

# Study the singing techniques of Western vocal music in the context of Chinese ancient poetry

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## Abstract

The purposes of this study were: Study the singing techniques of Western vocal music in the context of Chinese ancient poetry.

Research Methodology. Literature research method. By consulting and analyzing literature, materials, etc., relevant materials related to the research topic are collected, thereby providing theoretical support and reference materials for the research purpose. Data collection process : Collect literature and teaching materials related to Western vocal techniques. Collect literature related to the rhythm characteristics, artistic conception, and traditional singing methods of Chinese ancient poetry. Analyze the difficulties and what kind of development there is in the combination of the two. The study found that Western vocal techniques can be combined with the linguistic characteristics of ancient Chinese poetry. It not only retains the artistic conception and charm of the poetry, but also enhances its appeal and dissemination effect through Western vocal singing techniques. At the same time, it also promotes the continuous inheritance and vitality of ancient Chinese poetry

**Keywords:** Western vocal music, singing techniques, Ancient Chinese Poetry

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research background.

The integration of Western vocal techniques with Chinese ancient poetry represents a significant frontier in cross-cultural musical research. As historical treasures of China's excellent traditional culture, ancient Chinese poems carry profound historical and cultural connotations (Li Jing & Ji Yijin, 2024). These poetic works, with their beautiful language and profound artistic conception, have traditionally been expressed through unique chanting methods that showcase their rhythmic and emotional qualities. However, Western vocal singing techniques, developed over centuries, offer a complete and systematic approach to vocal production that could potentially enhance these traditional expressions. Western bel canto techniques, including scientific breathing methods and resonance control, present new possibilities for interpreting Chinese classical poetry. The control of timbre, breath usage, and emotional expression in Western vocal methods can bring fresh perspectives to ancient poetry performances (Sun Lijuan, 2024). When properly integrated, these techniques may make the emotions and connotations of the poems more vivid and three-dimensional, allowing audiences

to achieve deeper perception and understanding during appreciation. This potential synergy between Eastern poetry and Western vocal science forms the core focus of the current study.

Chinese ancient poetry songs have developed unique characteristics despite their Western technical foundations. The incorporation of China's traditional pentatonic scale ensures musical melodies harmonize with linguistic tones, while each poem's distinct historical and cultural background provides rich material for emotional interpretation (Li Rui, 2024). These art songs represent an important fusion where the linguistic charm of ancient poetry meets musical innovation, becoming gems of Chinese cultural heritage that require both technical skill and deep emotional expression from performers.

The physiological similarities between Chinese and Western vocal production suggest fundamental compatibility between these traditions. As ( Han Zi juan , 2015) notes, both systems share similar vocal cord mechanisms and aesthetic functions, despite their different cultural emphases - Chinese vocal music focuses on elegant emotional expression while Western traditions prioritize imitative, three-dimensional effects. This common ground enables meaningful technical exchange, where Chinese singers can adapt Western resonance and breath control methods to enhance their interpretation of classical poetry (Qu Zhengyi, 2018).

Recent developments in Chinese art songs demonstrate the successful integration of Western compositional techniques with ancient poetic themes (Liu Yunbo, 2022). These works exemplify China's musical evolution from Western-influenced beginnings to creations with distinct national characteristics. The current study builds upon this foundation by specifically examining how Western vocal techniques can enhance poetry performance rather than just composition.

