

# Common Problems of Chinese Vocal Baritone in Teaching and Training

Li Yuan and Yongsit Yongkamol

Bangkokthonburi University, Thailand

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

\*\*\*\*\*

## Abstract

Chinese vocal music "is not only a concept or category, but also a goal, which is the common expectation and vision of all Chinese musicians. China is a cultural powerhouse, and we have ample reasons and accumulation to showcase our national and cultural confidence to the world. On the path of Chinese music going global, facing the development trend of music both domestically and internationally, we need to create and judge with a wise eye, and boldly explore with a clear mind and rational thinking. Chinese musicians have a long way to go, and the future of "Chinese vocal music" is foreseeable. Since the introduction of Western bel canto to China in the 1920s, the baritone voice has also appeared in bel canto teaching. Western vocal music was introduced to China through the initial form of church chants, various types of choirs in schools and society, as well as Western opera performances. It was gradually accepted by the Chinese people, and while Western vocal music was spreading in China, it also opened up the learning of modern Chinese vocal music. Over the past century, through learning and borrowing from Western vocal music as an "imported product", including studying, accepting, and imparting modern vocal science singing methods and different Western vocal schools, vocal singing methods, as well as related teaching experiences and knowledge systems, in the process of combining and adapting scientific singing methods with the language, rhyme, and even artistic emotions of the Chinese national anthem, and completing its Chinese style artistic expression, In fact, we have already embarked on a path of Chinese vocal music. As a lyrical baritone, I have been studying vocal music for over ten years now.

**Keywords:** Common Problems; Chinese Vocal; Baritone; Teaching; Training

## Introduction

In the process of learning Chinese vocal baritone, the author has had some reflection and found that there are many problems:

Firstly, during the process of learning vocal music, it was discovered that although there have been a group of baritone singers in China in recent years, most of them mainly sing Western vocal works using bel canto. In terms of talent cultivation, it is also based on the evaluation of Western vocal music. Singing with a foreign flavor is enough, and obtaining international recognition is enough. In terms of ideological concepts, pursuit of goals, and focus of singing, Western vocal music has always been the standard, which has led to a phenomenon where more and more students prefer to use Western pronunciation, resonance, and timbre states when singing Chinese works. When singing, the sound is very Westernized, but it is not like Chinese people singing Chinese songs, but gives the impression that foreigners are singing Chinese songs (Cai, 2008).

The second is the introduction, reference, and application of the baritone voice in Western vocal art in the development of modern Chinese vocal music. There is a lack of phased research and summary of its overall development, as well as a lack of research on representative figures in different development stages and periods. Compared to the research on the singing of soprano and tenor vocals, the research on the singing and teaching practice of baritone vocals in Chinese vocal music is relatively weak.

Thirdly, in the current process of constructing the Chinese music school in our institute, the study of the Chinese vocal school is an important part, and for the construction of first-class disciplines, it can be said that it is of utmost importance. The baritone voice is also an indispensable part of the comprehensive construction of the Chinese vocal school.

The fourth reason is that the number of tracks written specifically for baritone is too small. There are some excellent art songs in modern China that can be sung, but there are very few opera works. This is also a common problem in the male baritone voice of Chinese vocal music, which is that there are too few works that can be called artistic masterpieces, even though they want to sing Chinese songs.

Fifth, in the creation of modern and contemporary art songs, although composers have created a large number of art songs, there are too few works created solely for the baritone part, and the creation of such works does not have a relatively systematic and clear development path, and is in a relatively scattered and random state.

Therefore, the topic of this article focuses on the research on the performance and teaching practice of the baritone voice part in the Chinese School of Vocal Music at the China Conservatory of Music. At the same time, based on the historical development process of the singing art of the baritone voice part in modern Chinese vocal music, it summarizes representative teaching methods, singing experiences and principles related to the talent cultivation of the baritone voice part in Chinese vocal music, in order to support the overall research of the performance and teaching practice of the Chinese vocal school (Du, 2011).

