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HISTORICAL ORIGINS AND STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE VOCAL MUSIC

The article examines the process of formation and development of contemporary Chinese vocal music in the context of historical, socio-cultural and artistic transformations that took place in the 20th and early 21st centuries. The study covers the key stages in the evolution of national vocal art – from the preservation of traditional singing techniques inherited from ancient opera and folk song forms to the integration of bel canto and the creation of an original Chinese vocal school.

The first decades of the 20th century were marked by a focus on authentic means of sound production and a limited range, reflecting the aesthetic priorities of traditional culture. After 1957, an active process of adaptation of Western techniques began, in particular bel canto, which was combined with national traditions. Music schools, in particular the Shenyang Conservatory, played a significant role in this process. An important component of this development was the 'school song period,' which contributed to the spread of musical literacy and the formation of a new vocabulary for vocal texts.

Special attention is paid to the war period (1927–1949), when music served a mobilising and propaganda function, as well as the period after the establishment of the PRC, when vocal art became an important tool of ideological policy. After 1978, under the policy of openness, there was a revival of vocal culture, an expansion of thematic and stylistic range, and active integration into the global music space.

The regional characteristics of vocal music have been studied, in particular the contrasts between northern heroic intonations and southern lyrical traditions, as well as the influence of ethnic minorities on the timbre and melodic palette of the contemporary repertoire.

The materials of the article allow us to trace the patterns of development of Chinese vocal art, outline its unique role in preserving cultural identity, and identify prospects for further research in the field of musicology and performance practice, which opens up new opportunities for intercultural dialogue and the formation of a global musical space.

Key words: Chinese vocal music, bel canto, national traditions, regional characteristics, musical culture.

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ІСТОРИЧНІ ВИТОКИ ТА ЕТАПИ РОЗВИТКУ КИТАЙСЬКОЇ ВОКАЛЬНОЇ МУЗИКИ

У статті досліджується процес становлення та розвитку сучасної китайської вокальної музики в контексті історичних, соціокультурних та художніх трансформацій, що відбувалися у XX – на початку XXI століття. Дослідження охоплює ключові етапи еволюції національного вокального мистецтва – від збереження традиційних технік співу, успадкованих від давніх оперних і народнопісенних форм, до інтеграції бельканто та створення оригінальної китайської вокальної школи.

Перші десятиліття XX ст. позначені зосередженням на автентичних засобах звукоутворення та обмеженому діапазоні, що відображало естетичні пріоритети традиційної культури. Після 1957 року розпочався активний процес адаптації західних технік, зокрема бельканто, який поєднувався з національними традиціями. Значну роль у цьому відіграли музичні навчальні заклади, зокрема Шеньянська консерваторія. Важливою складовою розвитку став «період шкільної пісні», що сприяв поширенню музичної грамотності та формуванню нової лексики вокальних текстів.

Окрему увагу приділено воєнному періоду (1927–1949), коли музика виконувала мобілізаційну та пропагандистську функцію, а також періоду після утворення КНР, коли вокальне мистецтво стало важливим інструментом ідеологічної політики. Після 1978 року, в умовах політики відкритості, відбулося відродження вокальної культури, розширення тематичного та стилістичного діапазону, а також активна інтеграція у світовий музичний простір.

Досліджено регіональні особливості вокальної музики, зокрема контрасти між північними героїчними інтонаціями та південними ліричними традиціями, а також вплив етнічних меншин на темброву та мелодичну палітру сучасного репертуару.

Матеріали статті дозволяють простежити закономірності розвитку китайського вокального мистецтва, окреслити його унікальну роль у збереженні культурної ідентичності та визначити перспективи подальших досліджень у галузі музикознавства й виконавської практики, що відкриває нові можливості для міжкультурного діалогу та формування глобального музичного простору.

Ключові слова: китайська вокальна музика, бельканто, національні традиції, регіональні особливості, музична культура.

Introduction. From the perspective of musical art, vocal and instrumental performance are its two main forms. At the same time, until the beginning of the 20th century, there was no concept of «vocal art» in the modern sense in China, although the country had been known for its musical performances for centuries. These performances were mostly based on court music, singing with dancing, Chinese opera, and a form of musical art similar to recitative. There was no single standard for musical performances that was accepted throughout the country, as Chinese history consisted of a series of dynasties, each with its own cultural, religious and social characteristics that directly influenced the nature of musical practice.

