

THE INFLUENCE OF BEL CANTO TECHNIQUE ON DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE NATIONAL SINGING STYLE

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Abstract. This article explores the impact of the Bel canto technique on the development of Chinese national singing style. The features of the integration of bel canto principles into traditional Chinese vocal practice are revealed. The article reflects the problems and successes in merging Western and Chinese vocal traditions; it is concluded that the dialogue between bel canto technique and Chinese national singing represents a vibrant area of intercultural exchange, enriches the pedagogy of musical art and contributes to the development of a distinctive Chinese form of vocal art.

Keywords: Bel canto technique, Chinese national singing style, cross-cultural exchange, vocal pedagogy, pedagogical strategies.

ВЛИЯНИЕ ТЕХНИКИ БЕЛЬКАНТО НА РАЗВИТИЕ КИТАЙСКОГО НАЦИОНАЛЬНОГО СТИЛЯ ПЕНИЯ

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Аннотация. В статье исследуется влияние техники бельканто на развитие китайского национального стиля пения. Раскрываются особенности интеграции принципов бельканто в традиционную китайскую вокальную практику. В статье отражены проблемы и успехи в слиянии западных и китайских вокальных традиций; делается вывод о том, что диалог между техникой бельканто и китайским национальным пением представляет собой яркую область межкультурного обмена, обогащает педагогику музыкального искусства и способствует развитию своеобразной китайской формы вокального искусства.

Ключевые слова: техника бельканто, китайский национальный стиль пения, межкультурный обмен, вокальная педагогика, педагогические стратегии.

The fusion of Western operatic techniques with traditional Chinese vocal performance practices has given rise to a unique synthesis in the realm of musical art, particularly in the development of a Chinese national singing style. This article examines the profound influence of the Bel canto technique, a cornerstone of Western vocal pedagogy, on the evolution of Chinese national singing. The integration of Bel canto's principles into Chinese vocal practices has facilitated a transformative process, yielding a

distinctive vocal aesthetic that resonates with both the nuanced expressivity of Western opera and the rich heritage of Chinese musical traditions.

The Bel canto technique, which originated in Italy during the 17th century, emphasizes the importance of seamless legato singing, purity of tone, and the agility of the voice. These foundational principles have been instrumental in shaping the vocal technique of Western opera singers, guiding them towards achieving a balanced and flexible vocal production that allows for expressive nuances and dynamic control. As Chinese singers and pedagogues began to explore the potential benefits of adopting Western vocal techniques, the Bel canto school emerged as a pivotal influence, offering a methodology for vocal development that could be adapted to enhance the traditional Chinese singing style.

Pedagogical approaches within the domain of Bel canto vocal instruction necessitate a nuanced understanding of the cognitive load presented by the early integration of theoretical knowledge into practical vocal training. The premature infusion of complex vocal music theory can engender cognitive dissonance among learners, subsequently impeding their problem-solving capacity. Consider, for instance, «the frequent occurrence of linguistic articulator rigidity, such as a stiffened tongue, within the vocal training milieu. A simplistic directive urging students to position their tongues flatly against the posterior oral cavity or to engender lingual relaxation, whilst concurrently maintaining an overall state of orofacial laxity, may inadvertently obfuscate the learner's comprehension of these abstract concepts» [1, p. 39]. The ambiguity surrounding the modalities of relaxation and the characteristics of an overly exerted orofacial condition necessitates a more tangible instructional strategy.

In this context, vocal pedagogues might employ phonetic anchoring sounds such as «li» and «la» to direct the learner's focus towards the apex of the tongue, thereby facilitating targeted relaxation of the articulatory mechanism. Such methodologically specific training interventions are designed to address concrete vocal challenges, enhancing the learner's procedural knowledge and application of technique. Furthermore, when learners exhibit proficiency in applying these vocal techniques, it is imperative that the instructor reinforces the correct methodological application, elucidating the symbiosis between theoretical frameworks and practical execution. This pedagogical strategy ensures the learner's development of an accurate auditory perception of sound production, foundational to the acquisition of fundamental vocal competencies. Hence, establishing a solid foundational skill set is paramount in the pedagogical journey towards vocal mastery.

