

An Analysis of the Essential Characteristics of the "Chinese Singing Method"

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ABSTRACT

The "Chinese Singing Method" is a vocal art system formed on the foundation of traditional Chinese vocal art, incorporating and drawing on the vocal techniques of "Western Bel Canto." It possesses distinct national characteristics and a spirit of the times. It is a comprehensive vocal system with national aesthetics at its core, linguistic artistry as its feature, scientific vocal production as its foundation, and emotional expression as its ultimate goal. This paper, proceeding from the national essence of the "Chinese Singing Method" and integrating traditional vocal heritage with contemporary developmental theories and practices, systematically analyzes its core characteristics that distinguish it from other singing methods across three dimensions: vocal technique, aesthetic orientation, and cultural bearing. It reveals the internal logical relationship of "technique as the form, culture as the substance, and emotion as the soul," systematically elucidates its essential features, and provides a theoretical framework of professional value for vocal practice and research.

Keywords: *Chinese Singing Method, Chinese vocal music, Artistic characteristics, Aesthetic orientation, Cultural traits.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

The "Chinese Singing Method" constitutes an academic conceptualization within the domain of national vocal music. In contemporary vocal practice, techniques and performance styles rooted in traditional Chinese vocal art have long grappled with conceptual ambiguity and unclear stylistic categorization. The frequent conflation of the "Chinese Singing Method" with related concepts such as "National Singing Style" and "Folk-Bel Canto Fusion" necessitates urgent systematic clarification, interpretation, and qualitative definition of its distinct artistic identity and cultural boundaries.

1.2 Research Purpose and Significance

The formulation and evolution of the "Chinese Singing Method" as an academic concept represents a significant achievement in the modernization of Chinese vocal art, embodying the dual pursuit of

cultural authenticity and scientific methodology. Clarifying the fundamental characteristics of this approach carries profound contemporary significance for multiple domains: it enables the preservation and promotion of China's exceptional traditional cultural heritage; facilitates the establishment of a comprehensive Chinese vocal pedagogy system; enriches the global repository of vocal arts; and enhances the international dissemination and recognition of Chinese vocal music culture. This conceptual clarification thus holds transformative potential for both academic discourse and artistic practice.

1.3 Literature Review

1.3.1 Research in China

Scholars in China have proposed the concept of the "Chinese Singing Method" from a theoretical perspective, characterizing it as a vocal system founded on correct breath support, performance in native languages, inheritance of traditional vocal essence, and incorporation of Western techniques.

Researchers such as Wang Baozhang and Cao Yiran have contributed to its theoretical construction and practical exploration. Furthermore, studies employing methodologies ranging from subjective auditory perception to spectrographic analysis and singer's formant examination have identified discernible differences between Chinese and Western vocal practices in terms of vocal production, resonance characteristics, and timbre. Additionally, historical research into the origins of traditional Chinese bel canto singing suggests the existence of vocal forms analogous to bel canto in China as early as 2,500 years ago.

1.3.2 International Research

Dedicated international scholarship on this subject remains relatively limited. Existing studies primarily focus on acoustic analyses of traditional Chinese opera singing, such as Peking opera, examining acoustic parameters including fundamental frequency and spectral characteristics. In summary, international research is still in its nascent stages, largely confined to acoustic characterization of performance styles, with limited exploration of the overall theoretical framework and essential characteristics of the "Chinese Singing Method."

1.4 Core Thesis

The "Chinese Singing Method" is fundamentally rooted in Chinese linguistic phonology, embodies the soul of traditional Chinese vocal aesthetics, and eclectically incorporates scientific vocal techniques from Western bel canto. This synthesis ultimately forms an independent vocal system characterized by distinct national cultural attributes and contemporary adaptability.

1.5 Research Framework and Methodology

This study adopts a research approach centered on "essential characteristics," developed through three dimensions: "cultural roots — technical core — artistic expression." Using a "technique — aesthetic — culture" analytical framework, the research employs multiple methodologies including documentary analysis, comparative study, case analysis, and expert interviews.

