



A Survey of the Chinese Folk Song Teaching Method for First-Year Students at Xinyu University

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate the teaching methods of Chinese folk songs for first-year students at Xinyu University. The research methodology was qualitative research, using survey forms and interview guidelines as research instruments. The key informants were three music teachers, and the collected data were analyzed through content analysis. The findings indicate that the university offers a variety of Chinese folk song teaching methods, which are rooted in simplicity and cultural authenticity. Chinese folk music primarily relies on the pentatonic scale (five notes: do, re, mi, sol, la), which is relatively easy for beginners as it avoids the complexity of a full seven-note scale. A common teaching technique is the call-and-response method, where teachers sing or play a short phrase that students repeat. To reinforce rhythm and melody, movement-based activities such as hand tapping, foot tapping, or swaying to the rhythm are incorporated into lessons. Furthermore, the teaching approach emphasizes an emotional connection to the music by using folk songs with clear and familiar melodies, encouraging learning through listening, singing, and movement. Teachers also highlight the cultural and historical context of the songs, sharing their stories and meanings to deepen students' understanding of the emotional content and cultural significance embedded in Chinese folk music.

Keywords: Surveying, Chinese folk song, teaching method, first year students, Xinyu University

1. Introduction

Chinese folk music has a long history, having its origins in the social and agricultural life of ancient China. The common people—farmers, fishermen, and craftspeople—wrote these songs to convey their everyday experiences joys, and hardships as well as the natural environment. Originally transmitted orally, early Chinese folk songs were frequently sung at festivals, at work, or at social events.

Scholars have carried out a great deal of research and proposed numerous significant concepts and solutions in the process of Chinese folk music's inheritance and development. explores the legacy of traditional Chinese vocal music in the context of multiculturalism and globalization, highlighting the difficulties it faces, including the loss of traditional techniques and dwindling acceptance among young groups, despite the fact that folk vocal music has a special charm in cross-cultural communication. Ethnic vocal music may preserve its traits in the face of globalization and adjust to contemporary aesthetics and consumer demands through new media communication, educational reform, and enhanced international music exchanges. however, examined the preservation and transmission of ethnic folk music from the standpoint of intangible cultural heritage, highlighted the use of contemporary scientific and technological

tools to digitally preserve folk music, urged widespread public involvement in the preservation effort, and stated that the government should improve policy support and collaboration with cultural research institutions to support the preservation of traditional music (Xie, 2022).

This combination of tradition and innovation is similar to the study of innovation and diversity in global popular singing genres and teaching methods, their research provides a framework for understanding the unique development of popular singing in China and explores the use of technology in teaching and learning, such as the use of digital tools to enhance student engagement and facilitate interactive learning. These studies reveal the vibrancy of popular singing innovation, genres, and teaching in China, while also demonstrating how the fusion of traditional Chinese musical elements with popular singing creates unique genres with cultural resonance (He, 2018).

Chinese folk songs are not just pieces of music; they are windows into the soul of the nation, offering insight into the lives and emotions of its people through centuries. They continue to inspire both traditional performers and modern musicians, creating a dynamic and living tradition, scholars have explored the inheritance and development of Chinese folk music, emphasizing the need for adaptation in the face of globalization and modern challenges. highlights the decline in young people's interest in folk vocal music and the loss of traditional techniques. She proposes solutions such as digital tools, reforming education, and enhancing international exchanges to help ethnic vocal music retain its unique qualities while appealing to modern aesthetics. emphasizes the role of intangible cultural heritage in preserving folk music, advocating for the use of technology to digitally archive music and urging societal participation and government support to ensure its survival.

Xinyu University is located in Xinyu City, Jiangxi Province, the school is the Ministry of Education's new engineering, new liberal arts project construction and implementation of units, the Ministry of Education, the first batch of pilot colleges and universities of the integration of education and innovation base, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Education, industry-academia cooperation, professional comprehensive reform project implementation of colleges and universities, the National College Students' Innovative Entrepreneurship Training Program Joint Fund project implementation of colleges and universities, the Ministry of Education, the Excellence in Innovation Alliance of the first batch of members, State-level language standardization demonstration schools, member units of the China University of Applied Technology Alliance, the first ten civilized campuses in Jiangxi Province

The primary aim of this research was to explore how Chinese folk song teaching methods are applied in first-year music education and to identify the pedagogical techniques that help students connect with the cultural and historical essence of the songs. Specifically, the study sought to examine the role of the pentatonic scale, call-and-response techniques, and movement-based activities in fostering students' musical understanding and emotional engagement.

Review

2.1 Historical evolution of Chinese folk vocal music

The thesis reviews the origin and evolution of Chinese folk vocal music and its development characteristics in different historical periods. The thesis firstly reviews the origin of Chinese folk vocal music, and believes that it can be traced back to the primitive society period, when music mainly existed in the form of labor trumpets, witchcraft ritual songs and folk ballads, which were not only an important means of human emotion expression, but also laid down the foundation of the art of Chinese folk vocal music. During the pre-Qin period, the social function of music was strengthened, and "music", one of the "six arts" of Confucianism,

became an important part of education and etiquette, which promoted the formation of court music and dance, while folk songs still occupied an important position in people's lives. Into the Han and Tang dynasties, the art of national vocal music was further developed. In the Han Dynasty, the prosperity of “Qing Shang Le” and Lefu folk songs made the national vocal music more diversified in terms of subject matter, song style and singing style (Li, 2017).