Pay attention to representative teaching methods, singing experiences, and principles closely related to the cultivation of male baritone talents in Chinese vocal music, and form an understanding of the multi-dimensional interweaving of Chinese vocal male baritone singing art in history and present, representative figures and artistic styles, subject teaching and talent cultivation, and even the principles and experiences of commonality and individuality, in order to support the disciplinary construction of the Chinese vocal school. Although this article is not a comprehensive exposition and study of the art of baritone singing in modern Chinese vocal music, due to its representativeness, typicality, and multi-dimensional research framework and comprehensive grasp of the topic, it has for the first time formed a cognitive achievement of understanding representative figures from historical background, focusing on the overall situation from typicality, and focusing on teaching and talent cultivation from artistic style (Xia, 2017).

Therefore, compared to similar research in this field, the topic selection, research scope, and discussion of this article have certain novelty and pioneering significance. It has the refinement and summary of typical singing style characteristics of Chinese vocal baritone, and has certain theoretical innovation significance.

## **Common problems of Chinese vocal baritone in teaching and training.**

### **1. Problems that Chinese vocal baritone students in China Conservatory of Music are prone to in their learning.**

Chinese vocal baritone is born with a natural voice position and a loud voice during training. Therefore, in order to pursue the shocking and metallic sound when singing, most baritone students always put their strength in the transitional voice area and push the sound state to a large extent to make what they think is a thick voice and a wide volume. These are common and common mistakes for baritone students of Chinese vocal music. Because they cannot grasp the correct timbre, sometimes aggravated, sometimes high, so that there will be sound deterioration in the place of sound point, sound cracking, throat discomfort and other phenomena. Of course, these have a lot to do with the teacher's teaching method, the teacher should correctly according to each student's physiological characteristics, vocal cord structure, voice conditions to make better scientific voice practice for students, in the training to find the most suitable and most comfortable voice position for them to train. This will encounter various problems in the teaching and training, and is also a severe test for our vocal music teachers. But in essence, the cause of various problems can be basically judged, is the ability to combine subjective and objective to look at the problem, which is the requirement of Marxist philosophy methodology, to look at everything, we must combine subjective and objective, and the development of things is multifaceted (Xiao, 2015). Dichotomism is the way to analyze the problem and end the problem by finding the main contradiction and the secondary contradiction. The voice we sing also reflects this problem more, the singer hears his own voice and the audience hears the singer's voice is often different. How to solve this problem is an important topic for teachers in teaching and students in learning process.

### **Timbre**

First of all, the timbre of the baritone, the difference between voice and pitch, determines the voice of the singer. The timbre of baritone is characterized by: deep, vigorous, majestic and deep sound; The middle voice is natural, flexible, loud and beautiful; High tone metallic sense, sound loud, strong penetration. Not all baritones have such a high quality timbre. In the learning process, some students who can't sing the voice often mistake it for a baritone, which is a huge mistake. The baritone voice is an important factor in the definition of baritone, but it is not the only factor. In the classification of baritone, there are high baritone, baritone and low baritone. Therefore, the Chinese vocal baritone often has the bad singing habit of pretending to be low and elegant, gentle and atmospheric in timbre performance. This requires teachers to guide students in teaching, improve students' aesthetic perception, pay attention to the timbre of different parts, and study how different timbre is sung. It has nothing to do with the way the sound is produced or pressed. Objectively speaking, the most important thing to learn vocal music is to use scientific methods to find their own voice, rather than blindly imitating the voice and timbre of others, so as to achieve the listener's satisfaction and shock effect (Zhang, 2015).

### **Sound exchange zone and vocal range**

The baritone transition zone is one of the most difficult problems to solve, and it is also a headache for each voice, which is to change a voice to another voice zone, or even a little higher. If the preparation work is not done well when singing, the voice is very easy to crack at the voice change area, the voice will feel uncomfortable, the voice will deteriorate, and the vocal cords will be affected. For baritones, the transition is the transition from the middle voice to the high voice, and its vocal range is usually between G and g<sup>2</sup>, but out of instinct, many baritone students will have throat lifting, facial tension, the voice does not relax, and the whole person becomes very awkward and other phenomena when they sing in the change of voice. Singing like that must affect their high notes. Therefore, it is still necessary to train the middle and low voice areas well and lay a solid foundation. The range of Chinese vocal baritone can be expanded through continuous training. In the first year of undergraduate study, it is not necessary to deliberately look for the improvement of the treble breakthrough vocal range, but should pay more attention to the scientific singing methods and singing habits, and carry out more intense training after forming a relatively stable muscle memory.

