

PRESERVING REGIONAL CULTURE THROUGH SONG THE TEACHING AND INTERPRETATION OF ZHENGZHOU FOLK SONGS FOR CHILDREN

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Abstract

This article explores the cultural and educational significance of Zhengzhou folk songs in children's vocal training, emphasizing their role in preserving regional identity while nurturing musical expression. Rooted in the agricultural and social traditions of the Central Plains, Zhengzhou folk songs embody distinct melodic, rhythmic, and dialectal characteristics that reflect the life, emotions, and values of local communities. The research examines the historical origins, musical features, and lyrical content of these songs, while also presenting child-friendly teaching methods, including breath control, vocalization, dialect training, and performance techniques. By integrating playful learning strategies with regional authenticity, the teaching of Zhengzhou folk songs not only cultivates children's musical skills but also strengthens their connection to cultural heritage. This dual function of artistic education and cultural transmission makes folk songs a powerful pedagogical tool in modern music education.

Keywords: Preserving; Regional culture; Teaching and interpretation; Zhengzhou folk songs

Introduction

Zhengzhou folk songs, as a vital part of Central Plains folk culture, serve as living representations of local traditions, emotions, and everyday experiences. Emerging from ancient agricultural societies, these songs evolved from simple work chants to richly expressive forms performed at festivals, weddings, and communal events. The melodies are primarily pentatonic, rhythmically rooted in labor and language, and lyrically infused with Zhengzhou dialect, offering strong regional identity and emotional depth (Liu, 2019). In the context of children's music education, Zhengzhou folk songs provide an ideal medium to combine cultural immersion with foundational vocal training. They encourage engagement, storytelling, and expressive performance while preserving a distinct musical heritage. This paper explores how these traditional songs can be effectively taught to children using methods tailored to their cognitive and physical development, ensuring that cultural transmission continues in an accessible and meaningful way.

Zhengzhou Folk Songs

Zhengzhou folk songs, as the bright pearl of folk music in the Central Plains, carry the long history and deep cultural heritage of the region, and are the valuable wealth created and inherited by the people of Zhengzhou in their long-term production and life. The origin of Zhengzhou folk songs can be traced back to ancient times. In the early agricultural society, people worked hard in the fields, and in order to coordinate the rhythm of labor and relieve the fatigue of labor, they hummed simple and rustic melodies, which was the prototype of Zhengzhou folk songs. Over time, during various traditional festivals, weddings and funerals, and rituals, the folk songs evolved, incorporating more cultural elements and emotional expressions. From the initial simple labor horn, gradually enriched into a narrative, lyric, song and other elements of the art form. For example, in some traditional temple fair activities, people sing folk songs related to myths, legends, and historical stories, which not only adds to the atmosphere of the festival, but also passes on the cultural memory (Ran, 2022).

Melody: Five-Tone Intertwined Emotional Veins

The melodic structure of Zhengzhou folk songs is based on the pentatonic scale, which creates a unique musical system. This combination of scales gives the songs a unique aesthetic of purity and harmony, making the songs not only easy to sing, but also highly recognizable. In the actual interpretation of the melody, the range control is just right, not only avoiding the challenge of too high a range for the singer, but also preventing the lack of expressiveness due to too low a range. The design of the melodic line is unique, the notes of the cascade are like a slowly flowing stream, smooth and smooth, showing the peaceful and beautiful side of life; the notes of the small jumps are like water droplets jumping, adding a lively and playful flavor to the melody.

In the case of “Carrying a Sedan Chair”, which conveys a cheerful mood, the beginning of the melody attracts the listener's attention with a bright and upward tone, and the successive cascades and small jumps cooperate with each other to vividly outline the lively and joyful scene when the sedan chair is traveling. The first few notes are just like the excitement of the sedan chairmen when they lift the sedan chair, light and energetic. As the melody progresses, it is as if we can see the joyful smiles on people's faces and their happy dancing postures, and the bustling scene unfolds in front of our eyes like a vivid folklore scroll. In the folk song “Crying at the fifth watch”, the melody spreads out in a euphemistic and low way, with a downward melodic line and delicate ornaments, expressing deep thoughts and sorrows as if sobbing. Sung from the first watch to the fifth watch, the ups and downs of each melody precisely match the changes in emotion, showing the woman's delicate feelings of longing for her lover in the long night (Li, 2018).

