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Business in the 1920th China**

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The Relationship between Women's Sport and the Show Business in the 1920th China

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the relationship between women's sport education and the show business in the 1920th China. In the late the 1910s, bound feet, which had been a criterion for beauty, became the symbol of backwardness and the healthy beauty replaced them. In the next decade, when the modern school system was built, a lot of women's sports schools were established one after another. It was the physical education thought of Cai Yuanpei, Father of Education in Republic of China that enhanced the educational institutions of women's sports. Meantime, Li Jinhui, a well-known composer of popular music as well as a showman, founded Chinese singing and dancing school and the school for beauty. Li's schools belong under the category of actress's training institute. However, they as with women's sports school can be categorized within the educational constitution to train the female body to be suitable for modern age, since Li had become acquainted with Cai at the music workshop of Beijing University and entered Cai's thought with the emphasis on physical education for intelligence. Moreover, this reasoning is supported by the fact that both bodies of sports women and dancing women were popular in the visual media, such as pictorial magazine or comic magazine.

Keywords: Republic of China, Li Jinhui, Cai Yuanpei, show business

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Introduction

The smash hits songs, such as *Mao-mao yu*[The Misty Rain], catapulted Li Jinhui (Li Jinhui 1891-1967) into fame in China of the 1920s. Many critics, however, branded his music "Yellow Music" (Jones, 2001, 74), a form of pornography, causing him to suffer persecution during the Chinese Cultural Revolution period. Recently, he has once again been recognized as a most important person in Chinese popular music history (Jones, 2001, 73). There are a few extant articles on the relationship between his teaching language and his children's operettas, although none focus on the relationship between his operettas and Cai Yuanpei's Ideal. Keeping these two points in mind, this paper focuses on the contribution of Li Jinhui to children's physical education.

Li Jinhui in His Youth

Li Jinhui was born in, China's Hunan district in 1891, the second son of an official of the Qing dynasty. After he graduated from Hunan Normal School, he taught music and Chinese language. In 1916, he was called on by the Educational Department of the Republic of China to, become an editor of texts of the standard Chinese language. Additionally, he joined the concomitant effort to spread the standard dialect to Chinese people. That was his first occasion to engage in popular culture.

The Influence of Cai Yuanpei's Ideal

After several years, Li Jinhui originated his method to spread the standard dialect through children's operettas, an idea inevitably influenced by Cai Yuanpei, "the father of the education of the Republic of China" (Ishikawa, 1984, 20).

Cai Yuanpei, serving as the first Minister of Education of the Republic of China, said the following in a lecture about the physical education of women:

It is possible to get the perfect personality through the physical education. In physical education, the most important initiative must be exercising. Our body and spirit have a kind of potential power, which would develop in response to the external surroundings..... Chinese tradition has bound Chinese women' feet, has not allowed them to go out freely, and to exercise. Thus, they gradually got lethargic. (Cai Yuanpei, 1997, p.319)

Cai Yuanpei asserted that Chinese women under restraint cannot develop their spirit, and he therefore encouraged them to exercise.

Further, he put a great deal of stock in extracurricular activities for the cultivation of an aesthetic sensibility. Li Jinhui had participated in one of Cai's activities, the Music Workshop of Beijing University, and had had a personal

acquaintance with Cai. After several years as a member of the musical activity, Li Jinhui devised his own children's operettas to learn the proper pronunciation through singing while dancing. Consequently, his aesthetic exercises for children transformed into an entertaining performance on stage. The transformation is little wonder, considering Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic ideals, which aimed to improve the daily life and social environment of the Chinese people.

Li Jinhui's Children's Operettas

In 1921, Li Jinhui was engaged as an editor at Zhong-hua Shuju in Shanghai. Meanwhile, he found the four voice inflections of the standard Chinese language can be expressed by the tone of music (Li Jinhui, 1982, pp.100-101), and he went on to publish Chinese language texts using Mandarin Phonetic Symbols. During this period, he organized a troupe to promote the standard Chinese language and traveled about the Jiangsu district. The troupe performed a Qinyu [the voice of the violin] program as follows:

First, one of the audiences writes one short Chinese sentence in using Chinese characters. Then, Li Jinhui looks at the Chinese characters and expresses the standard pronunciation of them by the tone of the violin. At the end, Li Minghui, who was the twelve- years-old daughter of Li Jinhui made guesses the collect sentence from the violin's tones without looking at the Chinese characters (Li Jinhui, 1982, p.98).

This program always won great popularity from the audience. From these experiences, he became convinced that the best way to master standard Chinese was through song and dance, and he started to create operettas for children. He edited the children's magazine *Xiao Pengyou* [*Little Friends*] to serialize his operettas in it.

Next, Li Jinhui organized pupils of the Chinese Language School and held an operetta concert called Mingyue Yinyue Hui [the bright moon music]. Although their expression and technique were unsophisticated, their performance was an epoch-making one in the history of Chinese education. There were, however, some Chinese soldiers who regarded their performance with amorous intentions. Presumably, and perhaps ironically, their inappropriate gazes at the girls' bodies gave Li Jinhui the idea of the next stage.

From Education to Show Business

In 1927, Li Jinhui established Zhonghua Gewu Zhuanke Xuexiao [Chinese singing and dancing school] in Shanghai. It was the first modern school in China that had the curriculum to educate professional entertainers.

Figure 1. *From Left to Right: Zhao Zihua, Li Lili, and Wang Renmei*



Source: Wang Renmei, 2011, p.4

A few years later, when that school closed for economic reasons, Li Jinhui founded his next school, Meimei Nuxiao [the school for beauties]. Wang Renmei (1914-1987), who became a famous actress in the 1940s, retraces her schooldays as follows;

Wei Yingbo [who graduated from Shanghai Dongnan Sports School], by whom I was most impressed, taught us dance every day. In her lesson, we must wear dance shoes. At that time, the dance shoes had a very simple design, they were made from white cotton with rubber soles, so we saw two white ribbons on them to bind our ankles, and then they looked like toe shoes in appearance. The exercises were not so complicated; the most difficult for me was to lean back and to allow my legs to spread apart, today so it called the splits (Wang Renmei, 2011, p.36).

Leading the students of Meimei Nuxiao, Li Jinhui organized a traveling company.

Three years later, the company was affiliated with the Lianhua film organization. In wartime, Li Jinhui's troupe lost its popularity and disbanded in 1936.

Conclusion

Though Li Jinhui's operettas originally aimed at training children to reinforce the standard Chinese language, they were effectively girls' operettas and hence had high affinity to popular culture. Additionally, the girls who studied at his school were both lithe in build and proficient in standard Chinese, with many going on to become leading actresses during the period of "talking pictures." Li Jinhui cultivated the bodies of talented girls during the glamorous show business period in the 1920s, thereby contributing to the prosperity of the Chinese film industry in the 1940s.

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