### **Training for breath and head cavity resonance**

Good breathing skills are very important, and it is important to strengthen the muscle strength of the diaphragm and feel the expansion of the waist and abdomen outward. Try to avoid two types of errors: shallow breathing position (gasping for breath when going up stairs) and tight breathing position (stiff breath, unable to exhale). The correct breath support will lay a solid foundation for singing. The famous tenor singer Pavarotti once said, "Whoever masters the good breath, he masters the best singing.". It can be seen how important the breath is during the singing process. Breath is the driving force of singing, bringing language, words, emotions and emotions into the melody of singing through breathing. Some students, in order to obtain longer phrases, take a deep breath while singing a sentence, causing their bodies to stiffen and their breath to not circulate. This is a wrong behavior. During the singing process, some students, in order to express some weak voices and appear to have emotions, do not inhale or sing falsely, exhale and sing, and release all their breath in advance, without entering the cavity, so that the breath does not convert into the head voice. As a result, before the end of this phrase, there is no breath left, and they fall into a great passive state, so that the following two sentences cannot be sung smoothly (Wang, 2008).

Head cavity resonance refers to the brightest and most penetrating sound produced during singing. To achieve a good voice and create a good resonant cavity, a mask is very important when singing. Only by covering up the mask well can we prepare for the high pitched head cavity. The resonance between the mask and the head cavity is the highest position in vocal singing and training, and we often push forward to find a high position or find resonance in the head cavity. This method is not healthy, and in this erroneous behavior, students often fail to recognize that resonance in the head cavity also requires space, which requires us to absorb it as a whole through our breath. At the same time, we need to use consciousness to allow the breath to flow in the singing chamber. And the mask and high position are the resonance points imagined by the singer, and the improvement of this technology can make the

sound extremely metallic, powerful, bright, and full of brightness. Marxist philosophy requires us to approach problems in a dichotomy when learning and understanding things, and to approach them more comprehensively, combining top-down and left-right approaches. To solve the above problems, we need to take a comprehensive and holistic approach (Wang, 2019).

## **2. The role of teachers in teaching male baritone in Chinese vocal music**

Faced with the new concept of vocal teaching in 21st century China, the first step is to ensure mutual cooperation between teachers and students in the teaching process, and strengthen the integration of emotions and thinking between teachers and students. The most important thing is to have a sense of responsibility and correct teaching methods, otherwise it will lead to students losing their enthusiasm for learning and even losing their field of study. We need to constantly update teaching methods, implement and strengthen the teaching ability of vocal teachers, and unify the relationship between teachers and students. As a professional vocal teacher, one must study hard, constantly discover and accumulate knowledge, which is the standard for being a good teacher. Italian soprano Terbaldi once said, "The secret to singing is to find a good teacher." Indeed, if students cannot meet a good teacher, it is better not to learn or study alone, while vocal music should be completely self-taught, which is impossible. Therefore, vocal teachers should play their due role in teaching in five aspects: first, they should have a correct concept of singing art and master the correct singing methods. Secondly, you must have good listening skills. The art of vocal teaching is mainly based on hearing. Thirdly, one must have the ability to prescribe the right medicine to the problem. Fourthly, one should have strong stage singing skills and a certain level of piano accompaniment skills, organically combining "information" with "example teaching" to make their teaching more attractive and persuasive. Fifthly, you should have comprehensive cultural and artistic achievements and corresponding scientific knowledge. The more comprehensive your achievements are, the more complete your knowledge structure is, and the greater the probability of becoming a vocal educator and cultivating a large number of excellent vocal talents.

In the present vocal music teaching, many local professional music schools in China still maintain relatively traditional and rigorous vocal music teaching mode in the training method of Chinese baritone. With the development and progress of vocal music education, more teaching ideas have changed. We should inherit old ideas and learn from each other. In addition to reform in practice, the new concept must be continuously implemented. Only in this way can baritone vocal music teaching be more powerful and attract every student and vocal music teacher who learns Chinese baritone.

