereby synthesizing and making scientific judgments; (2) practical research methods including investigation, interview and survey to collect Tro Ma and to clarify the role of performer in funerals of Muong people in Thanh Hoa.

4. Results

4.1. The legend of the origin of Tro Ma

According to documents collected by the author in Coc village, Thach Minh village, Cam Thuy district, Tro Ma originates from a legendary story as follows:

Once upon a time, there was a king who came to the Muong region. The king offered to eat with a poor family. The villagers chose two people to make rice for the king. There was a poor man who lived by the stream and a poor man who lived in the mountains. The poor by the stream made fish in the stream and sticky rice, while the people in the mountains wanted to find roasted bamboo shoots and put them in baskets to invite the king. The king chose the meal of the poor in the mountains as "roasted bamboo shoots". Understanding the plight of the poor living in the mountains, the king helped him do business to get out of poverty. When the king died, in order to pay filial piety to the person who helped, his descendants set up a guild to sing at the funeral.

Truyện thuyết trên cho thấy, trò Ma ra đời từ câu chuyện đền ơn đáp nghĩa, nhưng cũng bắt đầu từ đó, trò được lưu truyền và dần dần phát triển rộng khắp các bản Mường ở Thanh Hóa. Người Mường rất coi trọng chữ hiếu đối với cha mẹ, khi cha mẹ qua đời, gia đình dù nghèo khó đến đâu cũng phải cố gắng giết trâu, mổ lợn làm lễ tang. Đặc biệt là phải mời phường trò Ma đến diễn, tiễn đưa linh hồn người chết về với tổ tiên. Diễn trò cũng đồng thời xoa tan không khí âm đạm, giúp cho gia đình tang gia bớt đi nỗi buồn thương.

4.2. Content of Tro Ma

The main purpose of Tro Ma is to express condolences to the mourner and send the souls of the dead back to the ancestors. However, the content of Tro Ma is quite diverse. Some of the main contents can be summarized as follows:

- *Sending off the souls of the dead*

The songs in Tro Ma have content to offer condolences and instruct the souls of the dead before returning to Muong Ma. Some typical songs can be mentioned such as: Don moi, Giao ruoc Phuong tro, Vong om vong sat...

- Reflecting life

Tro ma clearly reflects aspects of the feudal life of the Muong residents. The images of labor and activities in the daily life of the Muong people such as hunting, growing , weaving... and their dreams and ambitions are also vividly displayed in each song. .

- *Educating children and grandchildren*

The funeral of the Muong is also an occasion to gather all the families and relatives of the village. This is also an opportunity for the Muong to teach their children and grandchildren indirectly. Many educational songs are performed spontaneously such as: Ca me sinh, Giao phuc, Giao duc, Giao an, Giao mu...

- *Making fun*

The humorous performances in Tro Ma creat laughter in the funeral is one of the unique features. Humor is not only shown in the jealousy act, but also portrayed through funny poems.

- *Congratulations to the emperors of the feudal period*

The respect for the king and mandarin in the feudal period of the Muong residents was also put into play by showing respect, the reputation and merit of the king and mandarin. Some songs can be mentioned such as: *Mung vu, Mung chua vuong, mung ong cai, ...* especially praising the prosperity of Le Dynasty.

It is a funeral game with the purpose of paying filial piety to grandparents, parents and comforting the family of the mourner, but its content is very diverse. In addition to songs about filial piety, consoling children, etc., there are also many songs about community life around, especially, there are many songs praising kings and mandarins in the feudal period. Thus, it can be seen that Tro Ma with the original purpose is to serve the funeral, but the other purpose is to remind and teach children and grandchildren about the events happening in life. All events and problems in the old feudal society were put into play, even criticizing bad habits in everyday life such as the game of Jealousy of two wives with the same husband. ... Besides the singing part, the performance part was also quite exciting and causes a lot of excitement for the viewers. The show is intended to remove all sorrows for the family.

4.3. Circumstance, time and form of performing Tro Ma

Ma's ward has from 8 to 12 males, of which 2 are young boys. The head of the ward is Mr. Kho, who is responsible for gathering his servants, teaching the young, and connecting with bereaved families. When receiving an invitation to serve the family with a funeral, Mr. Kho blew a horn made of buffalo horn to call his servants to quickly gather and prepare to perform. Before leaving, Ma ward has to prepare a vegetarian tray to worship Mr. No and ask permission to perform a trick.

Tro Ma consists of two main parts including the singing part and the acting part. In addition, some tasks performed at the funeral home, such as singing to invite the relatives of the mourner's family to visit (Don moi); Singing on the way to the cemetery; Singing when lowering the grave...