In the Tang Dynasty, under the influence of cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, music forms became richer and richer, and foreign music, such as Yan music and Hu music, gradually fused with local music, thus promoting the innovation of vocal music. During the Song and Yuan Dynasties, with the rise of the civic class, words, songs, operas and other art forms flourished, and the southern and northern songs gradually matured, and the national vocal art moved from the court to the folk, and the singing style became more life-like and delicate. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the art of opera reached its peak, and Kunqu and Peking Opera became important carriers of national vocal music, with singing techniques becoming more and more refined, forming a unique vocal system of opera. Since modern times, the introduction of western vocal theory and singing techniques has had a profound impact on the development of Chinese folk vocal music. On the one hand, the traditional singing system of national vocal music has been constantly innovated, and the gradual fusion of national vocal music with American and popular singing styles has given rise to new singing styles; on the other hand, the theoretical research and teaching system of national vocal music has been further improved, and many music scholars have devoted themselves to exploring the scientific training methods of national vocal music, so as to make it more artistically expressive and scientific while retaining its national characteristics. Li Hua emphasizes in his thesis that the development of Chinese folk vocal music is a process of continuous integration and innovation, which not only carries the cultural spirit of the Chinese nation, but also reflects the social changes and musical aesthetics of different times. Studying the origin and development of Chinese folk vocal music not only helps to better understand the traditional vein of China's vocal art, but also provides theoretical support and practical reference for the innovative development of contemporary folk vocal music. In article “The Origin and Development of Chinese Folk Vocal Music,” these ideas are systematically explored on of distinct vocal styles in various regions (Li, 2015).

2.2 Regional characteristics

China is a vast country with diverse cultures, and this diversity is fully reflected in the singing techniques of folk vocal music. Northern folk songs are known for their loud and clear, bold and rugged style, which is closely related to the vast geography of the north and the straightforward character of the people. When singing, northern folk songs usually emphasize the resonance of the chest cavity and the explosive power of breath, and the voice is bright and penetrating, which can fully express the passion and boldness of the people in the north. For example, the northern Shaanxi folk song “Shandandandan Blossoms in Red” is a typical representative of northern folk songs, whose singing technique emphasizes the strength of the voice and the direct expression of emotions. In contrast, southern folk songs are characterized by delicacy, softness and fluency. This singing style is in line with the gentle environment of the southern water towns and the subtle character of the people. Southern folk songs pay more attention to the resonance of the head cavity and the softness of the tone, the voice is delicate and layered, able to express the emotions in a delicate way. For example, “Jasmine Flower” is a typical representative of southern folk songs, and its singing technique emphasizes the softness of tone and the delicate expression of emotion. This difference between the north and the south is not only reflected in the treatment of voice, but also in many aspects such as rhythm, ornamentation and emotional expression. The Mongolian “Khoumai” is a unique throat singing technique, in which the singer is able to produce multiple voices at the same time through

special throat control, forming a unique harmonic effect. This technique not only shows the Mongolian people's reverence for nature and love for grassland culture, but also adds unique colors to the world of vocal art. The Tibetan “Zhengu” singing method is famous for its high and long tone and unique trill technique, which can fully express the vastness and mystery of the plateau culture. These vocal techniques of ethnic minorities have not only enriched the expression of Chinese folk vocal music, but also provided valuable resources for vocal music teaching and research (Wang, 2018).

2.3 Pedagogical value

The Special Characteristics of Language Phonetics and the Artistic Charm of Ethnic Vocal Music “The specificity of the phonetics of ethnic languages provides a rich expression space for the artistic charm of ethnic vocal music. Scholars have pointed out that the languages of different ethnic groups have unique charm in pronunciation and rhythm, and this charm can be shown through the singing of vocal music, which makes each ethnic song have a unique artistic style. Through delicate voice performance, ethnic vocal music is fully presented on the level of music aesthetics (Chen, 2020).

The phonetic art of ethnic vocal music is not only the skillful expression of the voice, but also the embodiment of ethnic cultural connotation. Scholars point out that the languages and pronunciation styles of different ethnic groups reflect their respective cultural traditions and historical backgrounds, so the phonetic aesthetics in ethnic vocal music is not only an expression of the artistic level, but also contains a profound cultural significance (He, 2021).

The cultural identity function of ethnic vocal music, Ethnic vocal music is not only an expression of music it also serves as a bridge of cultural identity in cross-cultural communication. With the gradual entry of ethnic vocal music into the international stage, many ethnic groups express their cultural confidence through vocal music. In this process, ethnic vocal music not only helps spread traditional music, but also inspires national pride. Studies have shown that the spread of ethnic vocal music in the context of globalization has an irreplaceable role in maintaining ethnic cultural diversity (Wang, 2017).