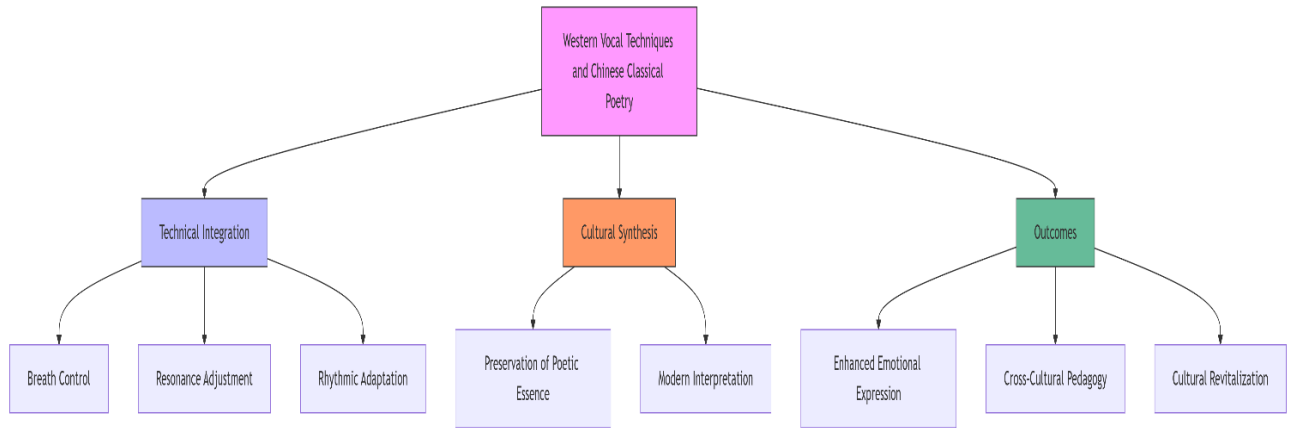
The research holds significance for both cultural preservation and pedagogical development. As traditional culture faces challenges in contemporary society, innovative approaches that maintain authenticity while increasing appeal become increasingly valuable (Chen Lixing, 2017). In educational contexts, combining Western vocal training with classical poetry interpretation may provide students with more comprehensive artistic development, cultivating performers who can bridge cultural divides.

This study aims to systematically explore the technical and aesthetic integration of Western vocal methods with Chinese ancient poetry performance. Through careful analysis of specific techniques and their effects on different poetic styles, the research seeks to establish practical guidelines for performers and educators. The findings may contribute to the ongoing vitality of traditional Chinese culture while expanding the expressive possibilities of Western vocal technique in cross-cultural applications.

## **1.2 Objectives**

Study the singing techniques of Western vocal music in the context of Chinese ancient poetry.

Table 1: Conceptual Framework



## 2. Methodology

This study employed two research methods. The first one was a literature review, where relevant materials for the study were obtained by reading documents in the online library. The second method was expert interviews. Experts were selected purposefully to collect information.

### 2.1 Literature Review

This study laid a theoretical foundation through a literature review. Relevant literature related to this study was retrieved from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), including journal articles and books related to the theme of "Research on Western vocal singing techniques from the perspective of Chinese classical poetry".

The literature review focused on the following aspects:

The application methods of Western singing styles in Chinese ancient poetry.

The inheritance and development methods of traditional Chinese ancient poetry.

How to express the connotation and charm of ancient poetry through music.

To clarify the research path for the theme of "Research on Western vocal singing techniques from the perspective of Chinese ancient poetry", in this study, interviewees were selected through targeted group screening interviews. They had relatively rich professional knowledge and practical experience in the integration of the artistic conception of Chinese ancient poetry and Western vocal singing techniques. Therefore, two participants were selected for in - depth interviews.

### 2.2 Targeted Group Screening Interviews

The selected individuals and their relevant information are as follows:

Liu Jie: Vice - chairperson of the Musicians Association in Changle County. She studied under Professor Kong Xiangping and specialized in courses such as vocal music. She has won many

important awards in provincial, municipal, and county - level vocal competitions. The students she tutored have also won many national, provincial, and municipal awards.

Lu Yujia: A young guzheng player and a member of the Rizhao Guzheng Professional Committee. She studied under Associate Professor Fu Rong and has won many academic scholarships and honorary titles.

### **3. Content Scope**

Western Vocal Music Performance Methods: Research on Western vocal music such as the abdominal and chest combined breathing method for breath control in bel canto, and the application of resonance such as head cavity resonance, chest cavity resonance, and oral cavity resonance.

Understanding and Application of Chinese Ancient Poetry: Research on the rhythm, cadence, tonal patterns, emotional expression characteristics of Chinese ancient poetry, as well as the traditional ancient music style.

