

# The Present Situation and Existing Problems of Opera Teaching in Colleges and Universities in China

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## Abstract

With the continuous enrichment of related courses in music colleges, the implementation of opera performance courses in domestic colleges and universities has become a hot topic. Under the teaching background of the new era, the introduction of Chinese national opera into colleges and universities, and then the formation of a unique teaching mode of Chinese opera performance class, has become important content to publicize the promotion and teaching of Chinese national opera. As a stage art, opera performance can improve students' ability to control the stage and good singing psychology. Singing opera can improve the singing level and musical accomplishment of students. Therefore, as a student majoring in ethnic vocal music, one must possess the professional qualities of an opera actor. Therefore, this academic article introduces the development status of the national opera class in domestic music colleges. This article has positive and extensive practical significance for the construction of an ethnic music teaching system with Chinese characteristics.

**Keywords:** Present Situation; Existing Problems; Opera Teaching; Colleges; Universities; China

## Introduction

Chinese national opera was born in the 1920s and has developed for nearly a hundred years. In the process of learning from Western opera and integrating my country's excellent opera culture, through continuous reform and innovation, a musical form with strong Chinese characteristics and rich Chinese musical elements has been formed: Chinese National Opera. Chinese national opera integrates traditional music and dance, opera, drama, folk songs, and other musical elements, composing a musical form with unique Chinese characteristics, showing the broad and profound cultural heritage of the Chinese nation.

## The Development of Chinese National Opera

According to the research of Chinese folk opera researcher Sheng Wen, the period from 1920 to 1949 was the formation stage of Chinese folk opera. "Singing" and "Bel canto" are merged to connect the "freehand brushwork" in national music with the "realism" in Western music. However, due to the certain directionality of the singing groups in this period, they inevitably exist in this period. A certain "typing" (Sheng, 2013).

The growth period of Chinese opera appeared from 1949 to 1966 after the founding of the People's Republic of China. During this period, the performance form of national opera experienced unprecedented prosperity, and a group of national opera artists represented by Guo Lanying appeared on the land of China. However, during this period, due to political limitations and other factors, there were not many Western opera works in my country, but there were also

many innovative artists who had long been exploring the development path of the localization of Western opera in their daily teaching and academic work, such as Huang Youkui and Zhang Quan. In the research, the latter has devoted himself to the reform and innovation of the nationalization of "Bel canto" for a long time (Zhang, 2012).

After 1966, my country's national opera officially became mature. With the continuous expansion of the reform and opening up, the national opera theory based on "Bel canto" had been conceived, and a group of localized opera singers and creators emerged in my country. However, the national opera had also been recognized on the international stage, and the corresponding performance forms and production methods have also become more diversified, and Chinese national opera had officially started to prosper (Li, 2017).

### **The Uniqueness of Chinese National Opera**

Due to the difference in regional characteristics and culture, the national operas that appear on the land of our country have their uniqueness. The image of the character, through the shaping of it, shows the revolutionary quality of the Chinese people who are indomitable and daring to sacrifice and has a profound imprint of the times and national spirit. Therefore, in terms of character shaping, Chinese national opera not only has a unique national character but also integrates a Chinese communication mode in artistic processing (Wang, 2017).

With the changes of the times and the opening of politics, the expressions of national opera are becoming more and more diversified. Another aspect that symbolizes the difference between Chinese national opera and Western opera is the shaping of Chinese women's roles by Chinese national opera, and the expressiveness of Chinese national opera. The characters show a different trend of Chinese women's liberation thoughts, which symbolize the progress of the times (Cai, 2021).

In terms of the choice of themes, most of my country's national operas are adapted from historical stories and folklore. In these national operas, people can see the real life of Chinese folks, which are completely different from that of the west, and they have a distinct national spirit. In addition, in terms of creative techniques, national operas are usually based on Chinese unique dramas, and the wide range of materials makes national operas have unique localization characteristics. In "Little Er Hei's Marriage," due to the shackles of traditional thinking, two young people have to break through the shackles of thinking and find a happy land. This kind of creation that is closer to reality is not uncommon in national operas and has become one of the signature Chinese national operas. A symbolic representation (Chen, 2021).

