

The Vocal Teaching of “Coloratura Soprano” in China

Li Ximeng and Sukontha Yimsangyard

Bangkokthonburi University, Bangkok, Thailand

Corresponding Author, E-mail: nicha.musiced@gmail.com

Abstracts

The coloratura soprano has a very high status in the history of the world's vocal music and is a highly distinctive artistic expression. The singer's good vocal condition, the ability to work with the vocal breath, and the use of the special singing techniques of the cantus firmus are indispensable elements to support her exquisite singing. The coloratura soprano is one of the beautiful Western folk music singing styles, referring to sopranos with coloratura techniques in American singing, mainly in the high register of showy singing, with a higher range than the average soprano. The study of Western folk music singing in China originated in the early 20th century. To promote the development of the art of beautiful singing with Chinese characteristics and to cultivate complex vocal talents, China attaches great importance to the study of beautiful vocal techniques and the artistic value of singing. As a difficult vocal singing technique, the coloratura soprano requires extremely solid training in technology to achieve a better sound through singing-specific works.

Keywords: Vocal teaching; Coloratura Soprano; China

Introduction

Compared to foreign vocal art, Chinese folk vocal music, despite its late beginnings, has developed with a strong and unique national flavor and a rich and profound cultural heritage. It has become a mainstream musical form with Chinese characteristics, irreplaceable and a household name. However, the nature of vocal performance dictates that singing methods and teaching systems are established from stage practice, so for a long time, the stage practice of Chinese folk vocal music has been far ahead of theory, but the close relationship between the process of singing and the related organs, muscles and thinking in many ways highlights the objective need for theoretical generalization and in-depth research. The Shanghai Music College, established by Cai Yuanpei in the 1920s, is widely regarded by academics as the beginning of vocal music education in China and has existed for nearly a century. In October 1977, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education jointly issued the "Notice on the Enrolment of National Art Colleges in 1977" The State Council restored the Central Conservatory of Music and six other professional music colleges in December. Several new senior music departments were established during the same period. The same period also established several new higher education music departments. In the past 40 years, the development of vocal music can be seen through various domestic vocal music competitions, various vocal music academic exchange lectures and conferences, and various performance activities. The various professional and teacher training colleges have also played a huge role in promoting the development of China's vocal education and theoretical system, achieving brilliant results and bringing the singing and theoretical construction of Chinese vocal music to a new stage. The trend of social diversification has provided a

favorable situation for a new phase of research in Chinese vocal education, and the concept of "Chinese vocal music" and the concept of teaching diversity in Chinese vocal music has emerged as a result of the ongoing research on Chinese vocal singing and education system.

Professor Bo Linlin (2011 : 1), in 'On the Control of Singing and Style in Folk Vocal Music Teaching - Reflections on the Phenomenon of Academic Diversity,' examines and discusses Professor Ma Qiuhua's concept of diversity in vocal music teaching. She argues that the manifestation of diverse "personalities" in folk vocal music is mainly obtained through the cultivation of three aspects: rhythmic line, embellishment and style, and aesthetic ability. She also discusses how the "diversity of singing" is, in fact, a reflection of the ability to control different singing styles and techniques and takes the relationship between "commonality and individuality" in teaching as the starting point for a specific discussion of how to train and develop the scientific and diverse nature of the singer.

It can be said that "singing diversity" in vocal teaching reflects the dialectical unity of opposites in singing. Specifically: learning the scientific method of vocalization is to grasp the style of the work, which determines how the singer deploys their vocalization. Conversely, a poor grasp of the scientific method of vocalization is all talk, and it isn't easy to reflect the connotations of the work. This article summarizes Professor Ma's teaching philosophy and years of experience teaching "diversity in Chinese vocal music," which he pioneered. Further, it demonstrates that "diversity in singing under science" is the core teaching philosophy of diversity in vocal music training for ethnic vocalists. The core teaching philosophy. This philosophy has produced many singers of different styles and popular singers. It is in line with the development of Chinese society and the inevitable trend in the development of Chinese vocal music.