Rhythm: The Rhythmic Rhythms of Labor and Life

The rhythms of Zhengzhou folk songs are closely linked to the rhythms of the local people's lives and their linguistic habits, and are a vivid reflection of labor and life. The key role of rhythm is especially significant in labor call type folk songs. For example, the “Ramming Song” sung on construction sites has a simple and powerful rhythm, with each ramming action accompanied by a distinctive beat, and a neatly organized “hey yo hey yo” shout, as if it were the

horn of labor. This rhythm is like the conductor of labor, making the movements of the laborers neat and coordinated, and uniting the laborers' strength by virtue of a strong sense of rhythm, making the heavy labor more rhythmic and coordinated. When a group of people sing the “Rammering Song” in unison, the neat rhythm and powerful shouts seem to shake the earth.

The rhythms of lyrical folk songs show a different picture. Take “Embroidered Lotus Bag” as an example, its rhythm is soothing and free, and the changes in the length of the notes echo the delicate emotions expressed in the lyrics. When the woman hums the song softly, the slow rhythm is just like she is carefully embroidering the purse one by one, and every note is full of her thoughts and love for her lover. The prolongation and pauses of the notes all provide ample space for the singer to express her emotions, allowing the listener to deeply feel the tenderness and fondness in the long melody, as if she could see the picture of a woman concentrating on embroidering a lotus bag in front of the window, full of the poetry of life (Li, 2018).

Lyrics: Life in Dialect

Lyrics can be regarded as the core essence of Zhengzhou folk songs, which are deeply rooted in the daily life of the people, depicting all kinds of scenes in the world in the most-simple language. The use of the Zhengzhou dialect is one of the most notable features of the songs, and the unique pronunciation and vocabulary of the songs give them a strong local flavor. The use of words like “I” and “Nim” gives people a strong sense of the regional flavor of Zhengzhou. These dialect words not only symbolize the regional culture, but also bring the emotional distance with the local people closer, making every lyric full of affection.

In terms of content, the lyrics of Zhengzhou folk songs cover an extremely wide range. The love-themed “Sending off the Lover” uses straightforward and sincere dialect lyrics to show the woman's reluctance and attachment when she sends off her lover to the best of her ability: “Sending off the lover to the gate, I have something to say”, a simple statement but full of deep feelings, making people feel the same way. From urging the lover to pay attention to his health outside, to hoping for his early return, every word seems

to flow naturally from the bottom of the heart. The song “Haunting the Lantern Festival”, which reflects folk customs, vividly presents the joyful atmosphere and folk activities of the traditional festival by depicting the lively scenes of the Lantern Festival, such as “The first month comes to the first day of the first month, and the lanterns are haunted on the fifteenth day of the first month”. The song sings about activities such as dragon and lion dances and lantern riddles, which are full of the fireworks of life, making people feel as if they were on the streets of the bustling Lantern Festival, and deeply feel that strong festive atmosphere (Qin, 2020).

Zhengzhou Folk Song Children's Singing Method

Breathing exercises Abdominal breathing exercises: Teach children to breathe into the abdominal cavity by contracting the abdominal muscles to feel the expansion and contraction of the abdomen. Games such as blowing up balloons and blowing out candles can be used to practice this exercise and enhance the control of the abdominal muscles in order to obtain more stable and sufficient breath support. This approach is in line with children's lively and active nature, and enables them to master abdominal breathing skills in a fun way.

Breath Control Exercises: For example, children can practice “counting numbers”, inhale and count the numbers slowly and evenly, see how many they can count, and exercise the persistence of the breath; they can also practice “long tone blowing”, such as blowing on the water surface with a straw, so that the children can keep their breath even and stable, and make the water surface produce sustained ripples. These exercises can effectively improve children's breath control and lay a solid foundation for subsequent singing.

Vocalization Training: Humming exercises, let the children hum a note gently, humming from low to high and back again, to find the feeling of resonance in the head cavity, and pay attention to keep the throat relaxed and the mouth open when humming, and the voice should be focused and bright. Humming practice is the foundation of vocal training and helps children find the correct vocal position (Liu, 2017).