### **Opera Performance Class**

Performance class is the only way for college students to go from the classroom to the stage after mastering certain music knowledge. With the continuous deepening and improvement of opera creation and artistic attainments in our country, there has been a relative shortage of opera performance talents, which does not match the increasingly prosperous opera market, which requires the establishment of special opera performances in colleges and universities in order to meet the needs of college personnel training. At the same time, researcher Ma Xingzhi took the opera "The Marriage of Figaro" as an example, expounding that the opera performance class should pay attention to the deep digging of the connotation of opera, so as to form a good stage presence. The setting of opera performance class is very necessary, and it is of great significance for college students to control the connotation of national opera in our country, to complete the refined presentation of performance (Ma, 2020).

In his article, Wan Shanhong expounded on the importance of integrating opera arias into college teaching and pointed out that it is necessary to dig deep into teaching at the levels of "hands, eyes, body, method, and steps," to improve the teaching of opera performance. It fits the increasingly mature Chinese opera market and achieves the purpose of effective promotion. In addition, he believes that Chinese opera itself is a manifestation of Chinese traditional culture, and it needs to be integrated into it in college education, to effectively improve students' understanding of opera performance and cultivate students' awareness of active participation during this period (Wang, 2017).

Therefore, the opera performance class has the meaning of "drama," which is to control the stage performance of the opera according to the characteristics of the plot, characters, environment, etc., to achieve the purpose of blending singing and music. In addition, through teaching, students can have a deeper understanding of opera, and improve their stage presentation skills in the process of learning, so as to form an ability to integrate singing and body (Cao, 2014).

### **The uniqueness of the opera performance class**

Scholar Zhou Fang believes that the setting of opera performance class can effectively improve the connection between theory and practice, which means that opera performance class is different from general theoretical teaching. It is necessary to combine the practicality of opera with opera performance theory and improving the teaching link can allow students to have a spiritual infection, and then achieve the mutual unity of "teaching" and "learning." The opera performance class should refine the corresponding training elements, and teach based on rehearsal, which reflects the practical features of opera performance classes (Zhou, 2020).

As depicted in Liu Siyao's article, the combination of scaffolding theory and performance teaching practice narrates the teaching design of the envisaged opera performance class through background knowledge, stage language, stage movements, stage prompts, etc. The teaching points of interaction, assistance, function rules, teacher evaluation, and other aspects are given based on the teaching method. This shows that in the performance class of national opera, it is necessary to follow the objective laws of performance, and based on teachers' assistance, students' autonomous participation is used to complete the corresponding teaching goals (Liu, 2014).

In the master's thesis of Hebei Normal University, we can see that the author proposed the importance of setting up a course of opera performance based on vocal music, and proposed that based on theoretical guidance, the analysis of characters and scripts should be integrated, and the pitch, the rhythm, and the corresponding environmental accompaniment are integrated and unified, and the importance of collaboration in the opera performance curriculum is proposed from the author's perspective. Therefore, opera performance class is a course that pays great attention to the sense of teamwork, and the importance of fit and synergy in teaching cannot be ignored (Zhao, 2014).

## **The development status of opera courses in 4 colleges and universities in China**

### **China Conservatory of Music**

Among the many well-known music art colleges in China, the China Conservatory of Music has an opera major that was established earlier, and the related major at this stage is called the department of vocal music and opera. While combining the two, it commits to cultivating professional talents with high-level artistic practice ability and theoretical research. The school currently has three teaching and research sections: national vocal music, bel canto majors, and performance. It implements the teaching concept of paying equal attention to both books and practice. The teaching staff is strong, and the main core teaching materials used are the self-edited teaching materials of the central conservatory of music, as well as the "opera department lines." "Basic," "Opera selection." At the same time, there are also appreciation textbooks such as "The Story of Western Opera in the 20th Century" and "The Collection of Classical Chorus of Foreign Operas of the National Centre for the Performing Arts." At the same time, there are professional minor courses such as body shape class, line pronunciation class, drama performance, and opera performance class.

