

# Historical Evolution and Cultural Connotations Analysis of Chinese Ethnic Vocal Art

Qinwen Yang\*

College of Art and design, YunNan University, Kun Ming, 650092, Yun Nan, China  
yangqinwen1121@163.com

Yang Yang

School of Education, Yuxi Normal University, Yuxi ,653100,  
YunNan, China

Tianze Mu

College of Art and design, YunNan University, Kun Ming, 650092, Yun Nan, China

**Abstract:** The national vocal music art is an important part of our national culture and the symbol of our national spirit. This paper mainly introduces the historical evolution of national vocal music art of our country, summarizes its cultural connotation, and puts forward the protection and inheritance strategy of national vocal music art of our country based on the background of globalization.

**Keywords:** National Vocal Music Art, Culture, Rap, Traditional Chinese Opera, Inheritance.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The vocal music art of our country has a long history and its history can be traced back to ancient times. From primitive singing to ancient poetry and fu, and then to modern national singing, the art of national vocal music of our country has experienced a long development process. In this process, ethnic vocal music art not only absorbs various ethnic music elements, but also integrates rich cultural connotation.

## 2. THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF VOCAL MUSIC ART OF OUR COUNTRY

### 2.1 The Development of Vocal Music Art of Our Country Ancient Nation

The earliest national vocal music art of our country can be traced back to the folk songs in ancient times, which are closely related to People's Daily life when they are composed at sunrise and breath at sunset. For example, the "broken bamboo, continued bamboo, flying earth, and shishishishi" recorded in the "Tange" in Volume I of the Source of Ancient

Poetry depicts the process of making hunting tools and then going out to hunt. The generation and development of ballads in this stage was a process of involuntary creation and oral expression. And with the continuous spread of folk songs, they gradually developed different tonal changes (Wang, 2017). With the unceasing development of the productive forces of the society, our country began to enter the slave society. The Xia and Shang dynasties introduced the songs into the royal court, and included folk performers to perform in the palace for the enjoyment of the emperors and nobles. The representative vocal music art is "Big Summer", "Big Past" and so on (Utz & Lau, 2013). The vocal music art was further developed in the Zhou Dynasty. The ruler not only set up special music institutions in the court, but also trained a large number of vocal music performers. At the same time, special officials were appointed to collect ballads among the people to enrich the vocal music art. During the Spring AND Autumn PERIOD and Warring States PERIOD, the vocal music art of our country became more colorful, among which The Book of Songs, Nine Songs and Chengxiang represented the highest level of vocal music art at that time (Han, 2013). During the Qin and Han Dynasties, with the establishment of a unified multi-ethnic feudal country, the folk songs and vocal music art of various nationalities flooded into the Central Plains and blended with each other. In the Western Han Dynasty, vocal music art forms developed rapidly. On the basis of traditional poetry and folk songs, rap music forms such as Han Yuefu ballad, Xiang and song were developed, as well as colorful vocal music art forms such as nao song, long narrative song and qinqu developed from Hu Qu. Sui and Tang Dynasties political and economic prosperity, further promoted the development of vocal music art. The main vocal music art form by Tang Da Qu, army song and so on. The former is a kind of instrumental music and song and dance, containing multiple sections of the structure of the large song and dance. The latter value drama, in the performance of more comic performances. At the same time, "Qu zi" and "bian Wen" began to prevail among the people, further enriching the art of vocal music. The "song" is mainly long and short sentence songs, such as "Looking South of the River", "Willow branch" and "Jiuquanzi" and so on. "Anwen" is a vocal art in the form of rap, which is often said in prose and sung again in verse. In addition, the development of vocal music art in the Tang Dynasty was relatively comprehensive. In addition to vocal music performance, vocal music education institutions such as Jiao Fang, Liyuan, Da Yue Department and Jiao Blowing Fang were specially set up (Gu, 2011). During the Song and Yuan Dynasties, with the continuous development of industry and commerce, the civil class