2.4 Related studies in music education

The reviewed studies collectively highlight the significant role of ethnic vocal music in fostering cultural transmission, cross-cultural understanding, and national identity. Zhang (2020) emphasizes its ability to transcend language barriers and create emotional resonance among diverse audiences, thereby promoting global cultural diversity. Li (2018) further demonstrates that ethnic vocal music education not only develops students' musical skills but also deepens their appreciation of cultural values and nurtures a global perspective. Wang (2017) underscores its function in strengthening cultural identity and national pride, especially as ethnic music gains international recognition. Together, these studies affirm that ethnic vocal music serves as both an artistic and educational medium for preserving cultural heritage while enhancing mutual respect and intercultural communication in the era of globalization.

3. Research Methodology

The purpose of the study was to survey on the Chinese folk song teaching method for first year students at Xinyu University in Jiangxi Province. The research methodology was qualitative research. The researcher collected data through interviews with three key informants and classroom observations.

1. Key informants and Data Collection

1.1 Requirements for key informants:

- 1) Bachelor degree or above in Chinese folk vocal singing.

2) More than five years of experience teaching Chinese folk vocal music to students at the university level.

3) Professor or associate professor of ethnic vocal singing

1.2 Names of Key Informants:

1) Ms. Yan Xinlei, associate professor and vocal teacher, school of arts, Xinyu College. She mainly undertakes the teaching work of courses such as the foundation of ethnic vocal music, folk song singing skills, and vocal performance practice.

2) Mr. Xu Jiarui, teacher of ethnic vocal music in the art College of Xinyu College, master's degree, engaged in ethnic vocal music vocal teaching for 10 years.

3) Ms. Ye Yiru, Teacher of ethnic vocal music in the art College of Xinyu College, engaged in ethnic vocal music vocal teaching for 11 years.

1.3 Data Collection

1) This information was obtained through in-depth interviews with three experts.

2) Researcher did not end the study immediately after the interview but continued with observations.

3) Once all the interviews and observations were collected, we began the analysis. First, we compiled the interview transcripts and summarized the experts' responses into several themes.

2. Research Tools

2.1 Interview questions

1) Which parts of the current classroom's physical space, interpersonal atmosphere, and cultural arrangement can best support students' learning?

2) What are the main criteria for selecting and designing teaching content? How to ensure that the content not only aligns with the course objectives but also sparks students' interest?

3) What teaching methods are commonly used in teaching?

4) How to design teaching activities to promote students' knowledge internalization and ability development?

5) What are the teaching media that are frequently used in daily teaching? What positive or negative effects has the application of teaching media had on classroom teaching?

6) What are the typical behaviours of students in the classroom? What strategies are generally used to guide behaviours such as lack of concentration?

7) What are the main evaluation methods used to test teaching effectiveness? How to balance the consideration of students' knowledge mastery and ability development in the evaluation process?

8) What aspects of the physical space, interpersonal atmosphere, and cultural arrangement in the current classroom need improvement?

9) Can you provide examples of how innovative teaching methods have significantly improved teaching effectiveness?

10) What is the biggest difficulty encountered during the implementation of the activity?

2.2 Observation form

The observation table consists of four aspects, which are:

1) Classroom environment

2) Content of courses

3) Teaching method

4) Teaching activities

5) Teaching Media

- 6) Student behaviour in the classroom
- 7) Evaluation method

3. Analytical Method

This study thought qualitative data analysis focuses on understanding and interpreting verbal or textual data and strongly supports the conclusions drawn from the research. Descriptive analysis is used to interpret the information of three key informants. Interview and observation data will be content analyzed to identify common themes and patterns.

4. Results

The objective of this study was to survey on the Chinese folk song teaching method for first year students at Xinyu University. According to the purpose of this study, the survey results are as follows:

1. Specific teaching strategies, cultural components, and vocal techniques

The Chinese folk song teaching method for first-year students is rooted in simplicity, Chinese folk music is primarily based on the pentatonic scale (five notes: do, re, mi, sol, la). This scale is relatively easy for beginners because it avoids the complexity of a full seven-note scale. repetition, A common technique used in Chinese folk song teaching is the call-and-response method. The teacher sings or plays a short phrase, and the students repeat it. To reinforce rhythm and melody, teachers often incorporate movement into the lessons. For example, students might tap their hands, feet, or sway their bodies to the rhythm of the song. and emotional connection to the music. It emphasizes using folk songs with clear and familiar melodies, teaching through listening, singing, and movement, and encouraging students to engage with the cultural and historical context of the songs, In Chinese music education, there's a strong emphasis on understanding the cultural significance of the songs. Teachers often share the stories or historical background of the songs, explaining their meanings and the emotional content behind them.