### **The overall of singing methods**

The teaching guidelines of China Conservatory of Music currently require that learning vocal music first requires mastering scientific singing methods. Singers themselves are like "musical instruments", and the quality of this instrument must be excellent. We demand that in the process of learning vocal music, we focus on honing and training scientific singing methods, cultivating strong literary and artistic literacy, cultivating noble moral qualities, and fostering a positive and positive sense of social responsibility (Wang, 2020).

It may not be difficult for vocal instruments to express themselves in general singing works, because singing is everyone's right, and everyone can sing loudly under the influence of various emotions and emotions. However, if singers want to achieve high-level, artistic singing, and unforgettable emotions, they need professional training and very sensitive observation and learning in daily life.

### **The singer's own form**

Chinese vocal music is an art of singing, and the form of the singer is an important factor that directly affects the quality of singing. The singer's standing posture, eyes, facial expressions, gestures, communication with the audience, temperament and other aspects of singing - all these need to be studied and improved systematically for a long time, summed up in life and learning, and correctly and rationally expressed, so that the singing characters are rich in emotions, and can be sublimated from ordinary life to an artistic image higher than life.

During the learning process, singers need to constantly observe, analyze, and "dissect" famous singers, experience, think, imitate, practice, digest, and absorb their methods, in order to learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses, and apply them. For example, the hands, eyes, body, techniques, and steps in traditional Chinese opera need to be improved over time. Singers should always pay attention to the expression of their body language when learning scientific vocal methods, so that their bodies serve the purpose of good singing, the meaning of the work to be expressed, and the essence of vocal art.

Stage appearance, gestures, eye contact, spiritual charm, and every move while singing - all reflect the singer's singing quality, overall awareness and all-round charm of artistic singing, as well as a high level of extraordinary artistic literacy. For example, the famous Henan opera performer Chang Xiangyu, in order to perfect her eye charm, accumulated time and energy to observe candles, objects, and people. This way, when she takes the stage, her eyes will be bright, and her whole face will be radiant, with an extraordinary temperament. This is not a one-time achievement, it requires long-term learning and gradual training.

When the singer's body movements are coordinated with the performance of the song, they should be able to balance strength and softness, stretch and bend, and move freely. Pay attention to the left when turning right, pay attention to the right when turning left, pay attention to the back when moving forward, and pay attention to the front when moving backward. For local movements, pay attention to overall coordination. The whole body sensation is aimed at achieving better local movement efficiency. In addition, the relaxation of the singer's form is

also important. The singer must pay attention to tension and relaxation, and the organic coordination between the parts and the whole, so that the local movements do not forget the overall coordination and sense of unity. And some parts always maintain a high degree of uniformity (Fu, 2017).

### **The main channel for singing**

The establishment of a major channel for singing is an important foundation for forming a good singing structure. Organically connect the resonance of the singing head cavity, oral cavity, chest cavity, and the coordination and balance with the resonance cavity of the whole body, forming a singing channel that connects the local and whole body up and down, gradually achieving full channel singing, that is, natural singing of the whole body with mixed resonance. By adopting this type of mixed resonance singing, several different channels can be formed through corresponding adjustments according to the different style needs of vocal works. Specifically, the currently mature and effective singing channels include: long wide channel, medium loose channel, short shallow channel, upper channel, middle channel, and lower channel. Roughly speaking, the upper passage is from the throat to the head cavity, the middle passage is from the throat to the waist belt and spine, and the lower passage is from the waist belt to the feet or heels. The singing channel of the human "instrument" naturally exists within the body, and the resonant cavity exists independently within the singer's own "instrument".

On the basis of maintaining vertical lines up and down by the singer himself, the state of yawning and opening the mouth to inhale is used to draw open the mouth, head cavity, trachea, chest cavity and abdominal cavity to maintain the upper and lower penetration and gas coherence, forming an organic and coordinated whole, so as to form a long and wide channel of singing. Here, the absorption and retention are the key to mastering the channel. When the absorption and retention forces and the reaction forces up and down and left and right of the body reach opposition and unity, the whole body mixed resonance of the long and wide channels will be organically coordinated to form an ideal and relatively perfect whole channel, that is, the whole body naturally sings. Note that when opening and opening the channel, the upper, middle and lower channels are required to be opened, so as to maintain the integrity, comprehensiveness and scientific nature of the singing channel.