Problems in teaching practice of vocal music

Many scholars in China have attempted to find problems in diverse vocal music teaching practices, to ask questions, and solve problems. Yang Shuguang (2004) discusses the problems that arise in vocal music teaching and proposes specific reforms in teaching and singing. He argues that many ethnic vocalists' understanding of the diversity of singing styles in ethnic vocal works is limited to how to embellish the voice or treat the style of a particular regional folk song as "the style of ethnic vocal music. " In this regard, she proposes that Chinese vocalists go deeper into life, goes into the countryside, and learn from the folk. Wang Shifei (2013 : 2), in his master's thesis 'An investigation into the development of Chinese folk vocal pluralism and the use of its spirit in the teaching of vocal music to senior teachers,' discusses the pluralistic characteristics of Chinese vocal styles, singing forms and the individuality of works, and in Chapter 4, Inspiration and innovation of individual singing for vocal music teaching, points out that the prospect of pluralistic development of folk vocal singing is the essential embodiment of the requirements of individuality.

Chen Yaling (2009) takes the multi-ethnic perspective of China as the She uses the multi-ethnic perspective of China as an entry point for the study of "singing diversity," noting specifically that:

China is a country with many ethnic groups and rich dialects. Each ethnic group uses unique singing methods and styles to sing songs characteristic of the Chinese style, thus expressing the ethnic history, national character, national spirit, life experience, and emotional experience of the Chinese people.

At the same time, she also emphasized the need for scientific backing for singing diversity.

Chen Yaling's article focuses on the necessity of "singing diversity" in folk vocal music from the perspective of China's multi-ethnicity. She argues that for this concept to be popularized in all aspects, "the interconnection and support of teaching, practice and scientific research are needed to establish a complete technical system of folk vocal singing and a theoretical system of teaching, from the generalization of valuable experiences to the height of theoretical texts.

Li Ping (2006 : 1) pointed out that the roots of Chinese folk vocal singing should come from the folk, and the rich art of folk vocal singing is not only an inexhaustible wealth for the development of folk vocal music but also a source of art that forms the individuality and diversity of folk vocal singing styles.

Guo Li (2014 : 1) examines the development of folk vocal diversity from a philosophical perspective. *Philosophical Reflections on the Development of Chinese Folk Vocal Music* contains a multifaceted discussion of the philosophical idea of folk vocal diversity in terms of ontology, popular aesthetics, and singing. The following is discussed about singing.

She believes that the most important thing for the diversified and prosperous development of folk vocal music in all aspects is inheritance and borrowing, which embodies 4 different layers of philosophical implications. Firstly, the development of diversification of folk vocal singing is a matter of social existence determining social consciousness; secondly, the universality of the existence of contradictions should be clarified in the process of inheritance, borrowing, integration, and development; then, the relationship between internal and external causes of inheritance and borrowing should be grasped; finally, the universality of the connection existing between inheritance and borrowing should be grasped.

In summary, Chinese vocalists have analyzed and theoretically researched various aspects of innovative vocal teaching concepts and trends in singing and generally put forward the idea of drawing resources from various ethnic folk and traditional opera genres, learning with an open mind, and returning to folk styles in the development of folk vocal music, with some success and conclusions, and have laid a good foundation for the teaching of diversity in Chinese vocal music, and for the in-depth study and theoretical system of folk vocal music contained in this broad concept. This will lay a good foundation for the in-depth study and theoretical construction of the "diversity of singing" in Chinese vocal music and the "diversity of singing" contained in this broad concept. As a professional discipline with a strong practical orientation, studying diversity in folk vocal music should not be limited to critical research, stage summaries, singular master feelings, and anticipatory outlooks. Still, it should also be put into practice by focusing on how to practice diversity in folk vocal music, using logical and scientific theoretical texts to provide a conceptual and theoretical understanding of the general laws of diversity in singing. The study should also focus on the core issue of how to practice the diversity of folk vocal music, using logical and scientific theoretical texts to conceptually and objectively sort out and summarise the general laws of singing and to analyze and study the concept of 'singing' in detail, technically and culturally, one by one, while introducing songs from different regions, nationalities, and genres as examples.