### **Shanghai Conservatory of Music**

The Shanghai Conservatory of Music has also set up a department of vocal music and opera, and its vocal music teaching level has long been in a dominant position in the discipline. Years, doctoral students for six years. In terms of curriculum, it includes professional courses such as vocal singing (bel canto and folk vocals), opera performance and ensemble, art song, Chinese opera, chorus, solfeggio, piano, music theory, harmony, polyphony, professional basic courses such as musical form, pronunciation, stage skills, as well as basic theoretical courses such as Chinese and foreign music history, introduction to Chinese folk songs, and introduction to opera music. In terms of professional teaching, it also pays attention to the cultivation of the students' chorus ability. The Shanghai Conservatory of Music choir was established, and the members are composed of outstanding students from the vocal and song department. In the selection of teaching materials, "Introduction to Opera," "Selected Works of Vocal Music" and "Coloratura Soprano" were selected.

### **Shenyang Conservatory of Music**

The department of vocal music and opera of Shenyang Conservatory of Music was established in 1958. There are vocal music singing and vocal music art guidance teaching and research sections, forming a professional teaching system covering four-year undergraduates and three-year postgraduates. The professional main courses and professional basic courses offered mainly include vocal music singing, vocal music art direction, opera rehearsal, Italian pronunciation, German pronunciation, French pronunciation, Russian pronunciation, body, performance, chorus, lines, etc. "Selected New Chinese Vocal Music Works 1-14" compiled by the teachers of Shenyang Conservatory of Music won the second prize of the 5th higher education teaching achievement award in Liaoning province.

### **Zhejiang Conservatory of Music**

Zhejiang Conservatory of Music consists of the Opera Academy, which was established in 2020. Referring to the school-running philosophy of foreign opera departments, in the process of professional talent training, through curriculum reform, the proportion of students' practice links has gradually increased, and masterclasses, training classes, and series of music have been implemented. The proportion of meeting in teaching, transforming theory into practice, such as international art festivals, music seasons, and other activities, the opera school of Zhejiang Conservatory of music pays attention to the display of students' personal style.

The vocal music and opera department of the college has three teaching and research departments, which respectively set up teaching systems for bel canto, artistic practice, and national vocal music. At the same time, based on the guiding concept of combining theory and practice, the department of vocal music and opera has respectively offered relevant skill courses such as vocal music, art direction, opera ensemble, chorus, rehearsal of repertoire, and line pronunciation, using the "one-to-one" teaching mode for teaching. A five-year academic system has been established. Students have time for after-class thinking and adjustment, and each semester ends with a concert. At a practical level, the school provides students with certain opportunities to display and review with brand practice models such as weekly concerts, "singing songs" concerts, the Double Xin Award, and singing and song forms (Liu, 2020).

### **The present situation and existing problems of opera teaching in colleges and universities**

First of all, in the process of teaching, due to the richness of folk stories in our country, the corresponding opera materials are relatively extensive. However, compared with the opera teaching in western colleges and universities, my country's opera still has certain shortcomings in terms of innovation, and it has not been integrated into modernization. Western colleges and universities innovate opera repertoire in the form of bands and other forms and consciously guide students to dig deeper into the subject matter in teaching. This is the difference between Chinese national opera and western opera in college teaching. A major difference is also a problem in the teaching of opera in our country at present (Lu, 2019).

