



# The Whole as the "Wonderful Harmony" of Its Parts: The Formation and Development of Zhou Xiaoyan's Vocal Teaching Philosophical Concepts

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**Abstract.** The esoteric philosophy of Zhou Xiaoyan's vocal teaching has been marked by a harmonious integration of vocal prowess and pedagogical philosophy. This piece delves into Zhou's formulation of vocal teaching concepts, influenced by personal challenges, methodological inspirations, and a blend of Eastern and Western pedagogical practices. It maps the evolution of her methodology, illustrating the symbiotic relationship between psychological and physiological aspects, and culminates in a discussion of its implications for contemporary vocal education.

**Keywords:** Vocal Teaching; Holistic Approach; Technical Precision; Artistic Integration

## 1 Introduction

Zhou Xiaoyan ( August 28, 1917 - March 4, 2016) was a renowned Chinese soprano singer and vocal educator. She dedicated her life to the performance and teaching of vocal music, leaving a profound impact on the Chinese music scene.

Zhou Xiaoyan is an outstanding Chinese vocal educator, renowned for her profound musical accomplishment and contributions to vocal education. She enjoys a high reputation in the Chinese music community, not only for her exceptional achievements in the field of vocal arts but also for her relentless efforts in cultivating a new generation of vocal talents.

Zhou Xiaoyan's educational background is equally impressive. She received professional musical education at the Shanghai National Music Institute (now Shanghai Conservatory of Music) and, after completing two years of study, she resolutely decided to further her studies in France." After studying at the Shanghai National Music Institute for two years, Zhou Xiaoyan went to France for further studies, where she stayed for a total of nine years (during which World War II took place). After overcoming various difficulties, she eventually completed her studies and returned to her home country".[1]This experience not only enriched her international perspective but also tempered her will and professional skills.

Upon returning to China, Zhou Xiaoyan brought back the advanced vocal techniques and educational philosophies she learned in France, dedicating herself to raising the standard of vocal education in China. She served as the Vice President of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the Director of the Vocal Department. She is known for her rigorous teaching attitude and innovative methods, and she has actively participated in the jury work of vocal competitions, promoting the development of Chinese vocal arts. Zhou Xiaoyan has nurtured a large number of outstanding vocal students, many of whom have won awards in international competitions such as the Concorso Internazionale di Canto Lirico 'Franco Federicci' in Bergamo, the Maria Callas International Grand Prix, the Vincenzo Bellini International Voice Competition, the Plácido Domingo World Opera Competition, the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World in the UK, the Internationale Meistersinger-Festspiele Nürnberg in Germany, and the Tchaikovsky International Competition.

Zhou Xiaoyan's achievements are not only reflected in her personal honors but also in her profound impact on the cause of Chinese vocal education. Zhou Xiaoyan proposed that one should not only learn from the traditional experiences and aesthetic principles of ethnic vocal music but also face the scientific principles of "Bel Canto" that have already formed a system for performance and teaching. By integrating these with the characteristics of the Chinese language and the expressive means of ethnic styles, it can demonstrate the proper level of modern Chinese vocal music.[2] Her educational philosophy and teaching results have inspired generations of music students, making an indelible contribution to the prosperity of China's music industry.

### 1.1 Incremental Construction of Zhou Xiaoyan's Vocal Pedagogy

Roland Foster pointed out in his work published in 1935, "If you want to become an excellent singer, your mind and your body must maintain a very positive state, and a flexible mind is as important as your voice." [3]

Zhou Xiaoyan, distinguished as one of the most influential vocal pedagogues in the history of Chinese music education, developed a teaching methodology that was a true reflection of her extensive expertise and deep comprehension of vocal artistry. This methodology was not merely a static set of principles; rather, it represented a dynamic and evolving system rooted in her cumulative experiences, both as a performer and an instructor.

Her approach was characterized by a keen sense of adaptability, informed by the wisdom she gathered over years of meticulous practice and study. Zhou's methods were anchored in the classical Italian bel canto tradition, yet she demonstrated a remarkable ability to tailor this convention to the unique qualities of Chinese vocal performance and the specific attributes of each student. By integrating the vocal techniques and emotive expressions germane to traditional Italian singing with the nuances of Chinese linguistic and cultural expression, Zhou crafted a hybrid methodology that transcended boundaries.