2. FOUR CORE ARTISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE "CHINESE SINGING METHOD"

The inherent characteristics of the Chinese singing method should be examined from four fundamental dimensions: "Linguistic Foundation - Technical Core - Aesthetic Essence - Systemic Attribute."

2.1 Linguistic Foundation

The linguistic foundation serves as the fundamental cornerstone of the Chinese singing method. Centered on the phonetic aesthetics of "shaping melody according to linguistic tones" and "articulatory precision with resonant tone," it is rooted in the phonological systems of Mandarin Chinese and various ethnic languages. Through technical principles such as "articulation and resonance management," "lexical prominence with melodic subtlety," and "melodic subservience to linguistic contours," it achieves in-depth integration between vocal production and linguistic rhythm. The realization of the core objective of "articulatory precision with resonant tone" constitutes the essential distinction from Western bel canto's approach of "adapting words to pre-existing melody."

2.1.1 Core Connotation

This system takes the mother tongue as the central element, with musical phrases subordinated to textual expression. "Shaping melody according to linguistic tones" is the phonetic basis for "constructing melodic lines around words," where the tones and phonology of Chinese characters determine the direction of the melody. "Articulatory precision with resonant tone" embodies the aesthetic orientation of "conveying meaning through melodic development," pursuing the harmonious unity of accurate pronunciation and melodic beauty. Ultimately, it achieves the conceptual ideal of "words as the foundation of melody and melody as the essence of words," enabling vocal expression to convey meaning clearly while communicating emotion through musicality.

2.1.2 Key Principles and Logical Framework

Primacy of characters: "Articulatory precision" takes precedence over "resonant tone." Initial

consonants must be articulated accurately, and vowels must be fully formed to ensure lyrical clarity, completing the entire process of "onset, sustain, and conclusion."

Language guiding melody: The melody strictly conforms to the tonal contours of Chinese characters rather than forcing pronunciation to submit to a pre-composed melodic line, rigorously adhering to the rules of the four tones.

Beauty of the integration of words and melody: "Resonant tone" is not a technical virtuosity divorced from the text; instead, it builds on "articulatory precision" to render vocal lines coherent, full, and rounded. It uses beautiful melody to enhance clear enunciation, forming the unique charm of "words embedded in melody and melody permeated with words."

2.1.3 Analysis of Core Principles

"Conveying emotion through words, enhancing expression through melody": Its core characteristic is that the voice can convey meaning clearly while possessing musical beauty. Technically, it is a vocal and melodic system centered on "words," integrating language and melody through the principles of "articulatory precision with resonant tone" and "shaping melody according to linguistic tones." Aesthetically, it follows the "beauty of harmony," pursuing a vocal quality characterized by "roundness, moderation, and harmony," emphasizing the balanced unity of "sound, emotion, words, and melody," which reflects the traditional philosophical concept of "balancing hardness and softness, harmonizing yin and yang."

Core of "shaping melody according to linguistic tones": Its essence lies in melody following words. Vocal melodies are designed based on the inherent four tones and vowel structures of Chinese characters, allowing melodies to naturally fit the phonetic rises and falls of words instead of being composed arbitrarily in detachment from the text.

Ultimate manifestation of "articulatory precision with resonant tone": "Articulatory precision" is the prerequisite, referring to clear and accurate pronunciation and enunciation. "Resonant tone" is predicated on "articulatory precision" and represents the artistic expression of coherent, full, rounded, and pleasant vocal lines, where sound serves language. The beauty of "resonant tone" lies in ornamenting melodies with "melodic ornamentation techniques" on the basis of "articulatory precision," making vocal lines smooth,

natural, and rich in charm, and reflecting the "linear beauty" of Chinese music.

2.2 Technical Core

The technical core of the Chinese singing method lies in realizing the unity of "technique and expression," supported by two pillars: ornamentation techniques and scientific vocalization, which not only preserve national characteristics but also possess professional expressiveness.

2.2.1 Ornamentation Techniques: The Soul of Style Formation

Ornamentation techniques are the core of style shaping in the Chinese singing method. Through decorative vocalization such as vibrato, portamento, and nuanced tonal variations, as well as refined breath control, they infuse straightforward melodies with national traits and emotional depth, serving as a key means to achieve the "unity of sound and emotion."