### **4. Population**

Professional music groups: This includes vocal singers, music researchers, etc. They possess professional knowledge and practical experience in singing techniques.

Regional scope: Due to the wide spread of Western vocal singing styles and Chinese ancient poems, relevant domestic suggestions are collected through online libraries and interviews with experts.

### **5. Data collection**

Utilize the online library to obtain the required materials. Through the online library, collect and read relevant articles at home and abroad about the integration of Western vocal performance techniques (such as breathing methods and resonance application in bel canto) and Chinese ancient poetry, which will serve as theoretical support for the research. At the same time, collect the academic research results of professional musicians (including vocal performers, music researchers, etc.) in this aspect of integrated creation, such as literature and works. Meanwhile, conduct online semi - structured interviews with experts. During the interviews, flexibly ask the experts questions related to the application of Western vocal singing styles in Chinese ancient poetry, and collect the experts' suggestions through their responses.

### **6. Results**

**6.1 The interviews revealed that Western vocal techniques, such as the bel canto method's coordinated chest-abdominal breathing, head resonance, and chest resonance, can effectively enhance the emotional expressiveness of Chinese classical poetry.**

During the interview, Liu Jie, the vice-chairperson of the Musicians Association of Changle County, pointed out, "The chest-abdominal combined breathing method in bel canto provides more stable breath support for the performance of ancient Chinese poems, making the vocal line more coherent. It is particularly suitable for expressing the emotional ups and downs of

long poems." She emphasized that this scientific vocalization method can help singers better control the dynamic changes of their voices.

Lu Yujia added from the perspective of musical performance: "The flexible use of head resonance technology is particularly suitable for expressing the delicate emotions of ci poems of the graceful and restrained school. During the singing process, by adjusting the proportion of different resonance cavities, the artistic conception of the poems can be accurately conveyed." The two experts agreed that this technical integration not only preserves the literary characteristics of the poems but also enriches their musical expressiveness.

The study demonstrates that Western vocal techniques, including the coordinated abdominal-thoracic breathing method, head resonance, and chest resonance, can significantly improve the emotional expressiveness in the performance of Chinese classical poetry. These techniques enable performers to interpret the profound emotions embedded in the poetic texts with greater precision. For instance, when performing majestic works such as "Man Jiang Hong," singers need to increase the proportion of chest resonance to achieve a fuller, more powerful vocal quality, while simultaneously focusing on head resonance to produce soaring high notes that effectively convey the grandeur of the piece. Conversely, for lyrical works like "Jin Se," a more delicate vocal approach is required, featuring gentler breath support, reduced chest resonance, and increased use of head and oral resonance to better express the poem's subtle emotions. This technical flexibility preserves the original artistic conception of the poetry while enhancing its emotional impact through nuanced vocal variations, making it more accessible and resonant for contemporary audiences.

## **6.2 The study emphasizes the application of rhythm, meter, and emotional expression in Chinese vocal music.**

Liu Jie explained in detail during the interview, "When dealing with works like 'When Will the Spring Flowers and Autumn Moon End?', we change the rhythm pattern by using slurs at specific verses, making the music better fit the 语感 and emotional expression of the poetry." She believes that this kind of treatment needs to be based on a deep understanding of the poetic meter.

Lu Yujia pointed out from the perspective of the integrity of musical performance: "In rhythm processing, we should take into account both the rhythmic features of the poetry and the expressive needs of the music. We tried to combine the sense of rhythm in traditional chanting with modern musical expression techniques to create an artistic effect that is both traditional and novel." She especially emphasized that such innovation must respect the spiritual connotation of the original work.