continued to grow, and the folk vocal music art was further developed. On the one hand, lyrics written in accordance with the song rose with it, and became a new development after Tang poetry with music melody. On behalf of Song poetry, there are "Nianlujiao · Chibi Nostalgia for Ancient Times" and "Yangzhou Slow". During the Northern Song Dynasty, "Various palace tunes" developed gradually, which enriched the expression of rap art in our country and laid a certain foundation for the development of traditional opera art later. At the same time, puppetry, shadow puppetry, acrobatics, burlesque and other dramas developed rapidly in the folk and were deeply loved by people. During the Yuan Dynasty, Yuan opera developed vigorously. Yuanqu can be mainly divided into drama and Sanqu. The former is more perfect and mature in the way of performance and script structure handed over to Song Zaju. The latter can be divided into a loop and a small order. The atmosphere of the cycle is simple structure of the cycle and more complex larger cycle, Xiao Ling is a single song that has been spread. In general, the vocal music art in the Song and Yuan dynasties gradually moved from the court to the folk, from aristocratism to the common people. Also since this, our country vocal music art is basically divided into singing and traditional opera two categories (Jing, 2019). During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the vocal music art of our country further developed into various art forms such as folk songs, traditional operas, songs and dances, instrumental music and rap. Among them, folk songs are very active, such as "Mountain songs" and "The Moon" contain hundreds of folk songs. At the same time, opera has flourished unprecedentedly, and the representative operas are Beijing Opera and Qinqiang Opera. Beijing Opera is the essence of vocal music art in our country. The main singing voices are Erhuang cavity and Xipi cavity. The former is soft, deep, steady, and has a small beat, while the latter is lively, harmonious, melodious, and has big ups and downs (Jian & Nicolas, 2021).

## 2.2 The Development of Modern National Vocal Music Art of Our Country

At the end of Qing Dynasty, due to diplomacy and the arrival of foreign missionaries, the Western vocal music art was gradually introduced into our country. The Opium War reduced our country to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, which greatly changed our social nature, and also affected the development of our vocal music art. During the Reform movement, new music was born marked by "school music". The content of music was mostly to praise the motherland, promote democracy and expose the

decadent feudal society. Influenced by Western vocal music art, the songs sung in the school at this stage are mainly some Western and Japanese songs, or lyrics for Western and Japanese songs. During the May 4th Movement, a group of intellectuals represented by Hu Shi began to accept Western ideology and culture and the spirit of democracy and science. In this context, colleges and universities in China began to pay attention to music and regarded music as a real major (Meng, 2020). At the same time, more and more musical intellectuals began to absorb and learn from the western bel canto singing method and develop a new ethnic singing method with national characteristics. The representative works are "May 4th Memorial Patriotic Song", "Starry Sky", "Weaving cloth", "Big River to the East" and so on (Zhang et al., 2024). After the founding of New China, the development of vocal music art in our country has entered a brand new historical period. The Party and the government have always attached great importance to the development of vocal music art. The majority of vocal music art workers adhere to the direction of "two acts" and the policy of "double hundred". They not only take the initiative to learn the profound experience and scientific methods of western vocal music in music creation and training, but also absorb nourishment from Chinese traditional arts such as folk songs and traditional operas. It has closely integrated opera and western singing, such foreign art styles and artistic expressions, with traditional national culture, and created a large number of excellent works reflecting the spirit of The Times and with national characteristics, which have played an irreplaceable role in meeting the spiritual and cultural needs of the people (Xia, 2022). Since the reform and opening, the vocal music art of our country has been reformed and developed continuously. On the one hand, more and more vocal art practitioners have lifted the ideological and spiritual constraints, making vocal music creation also full of confidence and hope for the future life. On the other hand, with the influx of international thoughts and culture, the development of vocal music art in our country actively absorbs the industry and draws lessons from the essence of western vocal music art, inherits, develops and innovates vocal music works with our national atmosphere and the characteristics of The Times. The representative vocal music works of this stage include "Toast Song", "I Love You, China", "Party, dear Mother", "That's Me", "Sea, Hometown" and so on. The vocal music art has broken through the previous appearance of standardization and simplicity, showing higher quality and richer vocal music art content (Wang & Kantasiri, 2022). Since the 21st century, more and more vocal artists are trying to explore new ways of singing to meet the needs of modern society. It not only innovates

in singing method, but also integrates in stage performance and quyi elements. This integration makes national vocal music art more colorful and closer to the aesthetic needs of modern people (Sun, 2021). At the same time, the contemporary national vocal music art pays more attention to the inheritance of traditional culture. Many artists are trying to tap into the essence of traditional culture and incorporate it into their singing. This inheritance not only makes the national vocal music art more profound, but also makes the national vocal music art more cultural connotation.