The singing part has two forms: standing singing and sitting singing. Standing singing is standing to sing and performed during the day; sitting singing is sitting to sing and performed at night. Standing and sitting singing is performed in the middle of the stilt house, in front of the coffin. The wards sit around playing music according to the arrangement of Mr. Kho, who stand up and turn towards the coffin to dance, sing or act. Late at night, Ma's ward can sit, drink wine and sing all night. The acting part is implemented in the morning. Usually, the wards will dance and sing *Cheo Mai*, *Cheo Ken*, then come to sitting singing. The content in the sitting songs is mainly to teach children and grandchildren to remember the nurturing merits of grandparents and parents, to describe the life of Muong residents including historical events. During the play, it is added some "cho cho" songs, funny poems in the rest of the servants

The performance part consists of two forms: performing then sitting and singing when it is almost dawn.

The performance before sitting and singing is *Cheo Mai* and *Cheo Ken* performed by two young people. When dancing, each person holds a whip with simple, rhythmic and flexible dance. The main dance movements are swinging the whip across the back or the forehead, swinging the foot to the beat of the song, or sitting down on one leg, the other foot bounces rhythmically according to the hand-twisting movement. When performing, rowing boys simultaneously face towards the coffin or turn to face each other depending on the movement and rhythm of the song.

A man with two women: is a comedy about two wives who are married to the same husband. The husband is a soldier for King Le. Two women pick him up when he returns home. Two men with Muong costumes act as two wives. That image was stimulated to laugh by the humorous story of the two women and between the two women and their village boy, who went fishing, accidentally meet by the stream. Those witty and humorous sayings make the atmosphere of mourning more joyful.

Mo Lon, Di tim Tu Man..... are also funny and humorous performances, which are welcomed by the people. The lyrics and humorous and funny acting in the stories helped the bereaved family to reduce their pain.s

Ca Trong, also known as Painting of rice drums, is a play consisting of three characters: a character wearing a rice drum and two characters competing a rice drum. The person wearing the drum protect the rice knob against the other two people. When the knob is peeled off on the drum, the show ends. Three characters when acting all wear wooden masks like the masks in the Xuan Pha game in Tho Xuan, Thanh Hoa. The throbbing drums in Ca Trong created a very vibrant and exciting atmosphere.

Ca Ho Lang describes a tiger hunt, which is very attractive to the villagers. Tiger is an animal that lives in the jungle but often comes to the village to attack people and cattle. Muong residents are very afraid of tigers and haunting humans. For the Muong, the tiger is a sacred animal, so in order to perform Ca Ho Lang, Ma's ward must prepare three worshipping ceremonies. Before the performance, the ceremony is a tray of rice with wine; During the performance, the ceremony must have a piece of raw meat (because tigers like to eat raw meat); After the performance, the ceremony is a tray offered by Mr. Kho to the tiger. The game has the sequence: Tiger procession - Tiger dance - Go shovel fish to meet tiger - Two hunters hunt tiger - Bring tiger.

5. Discussion

The above contents show that Tro Ma is a unique type of performance of the Muong in Thanh Hoa. In fact, there have been a number of restoration and preservation works, but only small projects can be localized. Up to now, there are very few people in the age of 80 (who used to play the game when they were very young), being the last generation that still retains the ancient method of this unique performance.

Since Thanh Hoa Department of Culture and Information and Vietnam National Academy of Music collected, restored and preserved Tro Ma in Coc village (Thach Minh village, Cam Lien commune, Cam Thuy district), It has been performed in the funerals of the Muong by artists. The sequence of performances is shown orderly by the artisans from the time the dead person is wrapped in the coffin until the burial is completed. The Ma's ward also strictly implements the customary law of the Muong in Thanh Hoa. It only served the dead at the age of 60 or older. When practicing, Mr. Kho had to burn incense to ask for Mr. No and was only allowed to practice each scene and segment of the show. Up to now, in Coc village, whenever the horn is heard and resounded from the stilt house of Mr. Kho, the villagers quickly show up. The atmosphere is very lively and urgent. That is the initial success of preserving and promoting Tro Ma in life. That success also opens up a new and broader direction for the Muong community in Thanh Hoa.

Teaching Tro Ma is a key issue towards conservation. With the current artisans in Coc village and with the methodical preservation both in terms of text and sound, it is possible to expand the ma's wards to other villages and communes. However, that cannot be implemented without the direction, support and policies of the State. In addition, there must be funding to support costumes, props and musical instruments for the wards.

Tro Ma is not only to send off the souls of the dead to their ancestors but also have an element to dispel the gloomy atmosphere. The amusing elements in the show made the funeral more cozy, the villagers gathered in greater numbers. That is one of the unique characteristics compared to the Muong people in other places. The replication of Treo Ma in the Muong community in Thanh Hoa helps the villagers to be properly aware of the issue of preserving the traditional cultural values of their homeland, on the other hand, also promotes the development of Tro ma in Thanh Hoa.

6. Discussion

The conservation and promotion of tro Ma should not stop at Coc village, but should be replicated in many places in the area where the Muong people live in Thanh Hoa. It is an urgent issue, which needs more attention from the state so that It can be truly restored, truly promoted, and have an important position in the cultural and spiritual life of the Muong in Thanh Hoa.

References

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