1.1 Teaching Methods of Chinese Folk Songs

The teaching of Chinese folk songs is deeply rooted in regional cultural traditions, emphasizing the integration of language, music, and emotion. A core pedagogical approach involves immersing students in the dialectal context of each folk song, as dialect tones and pronunciation habits directly influence melody and rhythm. For instance, in teaching the Shaanbei folk song "Xin Tian You", mastering the throat and retroflex sounds of the local dialect is essential to conveying the region's vast landscape and emotional tone. Similarly, "Jasmine Flower" from the Jiangnan region requires attention to the soft, flowing pronunciation of the Wu dialect, capturing the gentle aesthetic of water-town culture. Vocal technique training is grounded in the principle of "breath as foundation, emotion as core," with different song genres requiring distinct methods. Labor songs such as "Boatman's Song" employ short, forceful breaths to simulate physical labor, while Mongolian long tunes rely on deep abdominal breathing and mixed resonance to evoke expansive imagery. In the teaching of ethnic minority polyphonic songs like those of the Dong people, harmony training focuses on balancing head and chest resonance to create rich, layered soundscapes reflective of natural environments.

Melodic ornamentation is another crucial element, serving as a stylistic marker and emotional amplifier. For example, the use of glissando and trembling tone in expresses sorrow and resilience, while the playful vibrato in the Hunan Flower Drum Opera piece enhances its comedic flair. Unique regional techniques further enrich the teaching content—such as the rhythmic throat tremble in Uyghur, or the breath-controlled method in Dai folk music, which mimics the grace of a peacock.

Improvisation is also central to folk song pedagogy. Students are encouraged to adapt

lyrics and melody to local scenery and personal emotion, as seen in the free lyrical adaptation of Shanxi "Mountain Songs" or the nature-inspired vocalizations in the Yi group's "Haicai Opera". These improvisational elements allow folk songs to transcend fixed forms, transforming each performance into a dynamic interaction between tradition and personal expression. This teaching method sustains the folk song's cultural vitality, embodying the ethos of "a thousand people, a thousand voices."

1.2 The singing techniques of Chinese folk songs

China's vast territory and ethnic diversity have led to a rich variety of regional folk song styles, with vocal techniques deeply intertwined with local language, culture, and lifestyle. In folk singing, mastering dialectal pronunciation is essential—not only for linguistic accuracy but also for musical authenticity. The integration of tone, pronunciation, and regional vocal style allows singers to fully express the song's emotional depth and cultural identity. For example, the Shaanbei folk song *Xintianyou* relies on the robust qualities of the local dialect, with powerful initial consonants and broad vowel sounds enhancing its bold and unrestrained style. In contrast, the Jiangnan tune *Jasmine Flower* demands soft and rounded enunciation in the Wu dialect, preserving the delicate and graceful charm of southern folk melodies.

Vocal technique in folk songs centers on the principle of "expressing emotion through sound," requiring control of breath and resonance. The widely used "chest-abdominal breathing method" supports sustained phrases and high tones. Mongolian long tunes, for instance, require deep, steady exhalation and the use of mixed resonance (nasal, chest, and throat cavities) to create a vast, flowing soundscape. In contrast, labor chants such as Sichuan's *Boatman's Chant* involve short, forceful breathing aligned with the rhythm of work, producing vigorous vocal bursts reflective of physical exertion. Distinctive regional styles also incorporate specialized vocal methods. The Miao "flying song," for example, uses falsetto and alternating vocal registers to achieve a bright, penetrating sound that carries across mountainous terrain. These techniques are not merely musical tools but expressions of environment, labor, and daily life.

A defining characteristic of Chinese folk singing is Runqiang—ornamentation that enriches musical expression through techniques such as glissando, vibrato, and embellishment. In Northwest songs like *Orchid Blossom*, downward glides and "crying tones" evoke grief and nostalgia, while in Jiangnan melodies, upward glides and subtle pitch bends add a playful, flowing quality. Ethnic minority styles offer even greater vocal variety, such as the "Nagra drum tremble" in Uyghur *Muqam*, which features rhythmic throat tremors synchronized with hand drums to evoke spirited emotion. Similarly, the Dong people's "cicada-like vibrato" simulates natural sounds through choral harmonic resonance, reflecting an aesthetic harmony between humanity and nature.

Improvisation plays a vital role in folk song performance. Singers often adapt lyrics, rhythm, and melody in response to the setting, audience, or personal feeling. In Shaanbei's *Dui Ge* (antiphonal singing), performers spontaneously incorporate elements of the surrounding landscape or daily life, engaging in poetic and musical dialogue. Likewise, in the Yi ethnic group's *Haicai Opera*, the untested "cavity" section allows singers to explore free-form vocalizations, from naturalistic sound imitation to complex melodic variation. These improvisational practices make each performance a unique creative act, ensuring the dynamic evolution of tradition. The vocal techniques of Chinese folk songs are not isolated skills, but holistic cultural expressions. Whether in the resonant calls of the Northwest or the gentle tunes of Jiangnan, these techniques embody the emotional memories, aesthetic ideals, and collective identity of their communities. This is the essence of the Chinese folk song tradition— "a thousand people, a thousand voices, one song, three sighs."