### 3. THE CULTURAL CONNOTATION OF VOCAL MUSIC ART OF OUR COUNTRY

#### 3.1 Origin and Diversified Fusion Culture

As a core concept of human civilization and social change, cultural origin means that no matter how a culture undergoes changes, integration, development and creation, its fundamental cultural elements can still be highlighted through the investigation of the origin of the culture. These basic elements constitute the historical context and starting point of cultural development. Among the many aspects of cultural expression, art is the most prominent one. It is not difficult to see that the progress and evolution of art are not only closely related to the existence of culture, but also deeply rooted in culture. The original culture has exerted a profound influence on the content, form and external performance of art works. And the representative one is the national vocal music art of our country, which began in the ancient times of our country and developed continuously with the changes of The Times and the changes of the social nature. During this period, the national vocal music art of our country actively absorbed and learned from the essence of foreign vocal music art, integrated and subdivided into multi-culture fusion, which has the characteristics of our national culture. Vocal music art that embodies our country's national spirit (Chen & Sensai, 2023). Our national vocal music after nearly a century of exploration and growth in the initial construction to the present has been significantly improved and developed. The development course of China's national vocal music art is closely related to the fluctuation of our country's society, and the challenges and tests it faces are extremely indicative (Dong, 2021). Under the dual impact of internal and external factors, this art category adheres to the local culture and constantly integrates into multiple cultures to form a unique artistic style. During the 1940s and 1950s, there were persistent and in-depth discussions and practices on the issues of

traditional and modern, indigenous and foreign cultures. Including Wang Kun, Meng Yu, Guo Lanying and other older generation of singers, the performance on the stage is the positive attempt of this kind of cultural collision and fusion, they through countless experiments and dialectics, gradually established the unique style of national vocal music art of our country. Since the end of 1930s, our country has experienced the war of resistance against Japanese aggression, the war of liberation, reform and opening up and socialist construction, etc. During this period, based on the accumulation of traditional folk songs, traditional operas and other art forms, blending different musical languages and creative thinking of various nationalities, the ethnic vocal music art of our country emerged colorful and diverse cultural characteristics, thus laying a solid foundation for development. Since the 21st century, with the deepening of economic, political and cultural globalization, the development of national vocal music art of our country has faced new opportunities and challenges. In this context, the development of national vocal music art of our country should not only have an open mind, actively absorb and draw lessons from foreign art elements, but also stick to its own cultural foundation and maintain its unique artistic charm. Only in this way, Chinese national vocal music art can stand in an invincible position in the tide of globalization and realize its sustainable development (Fang & Chuangprakhon, 2024).

### 3.2 Heritage Culture of Tradition and Times

The evolution of the national vocal music art of our country revealed a development path of interdependence with the Chinese traditional art. Since its inception, this art form has always carried the essence of traditional cultural heritage, and absorbed the characteristics of the new era with the current of The Times, thus continuously enriching and promoting its prosperity. After the literature and art symposium held in Yan 'an in 1942, literature and art workers went deep into the grass-roots masses and conducted extensive research and study on folk culture. During this period, with the implementation of the "rectification movement", the guiding principle of serving the people was clearly defined for artistic creation, requiring that works must truly reflect the life of the people. In this context, "White-haired Girl", "Chiye River" and other widely loved masterpieces were born. These works are not only full of strong national characteristics, but also their creation integrates traditional art elements and music language, and gives the characteristics of The Times (Zhou & Tajuddin, 2024). For decades, our national vocal music art has always been rooted in the fertile soil of our country's traditional culture, closely combined with

the national music language and elements. It draws inspiration from folk songs, traditional Chinese operas and rap music, subtly integrates and excavates their essence. For example, the songs "Ode to the Plum" and "One Song, One Heart" embody the main singing techniques of Peking Opera, such as line tone, embellient tone, word occlusion and breath control, etc. Through the expression of songs, they not only convey the essence of traditional Chinese culture, but also tell the background of the art, and highlight the profound background of folk art. It can be seen that in the process of learning from and inheriting traditions, the national vocal music art of our country combines with the characteristics of the changes of The Times to reflect the beauty of sound of each era (Li & Cao, 2021).