Teaching Coloratura Soprano

According to Zheng Yunhua (2007 : 1), the beauty of a coloratura soprano phrase lies in its pitch, evenness, fluidity, delicacy, and precision. Singing can only be easy with a good head voice and a light high pitch technique. The coloratura technique is highly desirable in terms of vocal technique and technical development, as it strengthens the head voice, loosens the voice, relieves the throat of pressure, exercises breath control, enhances the expressiveness of the voice, makes the voice lighter and more flexible and, above all, extends the life of the singing.

The coloratura soprano is a type of Italian American soprano and is generally classified by her role in opera. As a vocal learner, it is important to choose your voice type correctly, define your voice type, and grasp your vocal technique through accurate and careful training to perform the coloratura soprano's vocal works better.

Susan (2013) argues that the soprano represents the art of singing and a "hundred spirits" and that strengthening scientific training techniques for the soprano is conducive to developing artistic charm of the soprano. This article proposes training techniques for sopranos from the following aspects:

- Strengthening the training of softness of soprano.
- Strengthening the training of skipping in soprano.
- Strengthening the training of ornamentation in soprano.
- Controlling the rhythm and strength of singing reasonably.
- Choosing a reasonable singing repertoire.

Li Min (2020 : 1) takes the definition of the Bel canto period and the singing characteristics of sopranos in this period as the starting point and summarizes the singing techniques and stylistic characteristics of sopranos in this period by studying the singing of typical sopranos in this period, the aesthetic changes of people towards Bel canto and the composers' works.

Liu Peng (2020 : 1) proposes a scientific training method for the soprano by explaining the process of the production and development of the coloratura soprano, analyzing the training techniques, and discussing the common problems in the training process. He proposes that the coloratura soprano is a kind of singing method that uses vibrato or ornamental tones, which can modify the vocal part and add flowers to it. The soprano performer must have excellent singing skills and a certain artistic connotation. With the further development of vocal teaching in universities, more and more attention is being paid to the training of the soprano. Some repertoire and training methods unsuitable for singers can cause their voices to lose their charm and confidence, and they may even give up their singing careers, so it is important to find suitable training methods and continuously improve students' singing skills in vocal music teaching.

Based on the origins and development of the coloratura soprano, Li Man (2022 : 1) elaborates on its artistic characteristics and training techniques, aiming to provide some reference for researchers in related fields. She suggests that the art of the coloratura soprano, as an integral and important area of vocal music, occupies an important position on the Chinese and even the world vocal stage. Although it occupies a relatively small proportion of the whole work, its role cannot be ignored and is the finishing touch.

Currently, Chinese scholars need more information on studying the coloratura soprano, and there is still much room for exploration. As the demands of vocal learning increase, vocal education in universities should be reformed to keep pace with the times, develop scientific

training methods, enhance students' cultural connotations, and promote vocal education's flourishing. The process of training the coloratura soprano is a difficult and lengthy one. Teachers should have a good understanding of the vocal conditions of their students and choose suitable pieces for them to practice so that they can give them purposeful guidance. Students should understand soprano singing techniques and concepts before practicing and be prepared to sing. The soprano, with her sweet and beautiful voice, is known as the lark of the stage and plays an important role in opera, so it is important to pay attention to the cultivation of the soprano in the training process.

Teaching vocal in Bel Canto

Current research on bel canto in China could be stronger. As a non-native culture, bel canto has only been practiced and studied in China for the last hundred years. In its development, more emphasis has been placed on the theoretical study of the fusion of native vocal culture and bel canto technique. There is little information on the history of "what is bel canto." The history of European vocal music by Shang Jiachao (2009 : 1), the history of Western vocal art by Guan Jinyi (2005 : 1), the history of European vocal music by Liu Xincong and Liu Zhengfu (1999 : 1), and the history of vocal art by Li Chao (2011 : 1) have constructed the development of Western classical vocal music, mainly bel canto, from different perspectives. Still, there are two common problems: firstly, they do not link the "history" to the modern bel canto technique and the "history" of vocal music. However, there are two common problems: one is that the "history" is not linked to the development of the bel canto technique and style in modern times, and the other is that many of the historical statements in the text are not labeled with their sources, lacking scientific rigor. There are almost only a few such monographs on the history of Western vocal music. Still, even so, they do not specify whether the subject of study is bel canto or 'beautiful voice' or 'beautiful song,' but rather extend to the whole of the vocal art so that the content cannot be grasped entirely from the perspective of bel canto.