Central to her philosophy was the belief that each student possessed an individual vocal identity, requiring a customized approach to unlock their full potential. Zhou Xiaoyan paid close attention to the anatomy and physiology of the voice, guiding her

students through exercises tailored to enhance their vocal strength and flexibility. She emphasized the importance of breath control, vocal range expansion, and the clear articulation of each note. Through her instruction, students learned to produce a resonant and beautiful tone, using their voices as powerful instruments of communication.

Zhou Xiaoyan also placed a significant emphasis on the psychological aspect of singing, fostering a learning environment that encouraged self-expression and confidence. Recognizing the intimate connection between emotion and voice, she devised teaching strategies to help students convey the emotional essence of a piece, thereby heightening the impact of their performances.

In addition to her focused groundwork in vocal techniques, Zhou Xiaoyan also imparted knowledge regarding the interpretation of musical works, instructing her students on how to delve into the historical context and emotional undercurrents of a piece. This comprehensive understanding of music allowed her students to perform with both technical precision and expressive depth.

Throughout her career, Zhou Xiaoyan was an advocate for ongoing education and self-improvement. She frequently updated her methodology, incorporating new scientific insights into the mechanics of singing and adapting to the evolving landscape of vocal performance. Her open-mindedness kept her teaching fresh and her students at the forefront of contemporary vocal technique, ultimately contributing to her enduring legacy in the field of vocal music education. The vocal music critic Qihong believed that "she consciously and consciously explored the possibility of the organic combination of bel canto with Chinese language, Chinese melody, Chinese style and Chinese traditional singing aesthetics."<sup>[4]</sup>

This unique synthesis of technique, adaptability, and emotional insight formed the bedrock of Zhou Xiaoyan's vocal teaching methodology—a paradigm that has influenced and shaped generations of singers, and which continues to resonate within the world of vocal pedagogy today.

## 1.2 Methodological Approach to Vocal Training

Zhou Xiaoyan's strategic approach to vocal training is remarkable in its blend of traditional techniques and innovative methods. She placed emphasis on the individuality of each singer's voice and tailored her training to capitalize on their unique strengths, while also addressing any weaknesses. Her philosophy underlined that a one-size-fits-all methodology is not applicable in the realm of vocal pedagogy. This was a game changer at a time when rigid teaching methods were the norm.

The linchpin of this strategy was Zhou Xiaoyan's commitment to adopting new ideas and techniques to foster both vocal improvement and artist development. For instance, she incorporated aspects of bel canto, a style of singing characterized by its emphasis on beautiful, seamless sound and technical prowess. This technique was combined with a deep understanding of Chinese folk music and its distinct vocal requirements, allowing students to maximize their vocal range and expressivity by adapting to various singing styles.

Additionally, Zhou Xiaoyan stressed the importance of understanding the singer's instrument - the human body. Implementing vocal exercises designed to enhance breath

control, flexibility, and resonance provided a clear structure to her strategic approach. She also introduced singing drills that improved diction, articulation, and pitch accuracy, which further supported a singer's ability to convey emotion and connect with an audience. In terms of the relationship between "singing style" and "articulation," Zhou Xiaoyan believed that "language influences singing technique." In her vocal teaching process, she established singing language as a fundamental node for the integration of Chinese and Western vocal music. Proficient in English, French, German, and Italian, Zhou dialectically handled the characteristics of singing style and language, defining different singing patterns through the features of various languages, and demonstrated the relationship between "following the character to shape the singing style" and "leading the character with the singing style" in both Chinese and Western singing forms.<sup>[5]</sup>

Moreover, Zhou Xiaoyan believed in the power of performance psychology and its impact on a singer's development. She integrated mindfulness and visualization practices into her training regimen to build confidence and stage presence. By doing so, she helped her students to manage performance anxiety and mental blocks, which are as crucial to a singer's success as vocal talent.

In embracing innovation, Zhou Xiaoyan consistently sought out new knowledge, even traveling abroad to learn from esteemed vocal coaches and bring back ideas that could enrich her teaching practice. She bridged East and West, historic and modern in her quest for vocal excellence, and this adaptability marked her as a visionary in the field of vocal training.