The expansion of pedagogical scope within vocal instruction is crucial for the cultivation of Bel canto techniques, which necessitate a broad vocal range. In particular, Bel canto vocalists are often capable of traversing up to two octaves, a feat notably achieved by coloratura sopranos and certain other vocalists extending to two and a half, and occasionally, three octaves. Such proficiency «encompasses mastery over three

distinct vocal registers, each producing divergent tonal qualities due to innate physiological variations in human vocal production» [2, p. 573]. Bel canto techniques, however, facilitate a seamless integration across these registers, culminating in an exemplary coherence of vocal output.

The pursuit of a distinctive Bel canto art form, imbued with Chinese cultural attributes, necessitates the integration of indigenous elements. Contemporary pedagogical strategies within professional music academia are thus challenged to evolve, fostering the emergence of vocalists proficient in both Bel canto and native folk styles – a synthesis epitomized by artists acclaimed as the "Sino-Western Nightingale," who have garnered accolades in both genres. This confluence of Bel canto and alternative vocal traditions is poised to redefine existing paradigms, fostering a pluralistic vocal culture.

Concurrently, the pedagogical advancement of Bel canto is witnessing an increased acknowledgment and integration of its scientifically underpinned vocal principles. For instance, the adaptation of Bel canto methodologies – specifically, techniques emphasizing open, relaxed throat singing – by performers of the ancient Qin opera illustrates a strategic response to contemporary auditory preferences. Originating from the unique acoustical landscape of the Loess Plateau, Qin opera has historically exhibited a vocal style shaped by its environmental context. However, the changing zeitgeist and the diverging aesthetic sensibilities of modern youth necessitate a transformative approach. Through comprehensive reforms in vocal technique, instrumentation, and musical arrangement, particularly the adoption of Bel canto's open-throat technique, Qin opera practitioners aim to mitigate the vocal strain associated with traditional singing methods. This adaptation not only facilitates a more accessible and contemporary vocal expression but also ensures the traditional art form's relevance and appeal to modern audiences.

In the domain of vocal pedagogy, particularly within the Bel canto tradition, the method of diaphragmatic-intercostal breathing is espoused as the cornerstone of effective vocal production. This technique, recognized for its scientific foundation, is prevalent across both operatic and contemporary singing disciplines, offering a versatile approach to breath management. Its characteristics include enhanced control over breath elasticity and capacity, enabling nuanced modulation of volume, pitch range from high to low, alongside maintaining vocal continuity and resilience.

Furthermore, the meticulous modulation of vocal fold vibratory frequency is a critical aspect, requiring acute awareness and phonetic adaptation alongside adjustments within the pharyngeal cavity. Such precision facilitates optimal control over the vibratory functions of the vocal folds, thereby enriching the vocal timbre and the dynamic spectrum of sound quality.

In the instructional context of Bel canto, emphasis is placed on the concept of respiratory support – termed "breath support" – which involves a synergistic operation of the inspiratory and expiratory muscle groups. The inspiratory group, «encompassing

muscles from the lower chest, lateral waist, and back, works in concert with the expiratory muscles, which are engaged during actions such as laughing, coughing, and sneezing» [3, p. 75]. Although potent, these expiratory muscles are employed with finesse rather than force in singing.

The act of inhalation in singing is akin to the natural reflexes of yawning or smelling, engaging a rapid and deep intake of air through both the nose and mouth. This induced state of inhalation must be sustained, creating a dynamic tension that embodies the principle of "breathing support." Such tension generates internal pressure, prompting the expansion of the lower lungs and outward displacement of the waist muscles, underpinned by the descent of the diaphragm.

During vocal training, instructors guide students to maintain this state of prepared inhalation, ensuring an open vocal tract that facilitates the production of a rich and accurate tonal quality.

The pedagogical strategy of blending true and false vocal registers is distinctive to Bel canto, where vocal sound is manipulated through a proportional mix of modal and falsetto registers. This technique evolves from predominantly modal voice usage to a balanced incorporation of falsetto as pitch ascends, achieving a seamless integration of vocal timbres and resonances.