Current research on bel canto in China could be stronger. As a non-native culture, bel canto has only been practiced and studied in China for the last hundred years. In the course of its development, more emphasis has been placed on the theoretical study of the fusion of native vocal culture and bel canto technique. There is little information on the history of "what is bel canto." The history of European vocal music by Shang Jiachao (2009 : 1), the history of Western vocal art by Guan Jinyi (2005 : 1), the history of European vocal music by Liu Xincong and Liu Zhengfu (1999 : 1), and the history of vocal art by Li Chao (2011 : 1) have constructed the development of Western classical vocal music, mainly bel canto, from different perspectives. Still, there are two common problems: firstly, they do not link the "history" to the modern bel canto technique and the "history" of vocal music. However, there are two common problems: one is that the "history" is not linked to the development of modern bel canto techniques and styles, and the other is that many of the historical statements in the text are not based on sources and lack scientific rigor. There are almost only a few such monographs on the history of Western vocal music. Still, even so, they do not specify whether the subject of study is bel canto or the 'American voice' or 'American song,' but rather extend to the whole of the vocal arts so that the content is not fully grasped from the perspective of bel canto. The study of bel canto is not specified as a 'bel canto,' 'beautiful voice,' or 'beautiful song.' In addition, many bel canto studies are included in comprehensive music history works,

such as a General History of Western Music, Shen Xuan's (2009 : 1) A Brief History of Western Music, translation of A History of Western Music, which is all more authoritative works on music history in China. Translation of the history of music from the perspective of the development of human civilization, Civilisation in Western Music is also an important reference work on the development of Bel canto. Although there are many books and essays on the history of music, the standard of the works varies, and most of them deal with bel canto in a general way, with similar content and lack of evidence. Hence, their academic value could be improved. The early stages of the formation and development of the bel canto are poorly documented, surviving in several comprehensive musical treatises and works, such as Wu Weixi's (2012 : 5) treatise on Greco-Roman music, 'The People's Teacher and the "Catataxis" - An Examination of Music and Musical Concepts in Ancient Greek Tragedy and Musical Concepts in Ancient Greek Tragedy.

The study of bel canto in Western countries is relatively well-developed and covers all aspects of its connotations and extensions. It includes the history of vocal development, vocal teaching, the study of different styles and genres, thematic studies of several 'golden' periods of development (e.g., the Baroque period with the prevalence of brown singers, the operatic era of Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti), as well as other technological tools and interdisciplinary studies derived from bel canto voice techniques or stage performances. A History of Bel Canto by Rodolfo Celletti, Bel Canto in its Golden Age by Philip A. Duey, Giovanni Battista Rubini, And the Bel Canto by Dan H. Marek Tenors: History & Technique by Dan H. Marek and Historical Vocal Pedagogy Classics by Berton Coffin all reflect on the development of bel canto vocal music from different perspectives in the form of 'histories,' some focusing on vocal pedagogy, others on the development of vocal music. Some focus on the teaching of vocal music, others on the singing of the singers. In defining the temporal or historical scope of their subjects, most of these studies dissect bel canto-related techniques directly from a contemporary or historical perspective as far back as the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. At the same time, few works trace the origins of Western vocal music in detail. This phenomenon is, of course, consistent with the prevailing academic perception since the specific vocal concepts and aesthetic requirements of the art of vocal music, as published in the preface to *Nuove Musiche* by Giulio Caccini (1546-1681) in 1601, is generally considered to be the earliest verifiable written documentation of the technical style of bel canto. The various stages of the formation and development of bel canto before Caccini are scattered throughout many works on the history of music and vocal music. For example, in Giovanni Comotti (1989)'s *Music in Greek and Roman Culture*, The Rise of Music in the Ancient World of Curt Sachs and John G. Landels (1999)'s *Music in Ancient Greece & Rome in Ancient Greece & Rome*, among others. The development of medieval and renaissance music has been studied in a vast array of sources, not only in monographs on medieval music such as Timothy J. Mcgee (1998)'s *The Sound of Medieval Song* but also in general histories such as Oliver Strunk (1998)'s compilation *Source Readings in Music History*. The source readings in *Music History*, compiled by Oliver Strunk, provide a fairly realistic view of what scholars of the eighth, ninth, and even earlier centuries were writing about at the time.

