

# The innovation of Song Guosheng's Erhu performance and teaching theory

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## Abstracts

Song Guosheng is a famous Erhu theorist, educator, performer, and composer. Born in Leting, Hebei Province, in November 1938, he has a great talent for music. In Hebei Province, home to ancient traditional operas, he has been deeply influenced by the Leting drum, Leting shadow play, opera, song-blowing, and anti-Japanese songs since childhood. Song Guosheng created a new technique of erhu by applying the form of the pipa's left hand to the erhu bow's right hand: the round bow, a special technique of the continuous and alternating use of multi-tone and single-tone striking and jumping bows. This article presents the innovation of Song Guosheng's Erhu performance and teaching theory.

**Keywords:** Innovation; Song Guosheng; Erhu; Teaching Theory

## Introduction

In 1956, he was admitted to the Music Department of Hebei Normal University in Tianjin. After entering the entrance of professional music and art colleges, he successfully learned erhu performance from Ji Guizheng, Ding Ding, Jinsha, and Huang Guowen. Meanwhile, he learned composition from Yang Jinhao and vocal music from Wang Chunfang. The erhu major has developed by leaps and bounds based on all-around development. At the same time, in the aspect of composition, many works have been published before graduation. During this period, he came into contact with many foreign art forms, found out the rules of their expression techniques, and freely applied them to Erhu, which laid a solid foundation for his performance art in the future. This was also the accumulation stage of Song's Erhu theory. He graduated from the Tianjin Conservatory of Music in 1961 and has taught there ever since. In 1963, he participated in the "Shanghai Spring" national Erhu music competition. He used the "body rhythm and breath," which was rarely seen in China at that time, to play Henan Dudes and the "Ruju Qu" created by himself, combining the body language with the performance of the Erhu, showing the unity of the inner and outer beauty of the erhu art. In this competition, he won two awards, "the Third Prize of the National Erhu Competition" and "Excellent Performance Award of New Works." The jury director, He Luting, praised his performance by name on the spot and reported it in the People's Music Review. This success made him more devoted to the Erhu art. This was the embryonic stage of Song's erhu theory.

In the decades after he was engaged in teaching, Mr. Song followed the footsteps of The Times. The historical and cultural evolution brought the Erhu art to high-speed development. He found that Erhu's teaching, performance, and creation needed to put forward new topics. After collecting previous pamphlets on Erhu's performance, he decided to develop the art of Erhu's performance further, changing the theory that remained at the level of noun interpretation. Inspired by Carl Fleisch's Art of Violin Performance, he proposed the

performing art of Erhu performance. In 1970, he began to compose and write, and in the late spring of 1972, he completed the first draft of the Art of Erhu Performance with 280,000 words. After seeking the opinions of some peers under the guidance of Mr. LAN Yu Song, Jin Sha, and other old gentlemen made several modifications, 1982 was officially published. This book is the most complete, detailed, and highly theoretical on erhu performance. It systematically introduces the basic knowledge of erhu performance. Moreover, from psychology, physiology, physics, mathematics, and other aspects of the vivid introduction of the left and right-hand playing techniques, The importance of the combination of the right hand and the left hand in the process of playing and the rhythm of the body; This paper discusses its regularity from the aspect of the purpose and technique of artistic expression for the first time, which is the establishment stage of Song's Erhu theory.

February 1982, for the periodical Tianjin Singing, wrote "Invigorating National Spirit, Developing National music ---- to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Mr. Liu Tianhua's death";

In 1984, he published a Preliminary analysis in the national folk music reform conference "< 829 Double-box Style New Sihou". This is his new string instrument, "double-box style New Sihou";

From 1987 to 1988, from the macro perspective of national musicians, he wrote two reviews of national instrumental music performance techniques and a New Attempt to Reform National Contribution Instruments for the "Chinese Music Yearbook."

In November 1988, he published "On the Body Rhythm and Breath Application in Erhu Performance" at the "National Erhu Teaching Seminar."

In 1989, in the second issue of Music Learning and Research of Tianjin Music Journal, he published "On Comprehensive Teaching Method in Erhu Teaching," which combines Erhu performance theory, teaching theory, and artistic expression organically with years of teaching experience and experience, to help young students better master Erhu playing skills.



**Figure 1, Song Guosheng (1938-)**

In 2000, Song Guosheng and his daughter Songfei, known as the "Queen of folk music," published "How to Play the Huqin Family." The book comprehensively introduces each member of the Huqin family, improving the skills of the left and right hand. It also discusses the law of artistic expression by introducing the changes in five factors: pitch, rhythm, speed, strength and timbre, and application skills. At the same time, it also creates nearly 100 Erhu etudes specifically to guide practitioners to return the theory to practice. The publication of Huqin Family Performance Introduction is the refining and sublimation of Erhu Performance Art and the development stage of Song's Erhu performance theory.

