

Systematic Discussion and Rational Thinking of Vocal Music Education under the Current Social Background of China

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Abstract—Vocal music education in the Chinese educational system has for a long time placed much importance on following the model of “Western Bel Canto”, but this may be about to change. Nowadays, with the rapid development of China's economic globalization and the integration of multiple cultures, the social background is changing dramatically, which brings great opportunity but also many challenges to vocal music education and teaching. This paper addresses a systematic discussion on the status and trend of vocal music education in the current social background of modern China, and gives rational thinking on how the new background reshapes the ideas and notions of vocal music education.

Keywords—vocal music education; social background; multicultural integration; Chinese educational system; Bel Canto

I. THE PRESENT STATUS OF VOCAL MUSIC EDUCATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TRADITIONAL CULTURE AND MULTICULTURAL INTEGRATION IN CHINA

The Chinese culture is one of the world's oldest cultures, originating thousands of years ago. The area in which the culture is dominant covers a large geographical region in East Asia with customs and traditions varying greatly between provinces, cities, and even towns as well. With China being one of the earliest ancient civilizations, Chinese culture is extremely diverse and varying, and it has a profound effect in the philosophy, virtue, etiquette and traditions of Asia to date [1]. China has a long history, and the masses of working people created a splendid culture of our country. Working people in different historical background created excellent national culture, which has diverse faces and rich content, including not only literature and art, but also philosophy and religion. The national culture needs to be inherited and developed from generation to generation [2].

In modern China, however, the digitalization and multiplicity of cultural manifestations have been changed dramatically with the continuous development of social economy. With the social change and development, cultural diversity has been blended in people's life, which can be considered as the multicultural integration of other nations and countries under the premise of inheriting our own traditional culture during the process of practice and social developing, and then creates a humorous cultural atmosphere, contending

on the basis of our own culture supplemented by the other cultures [3]. Therefore, the importance to the penetration of these multicultural elements into our education should be highlighted and, in the new era, educational workers should also undertake an important responsibility of inheriting and developing our national culture.

In recent years, music education and teaching have taken more and more attention in society. Music education is an important carrier of diverse cultural elements, and bears the mission of national cultural development. Multicultural integration leads to the diversified development of music. With the establishment and improvement of the modern education system, the music education embarks on the right track of cultural inheritance and integration, termed the multicultural music education (MME). Music preserves special meanings in MME since learning music from various cultures can help students to form worldwide perspectives. Facing the reality of a multicultural society, it is essential that we understand people in a more complete cultural way through musical, artistic and philosophical beliefs. Previously, many studies have emphasized the importance of MME in the music classroom within a multicultural society in modern China. In such a society the case of cultural traditions warrants particular attention in the field of music education [4]. However, for a long time in people's traditional ideas the foreign things are always better than ours. From the beginning of the 20th century, Chinese music education followed the Western music model. Due to external and internal factors, the development of the modern music education with respect to our traditional culture has slowed down. The influx of foreign music style has also a significant impact on our national music education, resulting in students with low interest in folk music learning, insufficient traditional cultural curriculum set by schools, and low attention to national music education from the society [5].

In vocal music, the curriculum is in accordance with Western Bel Canto with little Chinese traditional singing style in vocal music teaching. Today, the Bel Canto model is widely applied for vocal music education in China. Therefore, Western singing style is mostly used in school vocal music teaching [6]. However, in recent years many music institutes in China have carried out a series of educational reforms, ranging from vocal music courses to teaching methods. Changes have taken place

and, at the same time, we begin to realize that Chinese traditional singing style not only is highly artistic, but also represents an important section of our national culture, bearing the responsibility for heritage of Chinese culture. This inheritance could cultivate students to have national consciousness, to absorb good traditional culture for the future vocal music learning. These reforms have injected new vitality into vocal music education in modern China and, as expected, received good results for both the teachers and students [7].