- Technique serving "charm" rather than "virtuosity": All ornamentation revolves around "artistic charm" and "emotional expression," consistently ensuring that "vocal lines" serve "emotion" and "charm."
- Revealing the grand through the minute: This characteristic relies on subtle and sophisticated sound processing, including portamento, vibrato, mordents, breath points, and rhythmic pauses. A well-executed "pause" can highlight key lyrics, while a natural "legato" can prolong emotional resonance, creating the special effect of "sound ceasing while emotion continues."
- Conforming to Chinese linguistic rules to achieve articulatory precision with resonant tone: Ornamentation strictly adheres to Chinese pronunciation rules. When prolonging and modifying vowels, the direction of portamento and vibrato is adjusted according to the tones of characters to ensure that "ornamentation" does not compromise "clear articulation." The ultimate goal is to achieve the Chinese aesthetic of "rounded words within a resonant tone," making singing both intelligible and musically beautiful.

2.2.2 *Support from Scientific Vocalization*

The Chinese singing method appropriately draws on the principles of unified timbre support, resonance cavity adjustment, and register unification from Western bel canto, endowing the voice with penetration, endurance, and a wide range, thereby providing scientific technical guarantee for the expression of national styles.[1]

2.3 *Aesthetic Essence*

The aesthetic essence of the Chinese singing method adheres to the expressive pursuit of "integrating sound and emotion, blending emotion with artistic conception," featuring an artistic positioning of "appealing to both refined and popular tastes," which is specifically reflected in three dimensions: emotional expression, form presentation, and artistic conception creation.

2.3.1 *Artistic Positioning of Appealing to Both Refined and Popular Tastes*

In essence, the Chinese singing method inherently integrates "professionalism," "artistry," and "popularity." It absorbs the essence of traditional vocal music while remaining closely aligned with public aesthetic preferences, enabling it to shine on professional stages and resonate in mass communication, which reflects the attribute of "art for the people" in Chinese vocal music.

2.3.2 *Core Pursuit of Integrating Sound and Emotion*

Emotion as the soul: It emphasizes "carrying genuine emotion through the voice to achieve the perfect integration of vocal technique and sincere expression." The core of performance lies in conveying authentic emotion rather than mere technical display, and emotional interpretation must be consistent with the cultural background and inherent meaning of the work.

Form as a supplement: It focuses on the integration of "sound, emotion, posture, and expression." In stage performances, body language and facial expressions are concise and restrained, conforming to the aesthetic of "freehand expression," which supports vocal expression without resorting to exaggerated Western-style theatricality.

Voice as a medium: Voice is regarded as a bridge for transmitting meaning, expressing

emotion, and inheriting culture, serving as the material foundation for emotional expression in singing. As the core carrier of vocal performance, vocal delivery bears cultural depth and emotional connotation.

Endowing sound with emotion through inner feelings: Emotion is the soul of singing, while vocal technique serves as a tool for emotional expression. Inner feelings imbue the voice with nuance and vitality, transforming it from mere phonation into a vessel and extension of emotion.

Conveying emotion through voice: By manipulating timbre, dynamics, tempo, and rhythm, performers delicately depict the imagery and emotional landscape of a song, striving for profound artistic impact. The essence of "conveying emotion through voice" lies in expressing inner feelings purely through vocal qualities, independent of text or visual elements, with the key being the relationship where "voice" is the vessel and "emotion" is the essence.

2.3.3 *Aesthetic Pursuit of Artistic Conception Creation*

Singing emphasizes the expression of literary imagery as well as the "spiritual resonance" and "freehand nature" in traditional aesthetics, taking "spiritual resemblance over formal resemblance" as its core and pursuing the "creation of artistic conception." Through the interplay of substantial and ethereal vocal qualities, variations in dynamics, and changes in tempo, it conveys emotional imagery that transcends the literal meaning of the lyrics.