The research highlights the crucial role of rhythmic treatment in the vocal interpretation of classical Chinese poetry. The use of techniques such as slurs and tempo variations significantly enhances both the musicality and emotional depth of these works. For example, in the performance of "Chun Hua Qiu Yue He Shi Liao," the strategic application of slurs alters the original rhythmic patterns, creating a more melancholic and lyrical effect through deliberate rhythmic extensions (such as changing eighth notes to quarter notes at the end of phrases like

"the homeland unbearable to recall under the bright moon"). These carefully designed rhythmic modifications not only align perfectly with the tonal patterns of the poetry itself but also reinforce the fluidity of the verses through musical treatment, thereby accentuating the thematic imagery. The study indicates that mastery of these techniques allows performers to maintain the structural integrity of the poetry while imbuing it with new artistic vitality.

### **6.3 The study explores the application of Chinese art songs in music education. The**

Liu Jie shared her teaching philosophy: "In vocal music teaching, we adopt a phased teaching strategy. First, we consolidate the basic techniques of bel canto, and then gradually integrate the singing characteristics of Chinese ancient poems." She believes that this step-by-step approach helps students develop solid cross-cultural singing abilities.

Lu Yujia proposed from the perspective of curriculum design: "We have developed an integrated teaching plan that organically combines vocal skill training with the analysis of poetry culture. In the teaching of each piece, special class hours will be arranged to explain the background and artistic conception of the poem." Both experts emphasized that successful teaching needs to balance technical training and cultural inheritance.

The study explores the pedagogical value of integrating Western vocal techniques with classical Chinese poetry. Incorporating classical poetry songs into vocal training helps students develop a deeper understanding of the fusion between Chinese and Western musical cultures. Through specialized exercises in breath control and resonance training, students not only improve their vocal technique but also gain a richer appreciation of traditional cultural connotations. The research finds that this cross-cultural teaching approach enriches classroom content, stimulates students' artistic creativity, and contributes to the cultivation of professionals who possess both traditional cultural literacy and international artistic perspective. Notably, the study emphasizes the importance of maintaining balance in the teaching process, cautioning against excessive focus on technical performance at the expense of the poetry's authenticity, and advocating for innovative exploration based on respect for traditional aesthetics.

However, the study also notes the need to balance tradition and innovation in practice. On one hand, the historical and cultural value of classical poetry should be respected, avoiding excessive technical display that might dilute its inherent charm. On the other hand, to meet the spiritual needs of contemporary audiences, new musical expressions should be boldly explored while preserving the cultural essence.

## **7. Conclusion**

In terms of artistic expression, the study confirms that bel canto techniques including coordinated abdominal-thoracic breathing and resonance cavity modulation can significantly enhance the emotional expressiveness of classical Chinese poetry. Through analysis of representative works such as "Man Jiang Hong" and "Jin Se," it was found that singers, by scientifically adjusting the proportional use of resonance cavities, can both preserve the inherent linguistic characteristics of the poetry and amplify its artistic impact. This technical

integration renders the emotional expression of the works more multidimensional, infusing traditional poetry with renewed artistic vitality.

Regarding rhythmic treatment, the study innovatively applies Western musical techniques such as rubato to the performance of Chinese poetry. Taking "Chun Hua Qiu Yue He Shi Liao" as an example, the strategic employment of slurs and rhythmic variations at specific poetic lines maintains the tonal patterns of the poetry while creating more expressive musical effects. This innovative approach has pioneered new pathways for the contemporary interpretation of classical poetry.

In terms of pedagogical practice, the approach emphasizes not only technical training but also, more significantly, cultural comprehension, enabling learners to profoundly grasp the essence of both Chinese and Western musical cultures. Multiple experts highlighted in interviews that this teaching methodology holds substantial importance for the preservation and advancement of traditional Chinese musical culture.

From the perspective of cultural heritage, this study proposes innovative approaches to the living preservation of traditional poetry. The organic integration of Western vocal techniques with Chinese poetic art not only safeguards the authenticity of traditional culture but also enhances its contemporary communicative power and influence. This innovative practice demonstrates that the transmission of traditional culture requires an open and inclusive attitude to assimilate diverse cultural essences.

Nevertheless, the study has identified several noteworthy issues. In technical application, particular attention must be paid to preserving the unique artistic conception and aesthetic charm inherent in Chinese poetry, avoiding the potential compromise of cultural connotations through excessive pursuit of vocal effects. Furthermore, establishing a more systematic and comprehensive cross-cultural vocal pedagogy remains a subject requiring in-depth exploration in future research.