II. THE COMBINATION OF VOCAL MUSIC EDUCATION WITH AESTHETICS AND PSYCHOLOGY IN CHINA

In recent years, some other areas of vocal music education, such as the psychology and aesthetics of music art, have also been explored and practiced in China. These reforms have injected new vitality into vocal music education in modern China and, as expected, received good results for both the teachers and students. Psychology plays a critical role in music education, which focuses on students' mental quality and learning power, and devotes itself to the prosperity of individual and society. Previous investigations have shown that positive psychology contributes to the improvement of cognitive ability and executive ability, which is conducive to physical and mental health and helpful to the formation of new social behavior, but negative psychology, is opposite. Therefore, it is quite important for educational construction to make students form a positive character and positive behavior model starting from the positive psychology [8]. Historically, scholars of various stripes have pondered the nature of music, who have proposed a number of theories concerning the origin and purpose of music and some have pursued scientific approaches to investigating them [9], resulting in a new interdisciplinary subject namely music psychology, which is a field of research with practical relevance for many areas and has a long history dating back to the end of the 19th century. It is a distinctive strand of psychology that has grown in strength over the past decades. Much of the research has been of interest and relevance to music education and covers a wide variety of musical engagement [10]. As in education more generally, psychology played a major role in music education through the development of psychometric tests to assess musical ability. One century ago Stumpf suggested a number of simple aural tests that music teachers might undertake to select students. Subsequently, a range of assessments has been developed that can be administered to groups of children of different ages and adults [11]. Similar to the development of music psychology in other countries, the emergence of music psychology in China paralleled the development of a nationwide educational system. The concept of music psychology emerged in China in the late 1980s when school administrative psychology, which emphasized the use of psychological theory and practice in school administration and management, was being introduced from Western countries [12]. Recently, music psychology has practiced for vocal teaching in Chinese educational system. It has gone through many stages, including introduction and imitation of research in Western countries, learning from others' experience and reform, and getting independent from western psychology [13].

On the other side, to learn music culture we must explore the aesthetic value of music culture. There are many beautiful things in real life. The process of discovering beauty in real life is the process of elevating the aesthetic ability of people. For individuals, aesthetic education is very important. Aesthetic education is also an important part of music education. In the process of aesthetic experience, students will recognize the beauty in real life, experience the beauty of natural scenery and the truth, the goodness and the beauty of human nature, and enhance their own moral level and cognitive level in a subtle manner. Some witnesses drew attention to music as a language and urged the inclusion of music in the ordinary scheme of education on the same terms as language and literature, since it appealed to the same faculties of emotion and judgment and the same general aesthetic principles, while others laid much stress on the value of the fine arts in developing concentration of mind, accuracy of observation and a genuine appreciation of natural beauty and artistic achievement, and in stimulating the growth of the imaginative, critical and creative faculties [14]. Therefore, aesthetic education can reflect the humanistic nature of music education and can successfully accomplish the task of talent cultivation of music education.

Nowadays, the aesthetic of vocal music education is also changing continuously. For example, Zhang's paper, titled 'Aesthetic Education of Vocal Music Teaching in Music Education' [15], describes this new paradigm. He wrote "Music is a cultural category. To learn music culture, we must explore the aesthetic value of music culture." He also said "For a long time, China has implemented exam-oriented education, which has great disadvantages. Under the rigid teaching system, teachers did not aesthetically educate students, which hindered students' healthy development." Therefore, in the current China teachers must not only impart basic music knowledge to students and improve their musical quality, but also permeate aesthetic education in the classroom to promote students' all-round development, and vocal education reform is therefore becoming more and more urgent. Otherwise, Chinese students will not be able to meet the vocal music more and timely.

III. THE COORDINATION OF VOCAL MUSIC EDUCATION WITH NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN CHINA

New technology is changing the way of our work and study profoundly, however, at present, in respect to the manner of education research in China is still in its preliminary stage. Today, information and communication technologies (ICTs) offer increased potential for advancing progress towards economic and social development objectives. The worldwide spread of mobile telephony, computers and communication systems, the growth of internet networks and widespread use of broadband infrastructure and wireless installation have a considerable impact on international production and trade patterns [16].

New technologies such as Internet and We-media have recently been introduced to vocal music education, performance and spreading, which are diversified communication platforms and have been exploited as a promising private way to extend and promote traditional education in recent years. This is a great opportunity brought by the information era to vocal music education in China and a

new challenge against educators, teachers and students. For example, the We-media era brings people into a new life style termed as media infused lives, which refers to how people, particularly youths, are often deeply immersed in using digital technologies in their everyday lives [17]. Increased mobility, social networking, mass media and globalization have amplified the social connections of educators and learners as well as their exposure to diverse practices, including musically related practices that continue to grow and evolve, often in fast-paced, unexpected, and innovative ways. Consequently, the practical applications of We-media, internet and information technology in music education and vocal teaching is based on the specific learning motivation of students under the mining and analysis of potential factors affecting the learning state of students, to find effective ways to enhance student's interest in the learning according to scientific analysis results, and to formulate teaching programs in line with students own learning situation [18].

In addition, computer technologies such as spectrogram analysis can make voice visualized, which realize the integrated teaching mode of mouth to ear-nose, and improves the teaching quality of vocal music. The analysis gives a dynamic map of singing respiration and singing organs, and the singing process is specified by the harmony search algorithm [19]. In addition, spectrogram analysis solves problems of shallow breathing, slurred speech and incorrect use of resonant cavity, as well as visualizes vocal music teaching and improves student ability of singing, practice and innovation.