### 3.3 A culture of Practice and Innovation

The growth history of our country's national vocal music art shows a dynamic process of constantly absorbing multi-cultural nutrition and continuing artistic exploration and connotation extension on this basis. From the early Yangko opera "Brother and Sister to Open the Land" and "Husband and Wife can Read" to the new opera "White-hair Girl", "Liu Hulan", "Sister Jiang" and other plays, our country's national vocal music is exploring scientific singing skills through unremitting stage practice, aiming at specific problems such as "low volume" and "unclear pronunciation", learning from the western singing techniques to achieve applicability transformation and optimization integration (Ye et al., 2023). In all kinds of singing, based on western vocalization methods and theories, it breaks through the shackles of the limitations of volume and range, constructs a unified and coordinated resonance between the chest cavity and the head cavity, and accurately locates the support point of the voice (Shen, 2022). Our national vocal music has experienced artistic practice one after another, which makes singers not only constantly research, explain and renew their singing skills when creating operas, but also strictly abide by the cultural soul and genetic root of this art in the innovation and integration of skills, eliminating the parts that hinder the local vocal music style. Under the background of rapid cultural development and prosperity in the 21st century, national vocal music of our country is becoming mature and needs to make progress in continuous practice and innovation. Jin Tielin, Liu Hui, Ma Qiuhua, Fang Qiong and other representative vocal artists and educators shoulder the responsibility of The Times and drive the development of the art. Taking Professor Liu Hui as an example, in his more than 30 years of teaching and practice, he put forward the idea of "first cavity, then character, with cavity with character; First sound after the

word, with the vocal cord word; The 24-character national vocal music singing method of "the same rhyme, the cavity is round and the character is right" summarizes the core results of long-term research. The establishment of the 24-character policy represents the re-innovation of the ancients' concept of "correct and round characters". For example, Professor Liu Hui's "Losing the Ring" with this concept has endowed the northeast characteristic folk songs with more full artistic expression through exquisite articulation, throat sound, breath control and tone transformation (Tan, 2024).

#### 4. TACTICS OF ART PROTECTION AND INHERITANCE OF NATIONAL VOCAL MUSIC OF OUR COUNTRY

##### 4.1 Protection Strategy

In the context of globalization in the 21st century, the national vocal music art of our country is facing unprecedented challenges and opportunities. The integration and mutual influence of multiple cultures make the national vocal music art not only maintain its unique cultural connotation, but also adapt to the aesthetic needs of modern society. Therefore, the protection and inheritance of national vocal music art is particularly important. First of all, the establishment of perfect laws and regulations system is the cornerstone of the protection of national vocal music art. The government should formulate corresponding laws and regulations to ensure that the creation, dissemination and development of national vocal music art are not infringed. This is not only to protect the rights and interests of artists, but also to inherit and develop the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation. Secondly, strengthen the research and education of national vocal music art. Universities and research institutions shall set up special departments for the study of ethnic vocal music art to conduct in-depth research on the history, skills and cultural connotation of ethnic vocal music. At the same time, the national vocal music should be included in the compulsory courses of music education, so as to cultivate a new generation of musical talents and ensure the continuous inheritance of national vocal music art. Thirdly, encourage and support the innovation and development of national vocal music art. On the basis of respecting tradition, artists are encouraged to make innovative attempts and combine modern elements to make national vocal music art more colorful. At the same time, the government and all sectors of society should give enough support and resources to provide a good environment



for the creation and dissemination of national vocal music art. In addition, strengthening international exchanges and cooperation is also an important means to protect the national vocal music art. Through international music festivals, concerts and other forms, China's national vocal music art will be introduced to the world, so that more people can understand and appreciate the excellent music culture of the Chinese nation. This can not only improve the international influence of national vocal music art, but also provide new inspiration and ideas for the creation of national vocal music art in China. Finally, strengthen the publicity and promotion of national vocal music art. Various media platforms, such as television, radio and the Internet, are used to vigorously publicize the charm and cultural value of ethnic vocal music art and improve public awareness and acceptance. At the same time, various ethnic vocal music art activities are held, such as concerts, lectures, workshops, etc., so that more people can personally experience and participate in the inheritance and innovation of ethnic vocal music art.

#### 4.2 Strategy of Inheritance

First of all, strengthen the theoretical research of national vocal music art. This includes not only the in-depth research on the history, style and techniques of national vocal music art, but also its status, function and development trend under the multi-cultural background, so as to provide theoretical support for its protection and inheritance.

Secondly, strengthen the practice teaching of national vocal music art. This includes not only the study and inheritance of traditional national vocal music art, but also the innovation and development of modern national vocal music art. It encourages students to actively explore and practice on the basis of respecting and inheriting traditions to meet the needs of modern society.