In December 2002, the "National Instrumental Music Collection" published "Facing the Needs of Society, training compound professional talents";

In June 2006, he and Seinfeld jointly published "On Timbre and Timbre Change in Erhu Performance" in the third volume of "Chinese Erhu." In August of the same year, he also published "Ramble on the Style Performance of Erhu Performance," which was published in the "Erhu Teaching Forum of National Music Colleges";

In August 2008, "Several Key Words in the Basic Teaching of Erhu" was published in the third issue of Tianana, the school journal of Tianjin Conservatory of Music.

In January 2011, On the Three Dialectical Relations in Erhu Teaching was published in the first issue of Tianana, the school journal of Tianjin Conservatory of Music.

For 50 years, Song Guosheng has been fighting in the post of music art, unswervingly engaged in erhu performance, teaching, and theoretical research. Moreover, in many aspects of originality, put forward several core concepts, has established the framework of Song Erhu performance art theory for the development of China's erhu cause and talent training has made outstanding contributions, has been praised by the industry at home and abroad.

Innovation means to be different from the past, to think what has not been thought before, and to create what has not been created before. It must mean a break from tradition. Otherwise, it could be more innovation. In this sense, innovation is risky. Its results likely overturn accepted theorems, change customary practices, and break down certain rules and regulations. Mr. Song Guosheng's theory is exquisitely conceived with novel images, fully demonstrating his unique personality and charm and reflecting his new spirit of innovation. His originality put forward a series of refreshing artistic achievements. These endowed with creative theoretical research for the Erhu art have played a certain role in the navigation. The innovation theory of Teacher Song is embodied in structural innovation and teaching method innovation.

## **Structural innovation**

### **Systematic**

Song's theory is innovative because it differs from the traditional Erhu theory and teaching mode. For the first time, erhu performance has been promoted to a complete theoretical system. Speaking of systems, Erhu art itself is an all-encompassing system. On the original basis, Mr. Song creatively created the Song Erhu performance system, a development. He created an advanced theoretical system, solved problems in the new field, and enriched the previous theories. A *system* is a carrier composed of many elements which have organic relations with each other and have specific functions. Systematic engineering first embodies the systematic structural principle of materialist dialectics.

The principle of system structure holds that structure is how the elements of a system relate to each other, manifested in the functions, arrangement order, and proportional relations among the elements. If the system's structure is reasonable and the proportion relationship is coordinated, it can effectively play its function and develop normally. Otherwise, the system function is reduced and can not develop normally. Mr. Song's erhu theory is a systematic project, and its outstanding characteristic is that it emphasizes the importance of universal contact law. It is divided into three systems: Erhu performance technology theory, artistic expression, and teaching theory. They do not exist in isolation but are organically unified and form a mutually complementary relationship. Like the limbs and five viscera of the human body, they are harmonious living bodies composed of unified thinking. For artistic expression, the erhu performance art is shaped through scientific and standardized playing skills and rigorous teaching methods. Only through systematic and scientific teaching ideas and means can students quickly and effectively master the performance skills of erhu and reach a higher spiritual realm through perfect artistic expression so that the audience can enjoy the visual and auditory. Under the guidance of the principle of unity, the overall consideration is carried out to ensure the harmony and unity of the content of each link.

### **Integrity**

Each independent theory in Song's erhu performance theory is a complete whole. From the point of view, his playing technique theory is mainly composed of three parts. The first part is the introduction to the performance of Erhu, the tuning of strings, and the exercise physiology knowledge of the human body participating in the performance, which is the most basic rudimental knowledge of qin for beginners and helps to increase the human body's mastery of Erhu from a scientific and rational point of view. The second part is a detailed explanation of the basic skills of the left and right hands in the erhu performance. Regarding the skills of the left hand, the finger distance is divided into three categories according to the relationship between distance and distance, and there are six exponent relationships. At the same time, more than one hundred etudes correspond to it. This part is the basic training for piano learners to strengthen the student's grasp of intonation, rhythm, and other aspects. The third part is the coordination and cooperation of the whole body, which is explained to learners with medium levels. It corrects the activities of all body parts during piano practice from a visual point of view.