Her strategic approach has undoubtedly left a lasting impact on the world of vocal training. By combining time-tested techniques with forward-thinking methodology, Zhou Xiaoyan has set a benchmark for how vocal educators should foster talent and cultivate the next generation of skilled vocal artists.

### 1.3 Theoretical Framework for Holistic Vocal Education

Zhou Xiaoyan's holistic vocal education philosophy is firmly rooted in a combination of classical vocal pedagogy and innovative educational theories. The foundational theoretical frameworks that underlie her pedagogical approach comprise elements from the bel canto tradition, cognitive psychology, and humanistic education principles.

The bel canto tradition, with its emphasis on beautiful singing and mastery of technique, informs much of the technical training in Zhou Xiaoyan's philosophy. It advocates for the seamless integration of breath control, vocal resonance, and clear diction. The ultimate goal of this is to achieve a vocal quality that is both expressive and free from strain. This framework is essential for developing the fundamental vocal skills that students require to become proficient singers. In 1979, Zhou Xiaoyan pointed out in "The Training of the Middle Vocal Region and Vocal Transition Region in Tenor" that "the growth of a singer depends on various conditions, and solving the vocal problem is only a link in the chain"<sup>[6]</sup>

In conjunction with this classical approach, Zhou Xiaoyan incorporates insights from cognitive psychology into her teaching methods. This includes understanding how students process and internalize new information, the role of perception in singing,

and the development of memory and attention skills that are crucial for performance. By applying cognitive strategies, Zhou aids students in connecting the physical aspects of singing with the mental processes involved, fostering a more integrated learning experience.

Humanistic education principles are also a cornerstone of Zhou Xiaoyan's vocal education philosophy. These principles emphasize the development of the whole person and respect for each individual's unique qualities and potential. Her teaching approach is thus individualized, supportive, and aimed at empowering students not only as singers but also as confident and expressive artists. This includes nurturing students' self-awareness, creative expression, and emotional engagement with the music they perform. He said, "Vocal music, as we know, is the art that has the closest relationship between music and literature, so in order to be a 'perfect' singer, a learner must try to cultivate his or her own literary cultivation. A person with inner beauty can truly appreciate the 'beauty of art'. To truly appreciate the 'beauty of art' [7].

Zhou Xiaoyan's nuanced application of these frameworks leads to a teaching approach that is as comprehensive as it is detailed. She carefully tailors her methods to the needs of each student, allowing for a flexible and adaptive approach that takes into account the diverse abilities and learning styles of her students. The careful blending of bel canto technique and modern educational theories ensures that her students not only learn how to use their voices effectively but also develop a deep understanding and love for the art of singing. This holistic approach to vocal education has established Zhou Xiaoyan as a respected and influential voice in the field of music education, shaping the way vocalists are trained and contributing to the development of well-rounded and dynamic artists.

## **2 Motivations Underpinning Zhou Xiaoyan's Holistic Perspective**

### **2.1 Personal Challenges in Vocal Learning**

Zhou Xiaoyan, a name synonymous with vocal mastery in the lush realms of opera, did not attain her echelons of expertise without surmounting significant pedagogic hurdles. Her early vocal learning journey was punctuated with challenges that were as much about discovering her individual artistic voice as they were about navigating the technical complexities of vocal production. The very act of breathing, so natural to the human condition, became a meticulous study in control and phrasing. She delved into the mechanics of breath support, the cornerstone of sustained and clear vocalization, which later became an integral component of her educational philosophies.

However, vocal education for Zhou stretched beyond the mere mechanics. It embraced a holistic view, one that incorporated an understanding of the psychological nuances that impact a singer's performance. Stage fright, the oft-ignored specter in a performer's journey, was an adversary she learned to conquer with techniques that would later be imparted to her students. Zhou's approach underscored the importance of

mental fortitude and resilience in the face of the emotional vulnerabilities that a life on stage invariably brings.

Her pedagogic methodology was further refined through the intricate dissection of operatic literature. Zhou Xiaoyan believed that a comprehensive outlook on vocal education must intertwine with the interpretations of textual nuances and the emotive storytelling that opera demands. This viewpoint germinated from her own struggles with diverse repertoires, each with its linguistic idiosyncrasies and stylistic demands. Mastery over these allowed her to instill in her students an appreciation for the linguistic agility required in opera.