The development of modern Chinese vocal music is determined by a combination of two main forms of artistic performance: traditional, based on ancient Chinese musical practices, and Western, associated with the bel canto technique. In China, these trends are referred to as «national» and «bel canto». In a broad sense, national vocal music encompasses the singing arts of China's 56 ethnic groups, including opera, folk songs and contemporary pop music. In a narrow sense, it is a modern Chinese vocal school based on bel canto, but taking into account the specific cultural, linguistic and intonational characteristics of the country.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The stages of formation and development of modern Chinese vocal music have been the subject of scientific research by Zhang Xiaonong (Zhang Xiaonong, 2015), Jin Meilin (Jin Meilin, 2015), Chen Gangyi, Zhao Chunlei, Yang Shangfei (Chen Gangyi, Zhao Chunlei, Yang Shangfei, 2017) and others. The connection between classical Chinese poetry and modern vocal works is highlighted in the works of Zhao Jiezhong and Yan Hong (Zhao Jiezhong, Yan Hong, 2017), Liu Jiayuan (Liu Jiayuan, 2020) and others. The historical aspects of the formation of Chinese opera are analysed in detail by Chen Lei (Chen Lei, 2017), Jin Man (Jin Man, 2018) and others.

The specific features of Chinese vocal art are reflected in the research of Guan Lin (Guan Lin, 1986), Yang Hua (Yang Hua, 2017), Li Pengchen (Li Pengchen, 2020) and others. Methodological aspects of vocalisation form the basis of the works of Zhou Changjun (Zhou Changjun, 2020), while Ju Luancheng (Ju Luancheng, 2018) offers a vision of vocal art through the prism of its national identity.

Despite the significant number of works devoted to individual aspects of the Chinese vocal tradition, there are currently no studies that examine it holistically and multifacetedly, integrating diverse phenomena into the common historical and cultural context of the development of the PRC.

Objective of the work. To explore the historical origins and stages of development of Chinese vocal music.

The methodological basis is the dialectical and systematic methodology used in the field of cultural research. General scientific and logical methods of analysis, synthesis, induction and deduction, historical and comparative research of the problem are used.

Presentation of the main material of the research. The development of modern Chinese vocal music is a complex, multifaceted process in which national traditions, socio-political transformations and cultural borrowings from the West are intertwined. Each stage of this development has its own artistic, performance and pedagogical dominants, reflecting the general state of Chinese musical culture in a specific historical period.

At the beginning of the 20th century, in the context of an active search for cultural identity, Chinese performers consciously rejected the bel canto technique, which they perceived as a product of Western culture, preferring singing methods inherited from ancient Chinese opera and folk song heritage. This technique involved a narrow vocal range, a sharp, «ringing» manner of sound, rich in ornamental elements characteristic of traditional theatre. The plots of the works of this period were mostly derived from folk legends and historical tales, which made the music accessible to the listener. The names of Li Bo, Meng Yu, Wang Kun and other artists became symbols of this era, and their performances defined the concept of a «national» vocal style.

From the middle of the 20th century, especially after 1957, a new stage began, associated with the desire to combine Western and Chinese elements in vocal art. The «Struggle between Western and Chinese» movement stimulated the formation of the concept of harmonious integration of local traditions with bel canto technique (Wu Wanying, 2019). The Shenyang Conservatory became the leading centre of this process, where the country's first courses in national singing were organised. Subsequently, other music schools

adopted this experience, laying the foundation for the formation of a professional Chinese vocal school.

The third stage began in the early 1980's, when China entered a new phase of cultural development as a result of its reform and openness policy. Western methods of vocal training were actively combined with ethnic, regional and socio-cultural characteristics, which contributed to the emergence of works aimed at a wide audience. Well-known teachers of this period – Jin Tielin, Meng Lin, and Zhou Wenqing – trained a whole galaxy of singers, including Song Zuyun, Peng Liyuan, Zhang Ye, Yan Weiying, and Wang Hongwei. Their work became an example of a new synthetic vocal language that combines the flexibility and cantilena of *bel canto* with the expressiveness of national intonations.