The characteristic of the "U" vowel is like a bridge connecting the upper, middle, and lower channels. Practicing singing with the "U" vowel makes it easy to pass through the head cavity and lower the heel, with a coherent and seamless upper and lower part, achieving a full channel singing state where the voice is high and the breath is deep. From the ear to the heel, at the middle back one-third of the body (the waistline of the pants on the side of the body), connect up and down to form a vertical line, and maintain this vertical line for humming, sighing, and opening in the middle. "Up hum" refers to lifting the laughing muscles, soft palate, and humming towards the head cavity; "Downward sigh" refers to sighing to the heel of the foot; "Middle opening" refers to the middle part of the channel being kept sucked open. Maintaining vertical suction and opening up and down can easily form a U-channel for full

body singing. The coordination and application of the above methods can gradually form the basic instrument structure of scientific singing methods, which is the physical foundation and technical guarantee for artistic singing (Jin, 2013).

Professor Jin Tielin, a renowned vocal educator at the China Conservatory of Music, is a master of the application of channel theory. He used singing channels to establish a scientific framework for basic singing and applied it to a perfect level. He often asks students to "relax first, sigh later, inhale from where they sigh, and sing from where they inhale", and particularly emphasizes that "the higher the pitch, the U-channel must remain motionless, and the breath should rest on the heel, just place it there. Do not use excessive force below, that is, maintain its tone, maintain the feeling of the channel, and always remember the role of the channel.". Chinese characters themselves are quite complex to bite, which can easily cause changes in the channels. After the channels change, it is easy to cause the sound to come in and out, with varying thickness. When singing, it is important to ensure that all characters are completed on the "fulcrum", and to switch all characters in the U-channel. The entire channel should not be affected by the characters and style (Zhai, 2004).

## Conclusion

There are various ways in which Chinese vocal music can be presented, including the blending of true and false voices in different works, as well as the different vocal positions and styles required for dialect specific folk songs. In the art of singing in Chinese opera, Peking Opera has a higher vocal position, while Huangmei Opera has a lower singing position. In summary, the vast territory, abundant resources, and large population of China have created diverse styles of vocal singing art. We should identify the unique style and understand the cultural core to view the diversity of Chinese vocal music.

Overall, Western vocal art is result oriented and more like a commodity in the market, with strong directionality and accuracy in expressing emotions. In China, music expression is more casual and emphasizes personalization in a multicultural environment.

## References

- Cai, Y. (2008). On the inheritance of Chinese folk music culture. *Art Education*, (07), 62-64.
- Du, Y. (2011). Chinese National Music Education without "original". *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, (01), 61-67.
- Fu, H. (2017). Layout and practice of Professor Jin Tielin in baritone teaching. *Voice of the Yellow River*, (01),95-96.
- Jin, T. (2013). Development and Future of Chinese vocal music: Inheritance, reference, development and Innovation. *Music of the People*, (11), 51-53.
- Wang, A. (2020). The influence of Chinese national Opera on vocal music teaching in China. *Drama House*, (4), 2.
- Wang, S. (2019). Promoting the Development of "Chinese Vocal Music School" in the New Era. *Learning Monthly*, (03),55-56.
- Wang, X. (2008). Characteristics of Chinese modern national vocal music singing art. *Art Education*, (11), 1.

- Xia, H. Y. (2017). Research on the inheritance and innovative teaching of intangible cultural heritage native folk songs in colleges and universities. *China Vocational and Technical Education*, (35), 103-105.
- Xiao, N. N. (2015). An analysis on the thematic teaching of multi-voice folk songs of ethnic minorities in solfeggio and ear training teaching. *Music of China*, (01), 239-245.
- Zhai, S.(2004). Some misunderstandings in the art of singing. *Chinese Music* (02).
- Zhang, G. (2015). Reference and integration of Bel Canto singing in national vocal music teaching. *Drama Home*, (09), 240-241.