1.3 Training and Problems in Ethnic Vocal Singing Skills

The training of ethnic vocal singing in China is a comprehensive system integrating breath control, vocal production, language pronunciation, and emotional expression. At its core, the objective is to unify technical precision with artistic depth through scientific, culturally grounded methods. However, in practice, significant challenges arise due to individual physiological differences and uneven training approaches. Breath control, as the foundation of vocalization, demands mastery of the chest–abdominal breathing technique, with breathing rhythm adjusted to match the expressive needs of each song. Lyrical folk songs require slow, sustained breathing to support long melodic lines, while dramatic or rhythmic passages necessitate rapid, energetic inhalation and exhalation to convey heightened emotion. Common problems—such as shallow chest breathing—often result in breath instability and tension. These issues can be addressed through targeted exercises like “blowing candles” or “counted exhalations”, which develop core support and breath endurance.

In vocal resonance training, the principles of “opening the throat and stabilizing the larynx” are emphasized. Regional styles demand different resonating techniques: northern folk songs often rely on chest resonance to produce a bold and resonant tone, whereas Jiangnan tunes favor head and nasal resonance to achieve delicacy and smoothness. Many ethnic minority traditions use mixed resonance to imitate natural soundscapes, creating an immersive sonic experience. However, improper imitation or tension in the throat often leads to rigid, strained tones. Effective practices such as humming exercises and vowel modification drills can help singers discover balanced cavity coordination and tonal flexibility. Pronunciation training is equally essential, as it carries the cultural identity and linguistic specificity of each folk tradition. Singers must learn the phonological rules of various dialects, mastering elements like the forceful onset of consonants (e.g., the “spout” technique) and the rounded, accurate enunciation of finals. Shaanbei folk songs require precise control of throat and retroflex sounds, while Wu dialect tunes demand soft, sticky articulations. A lack of linguistic awareness often results in unclear diction or dialect distortion. This can be mitigated by phonetic analysis, listening to native recordings, and imitative practice, allowing for accurate reproduction of authentic regional sound.

Emotional expression and stylistic control are where technique must ultimately serve artistic intention. Whether it is the “crying tone” and descending glissando of Northwest folk songs, the dynamic physicality of ethnic minority performance traditions, or the fusion of bel canto elements in contemporary interpretations, successful expression depends on a deep understanding of cultural context. A common pitfall in training is overemphasis on technique at the expense of emotional connection. Learners must analyze each song’s cultural background, narrative imagery, and emotional logic, using this understanding to infuse technical passages with expressive intent. Only by internalizing the emotional landscape of the song can the singer elevate performance from mechanical execution to meaningful artistry. The recurring issues in ethnic vocal training—such as unstable breath, rigid tone, and unclear diction—often reflect imbalances across technical domains or a disconnection from cultural roots. Addressing these problems requires an approach that not only reinforces technical standardization, but also integrates cultural sensitivity into every aspect of training. When breath, tone, pronunciation, and emotion are harmonized with a deep awareness of regional identity, the performance can truly achieve the artistic ideal of “emotion in sound, and rhyme in emotion.”

1.4 The Future Development of Ethnic Singing Teaching

The future development of ethnic singing pedagogy must remain rooted in cultural heritage while embracing the innovations and aesthetic shifts of a globalized era. This evolution requires a dual strategy: preserving the unique vocal traditions of China’s diverse regions while

integrating contemporary methodologies and cross-cultural insights to foster relevance, accessibility, and artistic renewal. At its core, ethnic vocal instruction must continue to prioritize cultural authenticity. Key traditional styles—such as the “crying tone” in Shaanbei Xintianyou or the fluid “Shuimo tune” in Jiangnan Kunqu—should be retained as foundational components of the curriculum. Oral transmission remains essential, with master-apprentice models ensuring that stylistic nuances, dialectal inflections, and regional aesthetics are faithfully conveyed. At the same time, modern reinterpretation of traditional repertoire is becoming increasingly vital. Incorporating elements such as electronic textures, jazz harmonies, or popular music arrangements allows classic works like *Jasmine Flower* or *Shan Dan Dan Hua Hua Hong Yan Yan* to resonate with contemporary audiences. Such innovation not only revitalizes traditional melodies but also encourages students to explore personalized artistic expression.

The cross-cultural dialogue deepens; ethnic singing pedagogy must evolve into a flexible and inclusive system. Technical frameworks from other traditions—such as Italian *bel canto*’s humming resonance or the physical training methods of musical theatre—can be selectively adopted to enhance vocal agility and stage presence. Likewise, exposure to global rhythmic concepts, such as those found in African drumming, may enrich students’ sense of phrasing and timing. Technological advancement is poised to significantly reshape the delivery and methodology of ethnic singing instruction. Online platforms eliminate geographical barriers, enabling students in remote areas to access high-quality instruction, masterclasses, and performance analysis in real time. Intelligent vocal analysis software can provide instant visual feedback on pitch, breath control, and resonance balance, while VR and AR technologies offer immersive learning environments that simulate performance contexts—such as grassland settings for Mongolian songs or visual cues for pitch glides and ornamentation. These tools enhance learning engagement and transform abstract vocal techniques into intuitive, multisensory experiences.