Moreover, the analogy of vocal production to instrument crafting illuminates the necessity for a structured, scientific approach to vocal training. Just as the construction of musical instruments demands meticulous design, material selection, and fabrication processes, the human vocal instrument is cultivated through precise and informed pedagogical methods. This approach not only expands the vocalist's range and expressive capacity but also ensures longevity in performance without physical strain.

Ultimately, the aim of vocal education is to foster a methodology that empowers vocalists to articulate with versatility and endurance, underlining the collaborative effort between educators and students in achieving artistic excellence.

In the realm of vocal pedagogy, the acuity of auditory discernment plays a pivotal role for educators, given the necessity to simultaneously navigate the unique vocal characteristics and developmental trajectories of multiple learners. Despite the uniformity of instructional tenets, the physiological and acoustical idiosyncrasies among students necessitate a tailored approach to vocal instruction. It is imperative for instructors to eschew reliance on singular anecdotal experiences as proxies for the diverse anatomical and expressive nuances exhibited by the student cohort.

This necessitates a bespoke analytical methodology when addressing the vocal development of each student, avoiding the transposition of one learner's experiential outcomes onto another. Common pitfalls in this context include the erroneous application of generalized pedagogical strategies without consideration of individual learner differences. Therefore, a set of guiding principles is essential for vocal educators,

encompassing the evaluation of respiratory techniques, the accuracy of pitch production, the clarity and sonority of articulation, and the richness of resonant effects in voice production.

When interpreting specific musical pieces, the conveyance of emotive content through vocal expression requires nuanced pedagogical strategies, considering the intensity and stylistic approach suited to the piece. Educators «must adopt an empathetic stance, envisioning the optimal vocal and expressive potential within each student's unique physiological framework. This perspective fosters the identification and cultivation of each student's inherent vocal malleability and performance capacities, thereby facilitating holistic developmental progress in their artistic journey» [4, p. 49].

In essence, vocal instructors must excel in the art of recognizing and nurturing the individualistic expressive and performative capabilities of their students, thereby enabling their continuous growth and refinement in the art of vocal music.

The incorporation of Bel canto techniques into Chinese vocal pedagogy has necessitated a careful balancing act, ensuring that the adoption of Western methods enriches rather than overshadows the intrinsic qualities of Chinese national singing. Chinese singing is characterized by its emphasis on tonal clarity, the expressive use of vocal timbre, and the integration of speech-like intonations, which are deeply intertwined with the Chinese language and cultural expressions. By adopting aspects of Bel canto technique, Chinese vocalists have been able to expand their vocal range, improve their breath control, and achieve a greater degree of vocal flexibility, all while maintaining the cultural authenticity of their traditional singing style.

The impact of Bel canto on Chinese national singing can be observed in several key areas. Firstly, the emphasis on breath control and support has allowed Chinese singers to sustain longer phrases and achieve a more dynamic expression, enhancing the emotive power of traditional repertoire. Secondly, the focus on vocal agility has facilitated the incorporation of more complex ornamentations and nuances, enriching the aesthetic quality of Chinese singing. Finally, the cultivation of a pure and resonant tone has contributed to a vocal style that is both powerful and expressive, capable of conveying the subtleties of Chinese poetry and narrative song.

In conclusion, the integration of Bel canto techniques into Chinese singing is not without its challenges. The differences in linguistic phonetics, cultural expressions, and musical scales between Western and Chinese music necessitate a thoughtful and selective adaptation of Bel canto principles. Pedagogues and vocalists must navigate these differences to ensure that the adoption of Western techniques serves to complement and enhance the unique characteristics of Chinese singing.

The dialogue between Bel canto technique and Chinese national singing represents a vibrant area of cross-cultural exchange in the pedagogy of musical art. Through this ongoing synthesis, Chinese vocalists and educators continue to explore new dimensions of

vocal expression and technique, contributing to the evolution of a distinctively Chinese vocal art form that resonates with global audiences.

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