Vowel sound practice: By practicing vowels such as “a, e, i, o, u”, children can experience the pronunciation position and resonance effect of different vowels in the mouth, e.g., when pronouncing the “a” sound, the mouth should be wide open and the throat open; when pronouncing the “i” For example, when pronouncing the “a” sound, the mouth is wide open and the throat is open; when pronouncing the “i” sound, the mouth is relatively narrow and the tip of the tongue presses against the back of the lower teeth. Practice can be done in conjunction with scales, starting with simple monophthongs and gradually increasing the difficulty. Vowel exercises enable children to master pronunciation skills more accurately and enrich sound color.

Imitation of vocalizations: Guide children to imitate animal sounds, such as the “meow” sound of a kitten, the “woof” sound of a puppy, the “twitter” sound of a bird, etc. By imitating different sounds, children can exercise the flexibility of their vocal cords and their ability to control sounds. By imitating different sounds, we can exercise the flexibility of the vocal cords and the ability to control the sound, and at the same time increase the fun of the exercise. This fun way of training can stimulate children's interest in learning and increase their participation.

Dialect Bites: Preserving dialectal flavor, Zhengzhou folk songs are sung in Zhengzhou dialect to maximize their characteristics. For example, in “Weaving Flower Baskets”, the lyrics “weave, weave, weave flower baskets, weave a flower basket up the South Mountain”, the word “weave” in Zhengzhou dialect is pronounced with the consonant “b” pronounced with more strength and the rhyme “ian” pronounced with more strength and the rhyme “ian” pronounced with more strength. In the Zhengzhou dialect, the consonant “b” is pronounced more strongly and the vowel “ian” is pronounced further back, which is distinctly different from the Mandarin pronunciation. The character “南” is pronounced close to “lán” in the Zhengzhou dialect, which gives the song a strong local flavor. When children sing, they accurately restore these pronunciations in order to sing the original flavor (Zhang, 2014).

Emphasizing accent and intonation: The lyrics of Zhengzhou folk songs have their specific accent and intonation changes in dialect expression. Take “Pair of Flowers” as an example, “What flowers bloom in the first month? When asking “What flowers bloom in the first month?”, “in the first month” should have a heavier tone and a higher intonation to emphasize the time of inquiry; when answering “What flowers bloom in the first month are spring flowers? When answering the question “What flowers bloom in the first month of the year?”, the three words “迎春花” should be slightly prolonged, and the pronunciation of the word “迎” should be full, so as to reflect the rhyme and emotion of the folk song through the change of accent and tone.

Melodic Decoration: Regional characteristics of glissando, the glissando in Zhengzhou folk songs is unique. In “Wang Da Niang Nailed the Jar”, “Wang Da Niang I am 77 years old. My ears are not deaf and my eyes are not blurred”, there is an obvious glissando from the word “seven” to the word “ten”, sliding quickly to the alto, and the intervals of the notes are very short, and the pitch is very short. From the word “seven” to the word “ten”, there is a clear glissando, sliding rapidly from the high pitch to the middle pitch, with an interval span of about three degrees. It is like the rise and fall of the tone of voice when people speak in daily life, naturally and with the boldness and simplicity of the local laboring people, which makes the song more distinctive.

The skillful use of the wave sound: Wave notes are also very common in Zhengzhou folk songs, which can make the melody more dynamic. In some cheerful Zhengzhou folk songs such as “Little Cowherd”, “What kind of person repairs the Zhaozhou Bridge? Who will keep the jade railing?” Between the notes of this part of the lyrics, the frequency of the waves is slightly faster and the amplitude is smaller, like the children's cheerful laughter jumping between the notes, giving people a relaxed and happy feeling, adding to the lively atmosphere of the song.

Rhythm Grasp-Syncopated Rhythm Reflects Style

The use of syncopated rhythm in Zhengzhou folk songs is very characteristic. In some folk songs with dance, such as the backing vocals of “Flower Pick Dance”, the syncopated rhythm breaks the regular rhythmic accent

law, so that the dancer's foot movements can take a powerful step at the non-beat accent, changing the regular rhythmic rhythm. When children sing, like singing “picking flowers and picking, walking in all directions, dancing this way and singing that way” This part of the lyrics containing syncopated rhythms should be accurately grasped to emphasize the dancability and vitality of Zhengzhou's folk songs through the contrast of strengths and weaknesses (Zhou, 2019).