In terms of talent development, the future of ethnic singing education must move beyond a uniform training model. Students should be seen as both cultural inheritors and creative innovators. Curriculum reform will place greater emphasis on ethnomusicological study, including ancient music theory, regional epic traditions, and opera systems. Field research will become integral, encouraging students to document endangered vocal practices, engage in community-based learning, and develop a grounded understanding of folk songs as living, evolving cultural expressions. Moreover, individualized instruction will be prioritized to support diverse vocal profiles. Students with light, clear voices may focus on the refined aesthetics of Jiangnan tunes, while those with broader ranges may be guided toward improvisational forms from the Northwest. Cross-genre experimentation will also be encouraged, allowing students to integrate ethnic techniques with electronic music, rap, or contemporary stage performance, thereby cultivating adaptable, versatile artists capable of performing both *The Yellow River Cantata* and *New Dragon Boat Tune* across diverse platforms. The future of ethnic singing education lies at the intersection of tradition and innovation, technology and artistry, individuality and collective memory. It must uphold core aesthetic values—such as the union of sound and emotion—while daring to transcend boundaries. In doing so, ethnic vocal art can evolve into a vibrant cultural force that bridges historical memory and modern sensibility, amplifying the distinctive voice of Chinese civilization on the global stage.

2 Pedagogical challenges and proposed solutions

2.1 The teaching content of the first-year ethnic vocal course at Xinyu College

The first-year ethnic vocal course at Xinyu College adopts a comprehensive and

structured curriculum that balances theoretical understanding, technical training, artistic practice, and cultural appreciation. The goal is to equip students with a solid foundation in ethnic vocal music while cultivating their interpretative and creative capacities. Theoretical instruction forms the basis of vocal training. Students are introduced to the anatomy and physiology of the vocal organs, the principles of breathing and resonance, and the scientific mechanisms of sound production. This foundational knowledge supports the development of healthy vocal habits and accurate technique. In addition, the course outlines the historical development of Chinese ethnic vocal music from ancient traditions to contemporary innovations, highlighting representative styles, genres, and influential artists. Coursework also includes analysis of vocal works, training students to interpret lyrics, melodic features, musical structures, and emotional content to enhance expressive depth.

Technical training is the core of the program. Instruction begins with breath control, emphasizing abdominal and thoracoabdominal breathing techniques to support vocal stability. Students are guided in mastering the resonance coordination among the head, chest, and oral cavities, enabling them to produce timbres characteristic of regional and ethnic styles. Pronunciation and diction are addressed through Chinese phonetics, with a focus on tonal accuracy, clarity, and lyric articulation. Additionally, stage performance skills including facial expression, gesture, and physical presence are incorporated to develop students' emotional expressiveness and stage confidence. Repertoire practice is diversified to expose students to a wide range of ethnic traditions. Selected materials include regional folk songs such as Shaanbei ballads, Jiangnan minor tunes, and Mongolian long songs, as well as excerpts from ethnic operas like *The White-Haired Girl* and *Little Black's Marriage*. These selections allow students to explore style-specific vocal techniques, character embodiment, and ensemble collaboration. The curriculum also introduces modern adaptations and fusion works, encouraging stylistic flexibility and contemporary relevance.

2.2 Teaching Methods for Ethnic Vocal Music Courses

The teaching of ethnic vocal music combines traditional vocal aesthetics with modern pedagogical principles, providing students with systematic training in vocal technique, stylistic interpretation, and expressive performance. Foundational training emphasizes the integration of emotion and sound, guiding students to internalize breath control and resonance as expressive tools. Breathing techniques, such as chest–abdominal coordination, are introduced through imagery-based exercises (e.g., “smelling flowers”), while resonance training helps students distinguish and coordinate head, oral, and chest cavities using humming and vowel transformation. Traditional vocal methods, including the “shouting voice” of Chinese opera, are incorporated to preserve cultural authenticity and avoid over-Westernization. Language training focuses on the phonological structure of Chinese, emphasizing initial consonant clarity and vowel rounding, often referred to as the “Four Hùs.” Dialect features are integrated according to the stylistic demands of each work to strengthen regional expression and cultural relevance.

The curriculum places strong emphasis on musical interpretation and cultural context. Students explore stylistic categories such as folk songs (labor chants, mountain songs, lyrical ballads), creative ethnic compositions, and traditional opera excerpts and learn to connect musical structure with historical and regional meaning. Traditional opera training includes mastery of vocal tonality (“Hu Guang Yin Zhong Zhou Yun”) and physical expressivity (“hand-eye-body movements”), linking vocal and theatrical performance. Personalized instruction is embedded throughout the program. Voice assessments help tailor repertoire and technique, encouraging students to develop their strengths while respecting their vocal limitations. Learning pathways are adapted based on individual interests ranging from regional folk heritage to cross-genre experimentation involving popular or digital media elements. The

teaching model adopts a “demonstration imitation correction” cycle, with teachers offering detailed modeling followed by segmented practice and constructive feedback. Stage experience is built through recitals, competitions, and collaborative rehearsals, which enhance both technical confidence and performance adaptability. Continuous feedback from students informs adaptive teaching strategies, ensuring that instruction remains responsive, student-centered, and culturally grounded.