- Core logic: It takes "sound" as the brush and "emotion" as the ink, pursuing the aesthetic realm of "sound containing imagery and imagery imbued with feeling" through the integration of vocal technique and emotional expression.
- Implementation approaches:
 1. Vocal lines changing with scenes: Performers use the voice to simulate imagery and adjust singing styles according to the scenes depicted in the work;
 2. Emotion giving rise to artistic conception: Artistic conception is activated through emotion, where conception is the immersion and externalization of "feeling";
 3. Blank space and freehand expression: Drawing on the concept of "freehand

brushwork" from Chinese aesthetics, it reserves room for audience imagination. Instead of pursuing vocal "fullness," it creates "blank space" through "breath points," "pauses," and "soft dynamics." [2]

2.4 Systemic Attribute

The systemic attribute of the Chinese singing method is the inclusiveness and openness of "one body with multiple aspects," with its core philosophy being an integrated vocal system of "national aesthetics + scientific vocalization," which is not a simple combination but an organic unification of traditional and Western techniques.

2.4.1 Open Characteristic of "One Body with Multiple Aspects"

Different from the single focus of the "national singing method," the Chinese singing method is an open system. Its essence lies in "one body with multiple aspects": the "one body" refers to taking "national cultural attributes" as the core foundation, while the "multiple aspects" means it covers the essential spirit of traditional opera and folk songs, and at the same time adapts to diverse works such as modern art songs and film/television music. It can absorb new musical elements and always maintain the unity of the system based on "national cultural attributes."

2.4.2 Core Logic of Sino-Western Integration

Sino-Western integration is not "Westernization," but rather using Western techniques to "strengthen" the traditional foundation, making traditional vocal music "clearer in words, more rounded in melody, and more genuine in emotion." Supported by scientific vocal production, it neither loses the soul of Chinese charm nor gains a wider vocal range and more sustained expressiveness. [3]

2.4.2.1 Rooted in Tradition: Upholding the Core Essence of the Nation

Following the core principle of "Chinese learning as the foundation, Western learning for application," on the premise of Sino-Western integration, the Chinese singing method is rooted in the essence of traditional vocal arts such as folk songs, opera, and narrative singing. It draws on the scientific vocal techniques of Western vocal music while deeply integrating the core essence of

traditional national vocal music—"words, melody, emotion, and charm"—to make technique serve traditional charm rather than replace it.

- Centered on "Chinese characters": It adheres to the fundamental principles of traditional "shaping melody according to linguistic tones" and "articulatory precision with resonant tone." While Western bel canto emphasizes the coherence and resonance of "sound," folk songs, opera, and narrative singing "guide sound through words." The integration in the Chinese singing method always prioritizes traditional "articulation and enunciation": it draws on the "Thirteen Rhyme Schemes" and "Four Tones" rules of opera, emphasizing strong initial consonants, full vowels, and clear coda rhyming; it absorbs the characteristics of "recitative-style singing" in narrative singing to ensure that lyric pronunciation conforms to Chinese tones and rhythms. This prevents the phenomenon of "sound obscuring words and making lyrics unclear" when applying Western resonance techniques, thus upholding the traditional vocal principle of "words as the soul."
- Integrating the essence of "melody": It transforms traditional ornamentation techniques into "charm markers" in Sino-Western integration. The soul of traditional national vocal music lies in "melody"—the "portamento and mordents" of opera, the "mournful tones and wordless drawls" of folk songs, and the "staccato, lively, and witty tones" of narrative singing are all "charm genes" that the Chinese singing method prioritizes preserving. During integration, it does not simply copy and apply the "original ecological" ornamentation of tradition but uses Western scientific vocal techniques to make ornamentation more precise and sustainable.
- Adhering to the core of "emotion": It inherits the traditional aesthetic pursuit of "the perfect integration of sound and emotion, with melody following emotion." Western bel canto emphasizes the "objective beauty of sound," while the "guiding sound through emotion" in national opera, the "direct expression of heartfelt feelings" in folk songs, and the "narrative lyricism" in narrative singing all place "emotion" at the core of vocal expression. The mutual learning and integration in the Chinese singing method consistently adhere to the traditional

principle of "emotion outweighing sound": using Western techniques of "combining emotion and sound" to illuminate and enhance traditional "emotional and situational expression." [4]

2.4.2.2 Drawing on Science: Absorbing the Advantages of Western Vocalization

The Chinese singing method reasonably applies the principles of unified timbre support, resonance cavity adjustment, and register unification from Western bel canto, endowing the voice with penetration, endurance, and a wide range, thereby providing a more solid technical support for the expression of traditional charm.