Free Play of Scattered Rhythms: Some Zhengzhou folk songs will have a loose-plate rhythm section, which is relatively free. In the narrative folk song “Li Kuanzi's Divorce”, the loose plate rhythm is used to tell important episodes of the story, such as when telling Li Kuanzi's marital status, “Li Kuanzi, I'm twenty-one this year, and I don't have a beautiful look”, and the timing of the notes can be appropriately lengthened or shortened according to the lyrics and the emotions of the song, which is free and expressive, as if it were telling an ancient Zhengzhou story, with a free play. It is free and expressive, just like telling an old story of Zhengzhou, with ups and downs.

Emotional Expression and Stage Performance

Emotional Understanding and Expression: It is crucial to help children understand the emotions and the background of the story expressed in Zhengzhou folk songs. For example, “Weaving Flower Baskets” depicts a group of girls weaving flower baskets and picking peonies in a cheerful scene, which contains joy and the desire for a better life. In order for children to deeply feel this emotional connotation, they can tell the story behind the song, such as how the girls were laughing in the bright spring sunshine while carefully weaving flower baskets and preparing to pick beautiful peonies; they can also watch the related pictures or videos, and experience the joyful atmosphere through the expressions and movements of the characters in the pictures. Afterwards, the children are guided to express this emotion with their voices and expressions, such as singing with a light and bright voice and a big smile on their faces to convey the joyful emotions in the song (Deng, 2013).

Stage Performance Training: Posture and demeanor: Teach children to maintain good posture on stage, standing with chest out, stomach in, and hips up, with feet shoulder-width apart, so that the center of gravity of the body is smooth. Keep your head naturally straight and show confidence. At the same time, pay attention to body relaxation, to avoid stiff posture caused by tension. In daily training, children can be allowed to stand against the wall, with the back of the head, shoulders, hips, calves, and heels close to the wall, to help them find the correct feeling of standing (Gao, 2021).

Eyes and demeanor: Eyes are the soul of stage performance. When singing, children's eyes should be confident and focused, and change flexibly according to the content of the song. For example, when singing “weaving a flower basket”, when singing “weaving a flower basket to go up to Nanshan Mountain”, the eyes can look into the distance as if they really see the beauty of Nanshan Mountain; when singing “it looks good and delicious”, the eyes can be focused on their own hands as if they are holding the dainty peony, revealing their love for it. In terms of demeanor, it is important to echo the emotion of the song, keeping a smile on the face to show liveliness and cuteness for a cheerful song, and nodding slightly for a lyrical part, revealing tenderness and deep feelings in the eyes (Xiong, 2021).

Movements and gestures: Simple and natural movements and gestures are designed for children according to the content and rhythm of the song. When singing “Weaving Basket”, the child can imitate the movement of weaving a basket of flowers, interspersing the fingers flexibly to show the skillfulness of weaving; when singing “Picking Peonies”, pointing the fingers to the distance and leaning the body forward slightly to show the scene of picking peonies. Movements and gestures should be harmonized with the emotion and rhythm of the song, avoiding over-exaggeration or rigidity, so that the child can naturally show the mood of the song in the performance. For example, in the part with a cheerful rhythm, the movements can be slightly larger when the rhythm is soothing, the movements are gentle and slow (Chen, 2020).

New Knowledges



Figure 1: New Knowledges Diagram of Preserving Regional Culture through Song the Teaching and Interpretation of Zhengzhou Folk Songs for Children.

Conclusions

Zhengzhou folk songs offer more than melodic beauty—they are vessels of cultural memory and community identity. Through targeted vocal techniques, dialect preservation, and expressive stage performance, these songs become an invaluable educational tool in children's music learning. By teaching children to sing in the local dialect, understand the emotional context, and engage with rhythm and melody through playful and age-appropriate methods, educators not only develop students' musical capabilities but also cultivate a sense of cultural pride and belonging. As modern education emphasizes both global competency and local heritage, the interpretation and teaching of Zhengzhou folk songs represent a promising path for integrating regional culture into the broader framework of childhood music education. Continued application and development of this approach will help ensure that the voices of the past remain vibrant in the voices of future generations.

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