Zhou's lessons also heavily emphasized the significance of mastering vocal registers. The seamless transition between chest voice and head voice, and the blending of timbres, became pivotal in her teachings as a reflection of her own exploratory journey into the understanding of vocal registers. Acknowledging the uniqueness of each vocal instrument, she taught individualized approaches to technique, advocating that each student's vocal idiosyncrasies should be embraced rather than coerced into a one-size-fits-all methodology.

In sum, Zhou Xiaoyan's challenges in vocal learning were seminal in shaping her comprehensive outlook on vocal education. Each hurdle she encountered and overcame, from breath control to emotional expression, and from linguistic proficiency to the mastery of vocal registers, contributed to her becoming not just a consummate performer but a legendary pedagogue in the art of singing. It's in these challenges that the essence of her educational approach was forged, one that has influenced countless voices that have followed in her melodic wake.

## **2.2 Influence of Bernardi's Teachings and Philosophy**

Bernardi's teachings had an undeniable and transformative effect on Zhou Xiaoyan, one of the most renowned vocal pedagogues in modern China. His influence was remarkably present throughout Zhou's approach, allowing her to formulate a comprehensive and consistent pedagogical model that would benefit countless singers to come. Bernardi, recognized for his deep understanding of vocal mechanics and his holistic perspective on voice training, emphasized the importance of building a strong technical foundation while also nurturing the expressive aspects of singing. This duality is clearly evident in Zhou's pedagogy, which focuses on the meticulous cultivation of technique as well as the development of the singer's musicality and emotional connection to the repertoire.

In her teachings, Zhou often reminded her students that singing is not merely about hitting the correct notes; it is equally about conveying the soul and essence of the music. She integrated Bernardi's principles, combining rigorous breath control, precise diction, and vocal agility exercises with interpretative guidance, encouraging students to delve into the historical context and emotional depth of each piece. She placed a significant emphasis on understanding the structure and nuances of both the music and lyrics, in order to produce performances that were technically accurate and artistically compelling.

Furthermore, Zhou implemented Bernardi's belief in the necessity of physiological awareness in her model. She imparted knowledge about how the body functions when producing vocal sounds, from the workings of the diaphragm, larynx, and vocal cords, to the resonating chambers within the head and chest. By doing so, she aimed to equip her students with the tools to both prevent vocal damage and to improve their vocal endurance and quality. Through this blend of scientific understanding and artistic interpretation, Zhou Xiaoyan fostered a generation of well-rounded vocalists who were as cognizant of their vocal health as they were of their artistic expression. Ju Xiu-fang said, "Some people said that my voice was 'true or not, fake or not, earthy or not, foreign or not not in line with the performance specifications of the vocal department,' and that this kind of singing would not work."<sup>[8]</sup>

Zhou Xiaoyan's adoption of Bernardi's teachings not only shaped her own successful approach to vocal training but also established a legacy that has had a lasting influence on vocal education in China. Her balanced and coherent pedagogical model stands as a testament to the profound impact of Bernardi's teachings and Zhou's dedication to the craft of singing.

### 2.3 Universal Principles in the Convergence of Pedagogical Techniques

Zhou Xiaoyan's legacy as a vocal pedagogue is profoundly marked by her ability to blend universal principles of vocal technique with her personal experiences both as a successful singer and as an educator. Through meticulous observation and practice, she developed a convergent pedagogical technique that centered around the physiological aspects of singing, psychological preparation, and the artistic interpretation of music.

In the analysis of how Zhou synthesized universal principles with her experiences, one observes that her methodology was rooted in the *bel canto* tradition. She emphasized the importance of breath control and supported tone production as key elements in the development of a singer's voice. Zhou, who had undergone rigorous training and had a prolific singing career, understood the importance of developing a strong technical foundation, which included mastering the art of seamless legato, precise intonation, and clear diction. She translated these universal vocal principles into digestible exercises tailored to the individual needs of her students.