3. THE SUPPORTING FRAMEWORK OF THE "CHINESE SINGING METHOD": TECHNICAL, AESTHETIC, AND CULTURAL

3.1 Technical Support: A Vocal System Centered on "National Timbre"

The Chinese singing method is based on oral resonance and moderately integrated with sinus and nasopharyngeal resonance, while pursuing a national timbre characterized by "brightness, clarity, warmth, and naturalness."

The vocal quality of the Chinese singing method is intended to possess the characteristics of "brightness, roundness, and concentration."

The articulation of the Chinese singing method adheres to the tones of Chinese characters, following the principle of "words leading the melodic line."

Emphasis is placed on the completeness of the initial, medial, and final components of each syllable to achieve the effect of "precise articulation and a mellifluous tone." [5]

3.2 Aesthetic Expression Support: An Artistic Style Guided by "Vocal Mastery and Emotional Depth"

The Chinese singing method features subtle and restrained emotional expression that adheres to the principle of "imbuing sound with emotion," as it conveys delicate feelings through breath control and melodic ornamentation while rejecting explicit emotional outpouring; additionally, it emphasizes "linear beauty" in melodic treatment, with

ornamentation techniques such as portamento, vibrato, and rhythmic accents endowing the melody with "artistic charm" and "elasticity"; furthermore, it unifies "voice, emotion, posture, and expression" in performance integration, where gestures and facial expressions serve the emotional content to present a dignified and natural national demeanor.

3.3 Cultural Bearing Support: Value Transmission with the "National Spirit" as Its Core

The Chinese singing method deeply draws on vocal techniques from opera, folk songs, and narrative singing, thus representing the continuation and development of traditional Chinese vocal culture; it naturally embodies the cultural characteristics of various ethnic groups, with its singing style closely aligned with their respective folk music traditions; and its works and performance styles are closely linked to contemporary themes, serving as "sonic symbols" that record the era and convey the spirit of the times.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 Conclusion on the Three Core Characteristics of the Chinese Singing Method

"Technique has roots, aesthetics possess a soul, and culture carries a lineage."

4.2 Core Argument

This study systematically summarizes the three essential characteristics of the "Chinese Singing Method": A cultural essence centered on traditional aesthetics; A technical foundation rooted in the "word"; An artistic soul embodied by "emotion"; These three elements are interconnected and indispensable.

4.3 Value Manifestation

Contemporary Value: In the context of globalization, the exploration and practice of the "Chinese Singing Method" contribute unique Chinese wisdom and solutions to the world's vocal art.

Practical Implication: Clarifying its defining characteristics holds significant practical meaning for the inheritance, innovation, and international dissemination of the Chinese Singing Method.

4.4 Future Outlook

It is necessary to continue deepening the excavation of traditional vocal theory and persistently promote the innovation and development of the "Chinese Singing Method" in composition, performance, and pedagogy.

With "Chinese charm" and the "national core" as constants, it is crucial for the advancement of the "Chinese Singing Method" to firmly establish that "upholding integrity" (maintaining authenticity) is the prerequisite for "innovation."

Looking ahead, the "Chinese Singing Method" is expected to further integrate into the contemporary context and move towards global recognition, while steadfastly adhering to its essential characteristics.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

First author Lishan Xie guided the research, outlining the theoretical basis and designing the empirical study at Guangzhou College of Commerce. He used rigorous methods to collect and analyze data. Findings were synthesized and presented in the paper. Second author Songlin Zhou contributed to data collection and processing. She also conducted a supplementary empirical study at Chengdu Technological University.

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