At the same time, "breathing," which plays an important role in performance, is added to give players an overall state when playing. In Song Guosheng's article "On Body Rhythm and Breath Application in Erhu Performance," we can see the construction of the space theory of Erhu performance. Through the use of body rhythm and breath, he outlined the rhythm lines of the music played, the direction of each component in the performance, and the activity state of breath vertically and three-dimensional; The proposal of the use of body rhythm and breath integrates all body movements and spiritual activities in the performance, achieving a harmonious and complete inner unity, which is also a higher embodiment of artistic expression. We have to admit that the body rhythm teacher Song Guosheng said implies the idea of the whole. Teaching, just as he mentioned in "On the Comprehensive Teaching Method in Erhu Teaching." "With an artistic expression as the purpose, musical sense training as the premise, scientific theory as the guidance, god, Qi, body as one, the use of various effective means, to develop students' musical ability from a multi-angle comprehensive three-dimensional teaching method." Like a hologram, the performance movement track

corresponding to the music movement is depicted in three dimensions so that students can find the resultant force of components in appropriate proportions from various components in different directions to act on the strings and play a sound effect consistent with the music movement.

Moreover, through the coordination of "thinking, movement, and sound," the erhu performance is upgraded to the whole body. All these reflect the overall construction of Song's erhu performance and teaching. Based on the above three points, Mr. Song organically combined the erhu performance technique, teaching, and artistic expression into a whole, forming a complete and scientific theoretical system. Constitute the Song Erhu theory.

### **The proposal of "Body Rhythm and breath Application"**

The concept of body rhythm was published in Music Learning and Research by Song Guosheng in 1989, the first original music teaching theory proposed in China. It refers to playing (or singing) music, the body with the rhythm of the music to do regular body movements, namely body rhythm. Body rhythm is embodied in the following three aspects: 1. The arm movement that completes a specific skill in performance will spread to other parts of the body or the part farther than the shoulder and even to the spine. It combines arm and body local movements and overall movements in specific skills. 2. Arm movements are completed with the support of the torso and lower limbs (especially in standing performance). Meanwhile, the force of the two arms on the strings requires the gravity of the torso and head under the support of the waist, hips, and lower limbs in addition to their gravity. 3. Erhu performance is carried out in the three-dimensional space of up and down, left and right, front and back, by the direction of the specific resultant force. The three directions of the component force are the unity of the overall coordinated movement, including the torso. Its purpose is to train students to effectively use various organs of the body to feel, understand and express music and closely combine music with the movement response of various parts of the body and the unique emotional response of the individual heart to music to interpret music more completely and improve artistic expression.

The correct use of breath integrates the body movements and mental activities in the performance, inseparable from the body rhythm. Only coordinated movements and unobstructed breaths can make the performer play a better musical effect. Mr. Song carefully analyzed the technical function of body movements in Erhu's performance. They mainly include: trunk (together with the head) and spine forward flexion and extension, left and right lateral flexion, left and right rotation and circle rotation, and lower limb (thigh, calf, foot) flexion and extension. These movements play a supporting, balancing, supplementing, and even leading role in the direct performance of the left and right hands and arms. Secondly, the expression function of body rhythm in Erhu's performance is introduced. The relationship between body and body rhythm is analyzed from rhythm, timbre, strength, speed, and pitch changes. If the role of several aspects is effectively given full play, then not only make the music more appealing to the hearing but also the body rhythm can give the audience the visual appearance of beauty. Then it introduces the coordination of breath and body movements. The activity of breath in performance includes the state of breathing and the state of running in the body. Mr. Song pointed out that it is an inseparable whole with body movements. Combined with musical examples, the close relationship between breath, timbre, rhythm, and another artistic expression. We can see that Teacher Song's theory of "body rhythm" is solid, detailed, and comprehensive, and its theory is the summary and sublimation of years of practical

experience. It is a groundbreaking contribution to the Erhu circle.

### **The exploration of artistic expression**

In his book *The Art of Erhu Performance*, Mr. Song first proposed the problem of artistic expression and three requirements and five means of expression. Later, in *Introduction to the Huqin Family*, he summarized the requirements of artistic expression into four sentences:

**Playing from the heart, the pursuit of entry;**

**The change is unified, and the structure is rigorous.**

**Seize the style characteristic, highlight the national charm;**

**Strengthen comprehensive cultivation and enrich cultural heritage.**

That is, the performer is required to make the music style more appealing while describing the image of the music, bursting out sincere emotions from the heart when playing, and vividly portraying the expression of the music; Of course, attention should also be paid to the overall planning and arrangement of the structure of the music, through the change of the main means of artistic expression, the music planned out a rigorous layout of the grand blueprint. Have a clear theme and a clear sense of hierarchy; In addition, it is necessary to grasp the style characteristics of the music itself, mainly express the aesthetic experience of the theme, and pursue a vivid, natural, and intriguing realm, so that people can see the unwritten things from the plants they write, understand the unlearned things from the Tao, and feel the unplayed music from the music they play, which means that they have felt before they become tunes, that is to say, they can get the meaning beyond the words, the image beyond the image, and the aesthetic feeling of infinite meaning. Popular speaking is the taste; Finally, it is the requirement of the performer's own artistic and cultural accomplishment requirement to enhance inner wisdom and knowledge. Morality without skill. It is equivalent to the foundation; only a solid foundation can have a grand superstructure. Mr. Song's discussion on the law of artistic expression has raised erhu performance to an artistic level and reached a new historical height, which provides a valuable reference value for later learners.