Furthermore, Zhou incorporated her experiences into creating a framework that addressed the psychological challenges singers face. She understood that mental fortitude and a deep connection with the emotional content of the music were integral to performance. She often shared insights from her career, teaching strategies to overcome stage fright and to connect authentically with the audience.

Artistic interpretation was another cornerstone of Zhou's teaching. While adhering to the composer's intent and historical accuracy, she encouraged students to infuse their performances with personal expression. Zhou herself was known for her expressive singing, and she had a wealth of experience to draw from when guiding students on how to convey the emotional nuances of a piece.

Zhou Xiaoyan's convergent pedagogical technique is a testament to her ability to not only impart knowledge but also to foster a holistic development of young singers. She assimilated the best practices from the universal repertoire and her international ex-

posure into a teaching philosophy that respected tradition while promoting individualism. Her approach ensured that the essence of the music was never lost in technical execution and that students were well-rounded in their artistic education.

This synthesis was evident in her students, many of whom went on to have successful careers. By assimilating the universal principles with personal insights, she set a precedent in vocal pedagogy, ensuring that students received a unique and comprehensive educational experience that was as much about discovering their artistic identity as it was about honing their technical skills.

### **3 Zhou Xiaoyan's Formative Years and Influences**

#### **3.1 The French Sojourn: Knowledge Acquisition and Pedagogical Insights**

Zhou Xiaoyan began using the *bel canto* technique to perform Chinese art songs in the 1930s, such as "The Ballad of the Great Wall," "Red Beans," "Wine and Beauty," "Spring Dawn," and "Drinking Song," and was acclaimed as "China's Nightingale." Her performances not only showcased her superb and proficient singing skills but also clarified the direction of Chinese vocal performance.<sup>[9]</sup>

Zhou Xiaoyan's educational odyssey commenced as she embarked upon the voyage from her native China to the esteemed conservatories of France, a land renowned for its rich musical tradition and academic excellence. It was an era where the exchange of cultural and intellectual ideas was cherished, and France stood as a beacon of enlightenment, offering a fertile ground for the pursuit of knowledge.

In the hallowed halls of the Paris Conservatoire, Zhou Xiaoyan immersed herself in the rigorous study of Western classical music, under the tutelage of esteemed professors. The conservatory's pedagogical approach was grounded in a robust curriculum that combined theoretical knowledge with practical performance. Her days were filled with the reverberations of operatic arias and the intricacies of melodic phrasing as she meticulously honed her craft.

The conservatoire's environment fostered a unique blend of discipline and creativity. Zhou Xiaoyan thrived amidst this dichotomy, absorbing the nuances of Western musical expression while retaining the essence of her cultural heritage. Critical to her education was the exposure to a diverse array of musical interpretations and the sheer breadth of the repertoire at her disposal, ranging from the baroque to the contemporary.

This exposure was complemented by an in-depth analysis of musical theory and history. Zhou Xiaoyan dissected complex scores, engaging with the harmonic progressions and structural innovations that defined centuries of musical evolution. This analytical approach imparted to her an invaluable understanding of music's underpinnings, which she would later integrate into her educational philosophy.

One of the highlights of Zhou Xiaoyan's time in France was the opportunity to participate in masterclasses and workshops with eminent musicians and vocalists who visited the conservatoire. These interactions were not just exercises in technique but also conversations in artistry, as she absorbed insights that transcended mere performance. They instilled in her a comprehensive perspective on music, teaching her the importance of conveying emotion and storytelling through the power of voice.



Moreover, she was encouraged to regularly attend opera performances and symphony concerts, which further enriched her appreciation for the art form. Through observing live performances by outstanding artists, she gained a profound understanding of stage presence and the subtleties of musical interpretation, which would become central to her own pedagogical methods.

Upon the conclusion of her studies in France, Zhou Xiaoyan returned to China, equipped with a wealth of knowledge and a holistic vision shaped by her time abroad. Her experiences in France were integral in molding her approach to teaching — an approach that synthesized Eastern and Western methodologies. She became a conduit through which international musical philosophies were introduced to her students, thereby contributing significantly to the evolution of musical education in China. Her educational journey in France did not simply inform her teachings; it transformed them, and by extension, enriched the musical landscape of her homeland.