IV. THE CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY OF VOCAL MUSIC EDUCATION IN CHINA

Since 1980s, with the adjustment of Chinese population structure and sense upgrade in domestic society, quality education has been playing an increasingly important part in China, which allows Chinese music education to maintain the positive development situation. Vocal music education in China today reflects in striking ways the fluid, changing, yet indigenous nature of our culture. Vocal music classes include Chinese songs from a variety of historical and folk idioms, but also Western songs and recently composed songs that are Chinese only because composed by a Chinese. These songs, along with a variety of notation exercises, are provided in the formal music texts available for all students [20]. Today, the purpose of vocal music education in Chinese schools is to inherit and develop China's vocal music culture, to popularize the people's music literacy by using vocal music, and to promote China's vocal music to the world, which requires the cooperation and co-effort of music colleges and all kinds of normal schools as well as teachers and students. Vocal music, as a form of individualistic music art, is performed individually by artists on the stage. Its exquisite skills are appreciated, amazed, convinced and fascinating [21]. Currently, the vocal music education in China focuses on training students with improved stage performance for catering to audiences, which is a narrow aspect of vocal music art. Generally speaking, vocal music, like human speech, is the most natural way for people to express their feelings, adjust their lives, purify their minds, and cultivate their sentiments. People have their nature and instincts. Through large-scale and nationwide systematic language and

literature education, human cultural quality can be improved. The dynamics and dilemmas that challenge school education result from divergent aims: to combine the functional education of Confucianism and nationalism so as to encourage social harmony and maintain national myths, and to encourage popular and other world music with traditional Chinese music by using multicultural teaching strategies in music lessons. The question remains how to balance ideas of social harmony, traditional culture and nationalism in school vocal music education in the context of current Chinese education policies, teacher education and the globally oriented economics of China today [22].

In recent years, the vocal learning and education have been progressed rapidly in China. In order to better popularize vocal music education and promote the enthusiasm of singing fans, many organizations began to increase their enrollment of members, teachers and students [23]. However, due to the effect of overheated enrollment and fast-food teaching, vocal learners are tempted by grading examination and other factors, failing to better understand the art and essence of vocal performance, which makes the modern vocal music education into a bottleneck, while largely ignoring the role of Chinese traditional culture in the education. In addition, there is a vocal learning craze with the improvement of the quality of people's life. The social and commercial environment is more impetuous, people cannot have more understanding and attention of the traditional cultural aspects, which would cast an adverse impact on vocal music education in the modern China, and cannot achieve the purpose of vocal education and artistic innovation. Moreover, the rapid economic development in China has happened only in several decades, and admittedly there is still great disparity in the opportunity to obtain high-quality vocal education in the less developed areas. The availability of high-level teachers was often a problem in the less developed parts of the country. Nowadays, with the advancement of technology such as massive open online course (MOOC) has been developed diversely and rapidly. The MOOC is a Chinese online course aimed at unlimited participation and open access via the web. In addition to traditional course materials, such as filmed lectures, readings, and problem sets, many MOOCs provide interactive courses with user forums to support community interactions among students, professors, and teaching assistants, as well as immediate feedback to quick quizzes and assignments, which theoretically allows students in the least developed parts of the country to take the same courses in this country. However, MOOC is not a perfect solution, but this kind of e-learning, along with other tech-based initiatives, may help to narrow the urban-rural gap [24].

V. THE PROSPECT OF PROMOTING VOCAL MUSIC EDUCATION IN CHINA

To promote the systematization of Chinese vocal education and establish our own vocal teaching system, we need to include basic exercises, etudes polyphony, small and medium music and large movements. Therefore, the vocal music education should also balance these aspects to create a compatible mode between them [25]. The vocal education in China should integrate the current higher art education model

to create more nationalized vocal forms involving Chinese traditional culture, and then enrich the vocal education with folk music. These traditional art forms can be engaged to derive a scientific system of vocal teaching and education that integrates Chinese folk music into western Bel Canto. In addition, the traditional culture should be strengthened for not only vocal teachers and learners but also all students and Chinese people [26].

VI. CONCLUSION

After the introduction of Bel Canto from the west to the vocal education system of China, it has been partially nationalized over the past decades. A large number of Chinese musicians and vocal teachers use this classic western musical style to create and teach vocal singing with Chinese elements and national characteristics, which is of great significance to the development of Chinese music and art. Through the integration of Chinese culture in the vocal teaching in school and class, it is of great help to the change of students' vocal learning concept and the improvement of singing skills. Therefore, the application of Chinese traditional culture in the modern vocal music education should be paid attention by vocal teachers.

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