2.3 Teaching Activity of Ethnic Vocal Course for First Year Students at Xinyu College

The early stage of the ethnic vocal music course emphasizes foundational training in vocal technique and language articulation. Instruction begins with chest–abdominal breathing methods, using sensory metaphors such as “smelling flowers” and “blowing candles” to help students understand breath control and support. Resonance training follows, guiding students to coordinate the head, oral, and chest cavities through humming and vowel modulation exercises, facilitating the development of a stable, resonant tone suitable for ethnic singing. Language instruction centers on the principles of correct pronunciation and tonal rounding, introducing students to the “Four Hù” system of Chinese phonetics. Attention is given to the articulation of initial consonants and final vowels, ensuring clarity and expressiveness. Regional phonetic features, particularly elements of the Gan dialect relevant to the Xinyu context, are selectively integrated to enhance students’ understanding of dialectal color in ethnic vocal performance and to reinforce local cultural identity.

Repertoire learning focuses on classic and accessible folk songs with strong melodic and cultural appeal, such as Jasmine Flower and Nanniwan. Each work is taught with analysis of its historical background, emotional content, and stylistic characteristics, enabling students to interpret songs with contextual awareness. For instance, Jasmine Flower is taught through imagery of Jiangnan’s serene water towns, encouraging a soft and lyrical tone; Nanniwan is presented as a narrative of resilience, fostering strength and firmness in vocal delivery. Basic performance elements—including posture, gesture, and eye contact—are introduced to cultivate students’ stage presence.

Given the developmental stage of first-year students, the course prioritizes interactive and experiential learning. A “demonstration–imitation–feedback” model is employed: instructors present full demonstrations, break down complex sections, and provide individualized guidance. Collaborative group work, such as ensemble rehearsals and in-class showcases, fosters peer learning and teamwork. Engaging vocal games (e.g., lyric continuation, melody challenges) reinforce key concepts in a relaxed environment and enhance student motivation. To bridge classroom instruction with real-world practice, students are encouraged to participate in on-campus performances, cultural festivals, and community events. Educational visits to local folk music performances and traditional opera activities provide immersive exposure to living vocal traditions. Guest lectures and masterclasses by industry professionals further enrich the learning experience. Regular performance assessments and progress presentations allow students to reflect on their development, identify areas for improvement, and build performance confidence. Through diverse, practice-oriented, and culturally grounded activities, the first-year ethnic vocal curriculum at Xinyu College aims to foster a solid technical foundation, cultivate artistic sensitivity, and ignite students’ long-term engagement with ethnic vocal traditions.

3. Technological integration in teaching media

The teaching media for first-year ethnic vocal courses at Xinyu College should be carefully selected to align with teaching goals, student needs, and institutional conditions, creating a diversified and interactive learning environment. Audio and video media play a

central role, offering students examples of professional vocal performances for comparison and analysis. Video demonstrations of techniques like breath control and resonance, along with animated guides for phonetic pronunciation, further enhance learning. To deepen students' understanding of works, multimedia resources, including music software and stage performance videos, help with rhythm, emotional expression, and cultural interpretation. Virtual reality (VR) technology enriches students' immersive experience of the cultural contexts of songs. Online platforms like Xuetong and Rain Classroom support self-directed learning by providing easy access to resources, practice tracks, and interactive tools, such as pronunciation games. Social media platforms like WeChat and TikTok promote learning through sharing knowledge, student performances, and cultural content.

Recording equipment and live streaming are essential for both classroom and stage practice, allowing students to review their performances and receive audience feedback. Additionally, intelligent accompaniment software adapts to student needs, simulating real-world performance conditions. Together, these media forms create a multi-dimensional support system, improving both the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of student learning in ethnic vocal music.

3.1 Physical and emotional aspects of performance training

The teaching environment for first-year ethnic vocal students at Xinyu College is designed to foster both artistic expression and student engagement. The classroom features a circular seating arrangement with a central performance area, encouraging both interaction and observation of vocal and physical expressions. This layout supports individualized attention and fosters a dynamic, inclusive atmosphere. Decorations further immerse students in the cultural heritage of ethnic vocal music. A timeline of the evolution of Chinese ethnic vocal music links traditional and contemporary styles, while high-definition images of ethnic instruments, such as the Mongolian horsehead fiddle and Uyghur hand drum, deepen students' understanding of folk traditions. The classroom is equipped with a triangular piano for pitch training, as well as a surround sound system that faithfully reproduces the distinct textures of folk songs, from the rugged tones of Shaanbei to the melodic elegance of Jiangnan. These resources aid in developing both technical and emotional understanding of ethnic vocal music. During lessons, teachers engage students through interactive and immersive teaching methods. Instruction begins with demonstrations that emphasize both technical and emotional components of singing. For example, vocal exercises like chest-abdominal joint breathing are explained through relatable metaphors, such as "slowly inflating a balloon," making abstract techniques accessible. Teachers actively use visual aids like mirrors to guide students on correct mouth positions, and provide physical feedback, such as assisting with breath flow.