In conclusion, this study not only expands new possibilities for vocal performance art but also contributes valuable insights into the innovative development of traditional culture. Future research could further investigate comparative studies of regional stylistic variations and longitudinal assessments of pedagogical outcomes to promote deeper integration between Chinese and Western musical cultures. Such artistic dialogue, grounded in mutual respect and understanding, will undoubtedly infuse new vitality into the flourishing development of human musical culture.

From the perspective of teaching, the teaching materials, teaching methods, and teaching system have already reached a certain scale. From the perspective of singing, there have emerged songs of ancient Chinese poetry with Chinese singing style characteristics in China, and singers who are loved by the broad masses of the people (Chen Huihui , 2013).

## **8. Discussions**

From a technical perspective, the scientific and systematic nature of Western vocal music performance methods provides support for the performance of ancient poetry songs. For

example, bel canto emphasizes the continuity of the voice, the use of resonance, and the utilization of breath. These characteristics can better showcase the linguistic beauty and artistic conception depth of ancient poetry. Through training in breath control, voice, and resonance cavities, singers can more accurately express the emotions and connotations in ancient poetry while enhancing the expressiveness of the music. However, the application of technology also needs to be matched with the cultural connotations of ancient poetry to prevent the cultural connotations of ancient poetry itself from being weakened due to excessive pursuit of sound effects

Chinese ancient poetry is a treasure of Chinese history and culture. It is an important product under specific historical and cultural conditions. Its content is integrated with the context, with a very obvious beauty of rhythm and language. Moreover, it has been combined with musical elements in the continuous development process, forming ancient poetry songs. Ancient poetry songs have a strong expressive force, allowing generations of Chinese children to deeply appreciate and analyze them (Xu Xiaojun 2024).

Due to the influence of the historical background, the bel canto of the Chinese national tradition has been influenced by the Western vocal music performance style. Due to the long history and profoundness of Chinese culture, it has the tradition of taking the essence and discarding the dross. Therefore, the Western vocal music performance style has good conditions to integrate into the traditional Chinese national singing method. (Yin Lu 2015, ).

The art songs of ancient poetry have witnessed the great transformation of China's music creation from "dominated by the West" to "using the West for China", and finally to the creation with national and autonomous characteristics. At the birth of the art songs of ancient poetry, musicians created by integrating Chinese elements with the expertise of Western art songs, and integrating Western music concepts with the themes of ancient poetry in China. (Liu Yunbo , 2022). Chinese ancient poetry songs are a unique genre of vocal music works in China that combine Western creative techniques, themes with ancient Chinese poetry and musical elements (Chen Lixing , 2017).

## **9. knowledge gained from research**

Through the application and research of Western vocal music singing methods in Chinese ancient poetry songs, it can help singers more accurately understand the emotions and connotations of the works, so that they can express the unique emotions and connotations of ancient poetry in the singing. At the same time, in the singing process, we can also learn some advanced concepts and theoretical knowledge in many aspects, which is of great significance to the subsequent music education, music performance and the inheritance of traditional culture. For example, in the inheritance and development of traditional culture, through the interpretation of Western vocal music singing skills in ancient poetry, it can make more people, especially the younger generation, more easily accept and understand these classic traditional cultures. This not only promotes the spread of traditional ancient poetry, but also makes it appear in front of the public with a new look, and also makes the Chinese singing method of Western singing style known to the public.



## 10. Suggestions

1. Cross-cultural communication: Exploring the combination of Western vocal music performance techniques and Chinese ancient poetry. Analyzing how the musical expression forms in different cultural backgrounds and promoting its dissemination on the international stage.
2. Using Western vocal techniques should focus on coordinating with the cultural connotations of ancient Chinese poetry. It is recommended to deeply understand the historical background, literary value, and philosophical thoughts of ancient Chinese poetry, thereby avoiding weakening the charm of the poetry itself due to excessive pursuit of sound.

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