There are many more authoritative opera teachers in our country, but there are still some problems in the communication with students. In western countries, teachers are usually divided into different categories of teaching. One teacher is responsible for vocal music, one teacher is responsible for lines, and one teacher is responsible for stage movements. In the current stage of national opera teaching in my country, only one teacher is usually responsible for the entire opera curriculum. Teaching is bound to be misplaced (Zhang, 2021).

Our country usually arranges a variety of performance styles in the practical link of opera performance classes, but students are usually not very motivated to participate and have no interest. From the selection of teaching materials, the opera performance courses in our country are usually in the middle of the theoretical courses, and the practical links are relatively insufficient, which leads to the low participation of students in the courses. The choice of teaching materials is relatively conservative. As far as I know, in western opera performance classes, after teachers guide students to understand the plot, the corresponding teaching has been completed. In the subsequent links, students need to learn independently and perform shows with teammates. In my country's opera performance classes, the teachers' participation is too heavy in the practical aspect, and teachers are still involved in the students' program arrangements after guidance, which makes the students' awareness of participation relatively insufficient (Wang, 2012).

From the above standpoints, it can be seen that my country's opera performance is rich in subject materials and strong locality, which is a major advantage of my country's opera performance class, but there are certain problems in the practical curriculum. In this regard, on the one hand, in the selection of teaching materials, it is necessary to choose more textbooks that are biased towards appreciation, to enrich students' emotional cognition and deepen students' aesthetic experience of opera; on the other hand, in the teaching process, teachers

should pay attention to the students' presentation of team formation, role division, evaluation mechanism and guidance mechanism in the teaching of opera performance.

My country's national opera is more reasonable in terms of teaching settings, but as far as opera itself is concerned, due to the late start of my country's opera, the accumulation of opera is not as deep as that of European and American countries. It is an artistic expression that combines vocal music and lyrics, and in the teaching systems of colleges and universities, it is necessary to excavate national characteristics, learn from the teaching form of western vocal music and opera departments, and then create a characteristic national opera teaching system rooted in China.

### **The importance of opening opera performance classes in China**

Scholars Gao Feng and Bai Jie started from the feasibility of opening an opera performance class for educating people in the article, and expounding on that performance training can enable students to master various stage performance elements and improve stage survival skills, improve students' experience, and guide students to independently figure out the role from their own perspective, and at the same time improve their vocal skills and stage performance skills. The outline of the National Medium-Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) pointed out that the cultivation of talents is as important as the reform of the teaching system, and the students' psychological quality can be exercised through the setting of performances so that the students can realize their value. Practicing self-confidence in stage performance (Gao & Bai, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

After the reform and opening up, with the continuous development of my country's economy, the state has vigorously promoted the development of national opera and is committed to cultivating a new generation of outstanding opera performers in order to spread and promote my country's excellent traditional culture. Generations of musicians in our country have always maintained great enthusiasm for opera, and have created a large number of original opera works with both professional musicality and distinctive national character, which have a great impact on the development and progress of modern national vocal music in my country.

In Chinese current higher education and teaching of national vocal music, whether it is opera art theory, opera performance, lines class, body shape class, opera performance, opera fragment rehearsal, or basic opera appreciation, these courses are all lacking, the opera curriculum system is not perfect, and the teaching staff is weak. Singing Chinese folk opera is not only accomplished by grasping vocal skills. As a comprehensive artistic expression with the singing of national vocal works as the main body, Chinese folk opera can not only improve the singing level of students but also develop students' comprehensive artistic performance. The neglect of the elements of national opera in the teaching practice of national vocal music has formed a certain degree of restriction on the development of students and the further improvement of the level of national vocal music in our country.

Under the social and cultural background of the current era, the author, as a national vocal music teacher in colleges and universities, must have a clear cognition and deep understanding of the teaching of national opera, and integrate the teaching of national opera in my country into the teaching of vocal music, while closely linking the two. Therefore, it is the duty and responsibility of researchers to devote themselves to the dissemination and development of Chinese national opera courses in colleges and universities.

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