In the learning of works, the atmosphere becomes highly collaborative. Teachers integrate multimedia resources, playing stage performance videos to introduce the essence of each piece. For example, when studying the "Banjiu Tune" from Jiangxi, a video of traditional singing and dancing in an ancient village is played, immersing students in the cultural context of the song. This is followed by group discussions where students analyze the lyrics, suggest creative additions (like rhythmic clapping or simple body movements), and perform collaboratively. The peer feedback aspect encourages a supportive, creative environment. Cutting-edge technologies are used to enhance immersion. Virtual reality (VR) transports students to different folk song environments, such as Shaanxi cave dwellings or Yunnan bamboo houses, creating an authentic cultural atmosphere. Additionally, intelligent music score software allows real-time annotations of emotional symbols and singing techniques, displayed on a large screen for all students to access simultaneously.

The classroom also hosts live performances from local folk singers and opera performers, offering students hands-on experience with traditional vocal techniques and body

movements. Occasionally, the space transforms into a mini recording studio, where students can record their singing using professional equipment, gaining insight into the artistic creation process from start to finish. the teaching environment at Xinyu College goes beyond traditional learning methods, blending cultural immersion, interactive collaboration, and advanced technology to create a vibrant, dynamic space for ethnic vocal music education.

5. Conclusion

The Chinese folk song teaching method for first-year students is rooted in simplicity, Chinese folk music is primarily based on the pentatonic scale (five notes: do, re, mi, sol, la). This scale is relatively easy for beginners because it avoids the complexity of a full seven-note scale. repetition, A common technique used in Chinese folk song teaching is the call-and-response method. The teacher sings or plays a short phrase, and the students repeat it. To reinforce rhythm and melody, teachers often incorporate movement into the lessons. For example, students might tap their hands, feet, or sway their bodies to the rhythm of the song. and emotional connection to the music. It emphasizes using folk songs with clear and familiar melodies, teaching through listening, singing, and movement, and encouraging students to engage with the cultural and historical context of the songs, In Chinese music education, there's a strong emphasis on understanding the cultural significance of the songs. Teachers often share the stories or historical background of the songs, explaining their meanings and the emotional content behind them. the teaching method at Xinyu College offers a balanced and innovative approach that prioritizes both cultural heritage and modern pedagogical techniques. By cultivating students' vocal skills alongside their emotional and cultural engagement, the program not only ensures the preservation of traditional ethnic music but also encourages creative exploration and innovation in the genre. This dynamic teaching model sets a strong foundation for students to become well-rounded musicians capable of preserving and evolving China's rich folk music tradition.

6. Discussion

he Chinese folk song teaching method at Xinyu College offers a profound exploration of the musical simplicity, cultural significance, and phonetic beauty embedded in ethnic vocal music. Through methods like call-and-response, movement integration, and emotional connection, students not only develop their vocal skills but also their ability to interpret and express the cultural stories behind the music. Furthermore, by emphasizing the phonetic aesthetics of ethnic languages, the method ensures that students engage with the rich cultural traditions of the music they are learning. In Chinese folk song teaching, it is not enough to simply focus on the technicalities of the vocal performance. The cultural significance embedded in the language and its pronunciation styles plays a central role in understanding the aesthetic value of ethnic music. As scholars like Chen (2020) and He (2021) have pointed out, the phonetic characteristics of ethnic languages contribute significantly to the artistic expression of the songs. The pronunciation styles of ethnic languages are inextricably linked to cultural traditions, providing a canvas for vocalists to embody the essence of the language through song.

By focusing on the phonetic richness of ethnic songs, the teaching method encourages vocal flexibility and cultural appreciation. Students learn not only to sing the notes but to infuse their performance with the cultural heritage of the language itself, turning the act of singing into a cultural expression that communicates the deep-rooted traditions of ethnic groups.

7. Suggestions

Future research can be deepened from two dimensions: longitudinal tracking and horizontal expansion. At the longitudinal level, the research subjects can be extended from first

grade students to second and third grade students. Through a tracking survey lasting 2-3 years, a phased teaching method evolution model of "basic skills training style differentiation learning innovative practice application" can be constructed. For example, observe whether the teacher adjusts the teaching ratio of "oral transmission" and "graph analysis" when second grade students are exposed to performance routines such as "Short Step" and "Fan Flower" in Jiangxi tea picking opera; Tracking the personalized application of "moistening tune" techniques and the reconstruction of regional cultural symbols by third grade students in creating new ethnic songs, thus forming an optimized teaching method path that covers the entire undergraduate stage.

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