Although no one can deny that the development of the voice before the Caccini is inextricably linked to the eventual formation of the bel canto, it is not, after all, an art form of great substance. Nevertheless, it is difficult to find a complete and relevant study of the evolution of bel canto before the Baroque period, whether in terms of vocal technique, pedagogy, or the performance of works, and they are always scattered in 'fragments' in various

musical texts. After the Baroque period, when bel canto entered its main formative period with the birth and development of opera, research on vocal education began to develop. Technological advances have made the available data more abundant and complete.

In the 20th century, bel canto was well developed, and a complex system of interdisciplinary studies was formed. During this period, the first Enrico Caruso (Caruso), Lilli Lehmann (Lehmann), Gino Bechi (Bechi), and many other vocal masters made outstanding contributions to the study of bel canto technique in their rich practice, such as Lehmann's book *How to sing*; Cornelius L. Reid Richard Miller, Ingo Titz, D.ralph Applemann and Lucie Manen have also made significant contributions to the study of bel canto technique and its pedagogical application. Analysis, 'Essays on the Nature of Singing,' Titze's 'Voice Research and Technology: Concone's Thirty Exercises - An Interesting Variation,' Mann's 'Bel Canto: The Teaching of the Classical Italian Song-Schools, Its Decline, and Restoration,' Miller's 'Solutions for Singers: Tools for Performers and Teachers', Training Soprano Voices, Appelman's *The Science of Vocal Pedagogy*, etc. On the other hand, bel canto's research has made more extensive use of modern technology, with more elaborate branches of research, and has been combined with many interdisciplinary disciplines such as physiology, medicine, physics, psychology, and linguistics, and has achieved new results. For example, William Vennard's scientific research on the vocal mechanism of singing has led to the publication of *Singing: The Mechanism and Technics*, as well as acoustic research on the resonance peak of bel canto singing, the results of which have been published in major acoustic journals such as the *Journal of Voice*. Among them, Johan Sundberg's research at the Royal Institute of Technology is the most representative, with papers such as "Level and Center Frequency of Singer's Formant" and "Text Intelligibility and the Singer's Formant-A Relationship? Pabon et al. published 'Effects on Vocal Range and Voice Quality of Singing Voice Training: The Classical Trained Female Voice' by Pabon et al. and 'Singer's Formant in Sopranos: Fact or Fiction' by Weiss et al. are also important references for the study of bel canto vocal technique.

Professor Jin Tielin (2005 : 1) gave an important academic presentation on issues related to folk vocal music at the 2005 National Folk Vocal Forum held at the Shenyang Conservatory of Music. The main content of the lecture was: reviewing the history of the emergence and development of folk vocal music in China, saying that folk vocal music has made an important contribution to the times and, that its "development path is very broad,"; that "original" folk songs are the foundation of folk vocal music and that the two are not contradictory; expressing his views on the "scientific nature" of vocal music. He expressed his views on the "scientific nature" of vocal music. He also reported on the forthcoming establishment of the China National Vocal Music Research Association. Professor Huang Wenjie (2006 : 1) discusses the emotional expression of singing in vocal music teaching. By analyzing the aesthetic meaning of the emotional expression in vocal singing, the importance of training students to study music scores, analyze the content of works, set up singing situations, grasp the relationship between "emotion and technique," and control will and emotion, he summarises the important role and central position of emotional expression in singing in vocal music teaching.