### 3.2 Transition from Vocal Performance to Teaching

The transition phase from performance to teaching is a pivotal period in Zhou Xiaoyan's career, marking a shift in focus that ultimately reshaped her approach to vocal pedagogy. Initially an acclaimed soprano, Zhou Xiaoyan's storied performance career provided her with a wealth of experience and deep understanding of vocal techniques, musical interpretation, and the emotional conveyance essential to operatic performance. This firsthand knowledge served as the bedrock for her later work in educating the next generation of singers.

As Zhou Xiaoyan transitioned into the realm of teaching, her methodology evolved to accommodate the change in her role. No longer at the center of the stage herself, she now aimed to guide her students so they could achieve the heights of vocal artistry she had experienced. This transition necessitated an analytical approach, breaking down the intricate processes behind vocal mastery that she had once intuitively grasped. Zhou's new role required her to articulate and codify techniques that could be effectively taught and replicated by students with diverse backgrounds and levels of experience. From 1947 to 1966, Zhou Xiaoyan's early twenty years of teaching were devoted to her own area of specialization, the soprano. With regard to Zhou Xiaoyan's teaching experience in this period, therefore, the first twenty years of teaching can be regarded as a period of accumulation and experimentation of Zhou Xiaoyan's ideas on vocal music teaching.

Central to Zhou Xiaoyan's transformed pedagogical approach was her emphasis on the individuality of each student's voice. She recognized that a one-size-fits-all method would not suffice, and instead focused on tailoring her instruction to the unique characteristics and needs of each protégé. Understanding that the physical mechanics of voice production are critical, Zhou dedicated herself to the science of phonation, breath control, and resonance, explaining these elements in detail and exploring how they differed from singer to singer.

Moreover, Zhou Xiaoyan placed considerable importance on the expressive aspects of singing, fostering an environment where technical proficiency was balanced with emotional depth. She taught her students how to connect with their material and deliver

performances that were both technically sound and emotionally rich, mirroring the authenticity that had characterized her own stage career.

In summary, the transformation in Zhou Xiaoyan's approach to vocal pedagogy during her transition from performer to teacher was marked by a shift from intuitive performance to systematic instruction, a dedication to the individualization of teaching techniques, and an integration of expressive artistry with vocal technique. Her extensive experience as a performer, coupled with a newfound focus on the pedagogy behind vocal excellence, allowed her to become a revered figure in the world of music education.

### 3.3 Emergence of a Comprehensive Vocal Didactic Vision

Born in 1917, and recognized as one of China's leading vocal pedagogues, Zhou Xiaoyan's comprehensive vision for vocal didactics emerged throughout her extensive career. A graduate of the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris, Zhou implemented a blend of Western operatic techniques and traditional Chinese singing methods. Her vision was marked by several key elements that revolutionized vocal training in China.

One primary element was her emphasis on the correct breathing techniques essential for operatic singing. To this end, Zhou meticulously instructed her students in the use of diaphragmatic breathing, which is the foundational technique that supports vocal power and stability.

Furthermore, Zhou Xiaoyan incorporated precise vocal placement and resonance as crucial aspects of her teaching. She guided students to find their natural voice placement, focusing on the mask area – around the nose and cheeks – to amplify the natural resonance without strain. This technique was a transformative approach to producing a rounded and full timbre specific to each individual student. Wei Song, former president of the Shanghai Opera House, was singing baritone before he went to study at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. However, Zhou Xiaoyan heard the bright timbre characteristic of a tenor in his singing and determined that Wei Song was a large tenor, a talent for opera singing. She advised him to switch to tenor. For a singer, the determination of vocal range is crucial, and Mr. Zhou's judgment ultimately shaped Wei Song's artistic development path.<sup>[10]</sup>

In addition, Zhou's philosophy included a holistic approach to vocal health, recognizing the interconnectedness of physical and emotional well-being with vocal performance. She stressed the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, proper diet, and regular physical exercise as a means to support vocal longevity.

Another key element was her integration of language and diction into vocal training. Besides the voice, she believed that clear articulation and proper pronunciation are essential for effective communication through song, be it in Mandarin, Italian, German, French, or any other language tackled by her students. Zhou insisted on the mastery of the language's nuances alongside vocal training.