### **Innovation of teaching methods**

Mr. Song summed up a multi-angle comprehensive three-dimensional teaching method that aims at artistic expression, takes the cultivation of musical sense as the premise, takes scientific theory as the guidance integrates spirit, Qi, and body as one, and uses various effective means to develop students' musical ability.

The difference between the comprehensive teaching method and the traditional teaching method:

1. Updated the teaching concept, changed the previous teaching model based on the practice of boring basic skills, and put the cultivation of students' musical feelings (including the feeling of intonation, rhythm, speed, strength, timbre, and rhythm of musical lines) in the first place and always throughout the teaching. There are three ways to develop students' musical sense: First, teachers should talk more, including the necessary theories and specific requirements, their own experience, and training methods (Teacher Song often asks us to put our hands on the spring scale to feel the increase of gravity from one finger to the palm and then to the arm when talking about the sense of volume and strength). Second, students should listen more, another embodiment of being well-informed. Only after listening to more music storage in mind, more practice will do an in-depth and detailed analysis after listening to the comparison; Thirdly, let the students practice more, including practicing piano and singing,

especially practicing singing (Mr. Song often teaches us to sing Beijing Opera and folk songs from different places). It is one of the best ways to improve the sense of music.

2, make the purpose of teaching clear, which can avoid blindness, and can improve the efficiency of learning; At the same time, he also pays attention to individualized teaching, using popular language to explain to the less educated or younger students. Mr. Song set the purpose of learning as an artistic expression so that we no longer play for the sake of playing and improving the standard of learning.

3, put forward a guiding ideology that is: science.

(1) Conform to the basic mechanic's principle, easy to play the physiological function;

(2) By the basic mechanics, different music to choose the corresponding components and modes of action;

(3) According to the development logic of emotion and thinking and the development logic of music itself, the law of artistic expression should be handled well, namely the changes of factors such as pitch, rhythm, speed, strength, and timbre.

(4) To master and apply the rules of body rhythm and breath activity in performance. On Body Rhythm and Breath Application in Erhu Performance

(5) Overall artistic conception, layout, and complete treatment of musical form structure according to the ideological content, style characteristics, and music.

It can be seen from the above five points that this guiding ideology is the essence and improvement of the whole teaching theory of Mr. Song, the deepening of the understanding of the law of artistic expression, and the concentrated embodiment of Mr. Song's "Erhu Performance Art," "On the Body Rhythm and Breath Application in Erhu Performance" and other research results. It makes Erhu teaching more perfect and comprehensive. It is a leading role.

### **Innovation of techniques**

Professor Song Guosheng learned from violin techniques and innovated the application of new Erhu positions. He advocated the change of one tone and one handle, which not only absorbed the advantages of the violin position division but also made Erhu's tune more flexible and changeable according to the habit of reading the music according to the first tone. Six ways of changing handlebars are put forward for the first time: 1. 2, the sound media change; 3, two fingers interlaced change; 4, homophone different refers to change; 5. Change the stretching finger and compression finger distance; 6, with the empty string and other jump finger change. Song Guosheng absorbed and learned from changing the handle of the first finger in the Art of Violin Performance, edited by Carl Fleisch, and used it for his use, which was called media tone changing. This reference enriched the way of changing the handle of the Erhu.

## Conclusion

Song Guosheng created a new technique of erhu by applying the form of the pipa's left hand to the erhu bow's right hand: the round bow, a unique technique of continuous and alternating use of multi-tone and single-tone striking and jumping bows. The effect is strong graininess. This innovation gives the erhu, a linear piece, the character of a dot. He also borrowed from the snare drum to play two notes at a time and created the special bow technique of playing two hops: the double jump bow, the effect of which is softer and softer than the one-note jump bow and more magnificent and lighter than the general short bow or continuous bow. New techniques, such as double-hopper bow, four-finger wheel, reverse wheel finger, and even dun bow melody, are also used in his Erhu songs such as Yanzhao Spring Tide, Henan Township Trip, Home Road, and Jidong Ditty. Mr. Song's comprehensive grasp of the overall knowledge embodies a profound foundation and the source of innovation.

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