Thirdly, strengthen the publicity and promotion of national vocal music art. Various media and platforms should be used to make more people understand and appreciate ethnic vocal music art, so as to enhance its social influence and cultural value. At the same time, actively participate in international cultural exchanges, let the world understand and understand the national vocal music art of our country.

Finally, strengthen the legal protection of national vocal music art. Formulate and perfect relevant laws and regulations to regulate and protect the creation, dissemination and use of national vocal music art, so as to prevent it from being infringed or abused.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In the new period, the national vocal music art of our country has extremely high historical value, artistic value and scientific value. Under the background of globalization, the national vocal music art of our country should not only actively seek the integration and interaction with the global music culture, but also pay attention to the protection and inheritance of its unique cultural connotation.

## 6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Project: Ministry of Education Production and Learning Park Project: A study on the innovation of vocal music teaching model in universities in the context of new liberal arts (221006038121324)

### References

- Chen, G., & Sensai, P. (2023). *Hehuang Xiansuo Music Culture in Qinghai, China* [Mahasarakham University].
- Dong, L. (2021). "Highlighting the Characteristics of Vocal Art to Support the 'Going Global' of National Culture—Review of 'The Nationalization, Development, and Communication of Chinese Vocal Art'". *Media*(14), I0004.
- Fang, J., & Chuangprakhon, S. (2024). Transmission of Yi folk song knowledge into educational institutions in Liangshan and Chuxiong Prefectures, China. *Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction*, 14(1), 86-92.
- Gu, S. (2011). *A cultural history of the Chinese language*. McFarland.
- Han, M. (2013). *The emergence of the Chinese zheng: traditional context, contemporary evolution, and cultural identity* [University of British Columbia].
- Jian, Z., & Nicolas, A. (2021). Zhuang Opera---A study of Chinese Minority Arts in Guangxi Province, China. *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education (TURCOMAT)*, 12(6), 2900-2912.
- Jing, S. J. (2019). *The Influence of Western Classical Singing Method on the 21 st Century Chinese National Vocal Music* [University of Malaya (Malaysia)].
- Li, Y., & Cao, J. (2021). "Adhering to Ethnic Characteristics and Expanding International Perspectives—Review of 'The Nationalization, Development, and Communication of Chinese Vocal Art'". *Media*(11), I0004.
- Meng, Z. (2020). "History and Development Trajectory of Chinese Ethnic Vocal Art". *Literary and Artistic Struggle*(9), 200-204.
- Shen, T. (2022). "The 'Traditional' in 'Modern'—On the Resonance between Modern Ethnic Vocal Art and Traditional Ethnic Vocal Art". *Literary and Artistic Struggle*(5), 196-199.
- Sun, X. (2021). "Reflections on the Development of Ethnic Vocal Art in a Multicultural Context". *Sichuan Drama*(6), 101-103.

- Tan, X. (2024). Ethnomusicological Perspectives on Gaomi Miaoqiang: Unveiling the Cultural Tapestry. *Pacific International Journal*, 7(1), 125-130.
- Utz, C., & Lau, F. (2013). Vocal Music and Contemporary Identities. *Unlimited Voices in East Asia and the West*, New York.
- Wang, L. (2017). Aesthetic Characteristics and development of Chinese national vocal music. In *2017 International Conference on Innovations in Economic Management and Social Science (IEMSS 2017)* (pp. 1390-1394). Atlantis Press.
- Wang, L., & Kantasiri, K. (2022). Arts Performance Communication Of Guangxi Piano Music. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(8), 9423-9437.
- Xia, W. (2022). Peculiarities of Singing in Chinese Popular and Traditional Music: Influence of Musical Genres on Vocals. *Revista Música Hódie*, 22.
- Ye, X., Chonpairot, J., & Seekhunlio, W. (2023). The contemporary status and learning among the Shifan music troupe in Putian, Fujian, China: Status and learning among the Shifan music troupe in Putian. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 15(3), 2219-2231.
- Zhang, Y., Chaiyason, N., & Phimprajun, R. (2024). Musical Literacy and Education: A Historical Analysis of Huaibang Opera Development in Henan Province, China. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 12(2), 101-110.
- Zhou, X., & Tajuddin, T. (2024). Revival Voice: The Enlightenment of Folk Music Education to the Historical and Cultural Inheritance of College Students. *Herança*.