Li Shoumin (2007 : 1) summarises the practice and experience of vocal music teaching over the past 20 years, gives a preliminary theoretical overview, and proposes some ideas. One is to combine the teaching plan of vocal teaching, the selection of teaching materials for vocal teaching, and the cultivation of basic theory and comprehensive quality in the teaching

of skills to reasonably carry out teaching and pay attention to the teaching process; the second is to use students' actual singing ability, vocal theory knowledge to guide vocal practice activities and the basic ability of vocal teaching and so on. The course is designed to objectively and scientifically assess the effectiveness of teaching. We want to explore a more scientific and reasonable model for vocal teaching in terms of teaching methods, forms, and contents.

Wei Yijun (2008 : 1) points out that the Bel Canto singing method originated in Italy, where the subvocal and vowel connections are smooth, and the position of the letters is clear, making it suitable for singing in the Italian language. The structure of our language is more complex. It has its own rules, so if we rigidly apply the Italian language to the American singing style, we will lose sight of what we are doing and have the consequence of not being able to bite the words. Some people sing foreign vocal works with excellent performance but sing Chinese songs with good voice, but the language needs to be clearer and more accurate, so they cannot fully express their feelings.

Conclusion

China attaches great importance to studying American vocal techniques and the artistic value of singing. As a difficult vocal singing technique, the soprano requires extremely solid training to achieve a better sound through singing-specific works. The basic methods of vocal training in singing have been studied by many, and as a difficult vocal technique, the soprano has its characteristics. The teacher's habits, experiences, and preferences impact the student's teaching activities, while the student's perceptions, attitudes, and comprehension also influence the learning progress. The performance of a coloratura soprano requires extremely solid skills training to achieve a better sound through the singing of specific pieces.

References

- Bo, L. (2011). On the Mastery of Singing Techniques and Styles in National Vocal Music Teaching—Professor Ma Qihua's Thoughts on Diversity in Vocal Music Teaching. *Music Creation*, (1).
- Guan, J. (2005). *History of Western Vocal Art*, Beijing. People's Music Publishing House.
- Guo, L. (2014). Philosophical Reflections on the Development of Chinese Folk Vocal Music. *Shanxi University*, (6).
- Huang, W. (2006). Analysis of Emotional Expression in Singing in Vocal Music Teaching. *Journal of Jimei University (Educational Science Edition)*, (02).
- Jin, T. (2005). The Current Situation and Innovation of National Vocal Music Teaching—Professor Jin Tielin's academic report on the "2005 National Vocal Music Forum". *Chinese Music*, (04).
- Li, C. (2011). *History of the Development of Vocal Art*. Beijing. Central Conservatory of Music Publishing House.
- Li, M. (2022). Artistic characteristics and training techniques of the florid soprano. *Yellow River Voices*, (20).
- Li, M. (2020). A study of the singing techniques and styles of Coloratura Soprano of the Bel canto period. *Art Education*, (7).
- Li, P. (2006). Reflections on the Development of Diversity in National Vocal Music. *People's Music*, (09).

- Li, S. (2007). Discussion on Constructing a Scientific and Reasonable Vocal Music Teaching Model——Some Ideas on Vocal Music Teaching Reform in Colleges and Universities. *Chinese Music*, (03).
- Liu, P. (2020). Research on the training of florid soprano in college vocal teaching. *Art Education*, (10).
- Liu, X., & Liu, Z. (1999). *History of European Vocal Music*. Beijing. China Youth Press.
- Shang, J. (2009). *History of European Vocal Development*. Beijing. China Radio and Television Press.
- Shen, X., Gu, W., & Tao, X. *A Compendium of Western Music History*. Shanghai. Shanghai Music Publishing House.
- Wang, S. (2013). *The Development of Chinese Folk Vocal Diversity and the Exploration of its Spiritual Use in Vocal Music Teaching for Senior Teachers*. Harbin Normal University.
- Wei, Y. (2008). Coloratura Art Songs Application in Vocal Music Teaching. *People's Music*, (04).
- Wu, W. (2012). The End of Antiquity and the Origin of the Middle Ages. *New Voices in Music*, (3).
- Zheng, Y. (2007). The Singing of Coloratura Soprano Arias. *Journal of Liaoning Institute of Education and Administration*, (11).