However, the origins of the process of integrating *bel canto* into Chinese musical culture date back to 1840, when, after the Opium War, Western cultural influences, including church singing, began to penetrate the country. At the turn of the 19'th and 20th centuries, reformers such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao emphasised the need to study Western music and art as a means of modernising society. An important event was the introduction of compulsory music education in schools in 1912, which marked the beginning of the «school song period». After the May Fourth Movement (1919) and the establishment of the Shanghai National Conservatory in 1927, *bel canto* began to spread among professional musicians. After 1949, it became an integral part of conservatory programmes, but during the Cultural Revolution, its development almost came to a halt. It was only in the late 1970's, as a result of the policy of openness, that this technique became widespread again, integrating into the global music scene (Jiang Ruomu, 2019).

The period of school songs, which became the foundation for the modern vocal school, was extremely important in shaping China's musical culture. It contributed to the spread of Western instruments, the development of note-reading skills, and the introduction of new vocabulary into vocal texts, which enriched the expressive possibilities of the language. The themes of these songs covered patriotic motifs, the glorification of science, geographical discoveries, and the beauty of native nature. The activities of figures such as Shen Xingong, Li Shutong, and Zeng Zhimin laid the foundations for the future development of Chinese song culture. In the second half of the 20th century, composer Gu Jianfeng gave this tradition new meaning by combining classical Chinese poetry with contemporary melodic forms.

The period of war and political upheaval (1927–1949), which included civil conflicts and the

war with Japan, was a turning point for Chinese music. Music became one of the main tools for mobilising the population, forming patriotic feelings and strengthening morale. At this time, two trends emerged: the «academic school» focused on professionalism and complex musical forms, and the «school of national salvation», which sought maximum simplicity and mass accessibility. Despite their differences, both trends had a common goal – to unite the people in the face of threat. Among the outstanding composers of this period were Nie Er (author of «The March of the Volunteers»), Xian Xinhai (creator of «The Yellow River Cantata»), Zhen Guang, and Liu Ji.

After the proclamation of the PRC in 1949, vocal art received strong state support, but its themes were closely linked to ideological principles. In the 1950's and 1960's, the repertoire was filled with works glorifying socialist ideals, the country's leadership, and the heroism of the people. At the same time, ethnic motifs were actively used to emphasise the unity of nationalities. The Cultural Revolution sharply limited the repertoire to a few «model» operas and ballets, but 1978 marked the beginning of a period of revival, when the themes of songs became more diverse and international cultural contacts became more intense.

Regional styles play an important role in contemporary Chinese vocal culture, forming the country's unique artistic palette. Northern China is associated with heroic, wide-ranging melodies, bright timbre and clear rhythm. Mongolian, Xinjiang and Tibetan songs are widespread here, distinguished by national instruments and special performance techniques. Southern China, on the contrary, is characterised by lyricism, soft and warm sounds, pentatonic melodies, the use of falsetto and ornamental embellishments. Such regional diversity not only enriches the performance repertoire, but also serves as a basis for the synthesis of traditional and modern interpretative approaches.

Conclusions. The history of the formation and development of modern Chinese vocal music reflects a long and multifaceted process in which national traditions and Western influences have been organically combined. The initial stages were aimed at preserving authentic singing techniques inherited from opera and folk song sources, while later periods were characterised by the active adoption of *bel canto* and its adaptation to ethnic and regional characteristics. Historical events, cultural reforms and the activities of leading composers, performers and teachers made a significant contribution to this process, laying the foundation for the flourishing of vocal art in a new era.

Contemporary Chinese vocal music is a striking example of cultural synthesis, in which the combination of a rich historical heritage, regional diversity and

international musical influences ensures its unique artistic image. It not only preserves its own cultural identity but also actively integrates into the global artistic space, enriching it with unique timbres and intonations. This experience testifies to the dynamic development of China's vocal culture, its ability to respond flexibly to the challenges of the times while preserving its national identity.

Prospects for further research in the field of Chinese vocal music open up broad opportunities for interdisciplinary analysis and in-depth understanding

of its artistic and stylistic evolution. It is advisable to conduct a detailed study of the mutual influence of regional vocal traditions and Western singing techniques, particularly in the context of contemporary pedagogy and stage practice. Special attention should be paid to analysing the creative biographies of leading performers and composers who have become key figures in the formation of contemporary Chinese vocal art, as well as studying the processes of transformation of the vocal repertoire in the context of globalisation.

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Дата першого надходження рукопису до видання: 22.08.2025

Дата прийнятого до друку рукопису після рецензування: 26.09.2025

Дата публікації: 23.10.2025