Zhou Xiaoyan's vision went beyond technical skills. She advocated for musicality and artistic interpretation, encouraging her students to convey emotion and meaning in every piece they performed. She believed a deep understanding of the music's historical context and composer's intent was tantamount to a powerful performance.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, Zhou Xiaoyan wrote, "The Training of Tenor's Middle Vocal Range and Vocal Transition". After the Cultural Revolution, Zhou Xiaoyan wrote "Training of Tenor's Middle Vocal Range and Vocal Range Transition", and made an academic report "What the Development Trend of Contemporary World Vocal Music Gives Us", Luo Wei, Liu Jie, Zhang Jianyi, Gu Xin, a series of facts show that Zhou Xiaoyan has a set of her own experience in tenor's training and cultivation. The following is a list of facts that show that Zhou Xiaoyan has her own experience in training and cultivating tenors.

The amalgamation of these elements under Zhou Xiaoyan's guidance fostered not just skilled vocalists but well-rounded artists, capable of expressing themselves authentically through song, and her legacy in the realm of vocal didactics continues to influence generations of singers.

## **4 The Development Trajectory of Zhou Xiaoyan's Vocal Teaching Philosophy**

### **4.1 Conceptual Evolution from Learning to Performance to Pedagogy**

Zhou Xiaoyan's conceptual evolution reflects a journey marked by personal growth, shaped by her own learning experiences, that later matured through her performance career, and ultimately culminated in her contributions to the field of pedagogy. Initially as a learner, Zhou immersed herself in the technical mastery of her craft, diligently studying the nuances of performance. Her years of practice and exploration equipped her with a deep-seated understanding of the art form, an understanding that became the bedrock upon which her later accomplishments were built.

The second phase of her journey saw Zhou transition from student to performer. As she took the stage, each performance served not only as a display of her acquired skill but also as a laboratory for real-time experimentation. It was during this period that she fully grasped the intricacies of conveying emotion through art and the importance of connecting with her audience. Performance became a medium through which she translated the theoretical knowledge gained in her earlier years into tangible, impactful expressions.

The insights garnered from her performances began to shape Zhou's conceptual framework, marking the early stages of her sophisticated realm of pedagogy. Having been a student herself and then a performer, she was exceptionally positioned to understand the needs, challenges, and aspirations of those who sought to follow a similar path. With this in-depth perspective, she began to formulate teaching methods that were both innovative and grounded in practical experience. Vocal music thesis "baritone voice area and voice change area training" puts forward the urgency and necessity of emphasizing technical specifications in vocal music art. "The basic training must be restored, and the technical specifications that should be emphasized should be mentioned with a straight face to clarify some of the confusing ideological and conceptual problems in the vocal music world<sup>[11]</sup>. The publication of this thesis means that Zhou Xiaoyan has already taken shape in her teaching technique, and the proposal of tech-

nical specifications for thousand of vocal music is the manifestation of the overall view of technology that "if you want to do a good job, you have to make good use of your instruments first".

Her pedagogical approach focused on bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and its application. She emphasized the importance of a strong technical foundation while also advocating for the development of interpretive skills and artistic expression. Her methodology revolved around personalized instruction, recognizing that each student possessed unique strengths and learning styles, and required tailored guidance to unlock their full potential.

As an educator, Zhou's conceptual evolution was characterized by a keen awareness of the changing landscape of the arts and the evolving needs of learners. She continually adapted her teaching strategies to incorporate new findings, technologies, and educational theories, ensuring that her pedagogy remained relevant and effective. Zhou's commitment to the lifecycle of learning—from student to performer to educator—effectively encapsulates the rich tapestry of her conceptual evolution and solidifies her legacy in the arts.

#### **4.2 Integration and Adaptation of Western Techniques in Chinese Context**

"Several Problems to be Paid Attention to in the Cultivation of Vocal Talents" is a thesis written by Zhou Xiaoyan after she led Zhang Jianyi to win the first prize in the Vienna International Vocal Competition. She affirmed the teaching methods in the past, criticized the "surprise" competition-style teaching, and pointed out that our students, "although they have already attained the world-class level of vocal skills, they are still quite incomplete in their mastery of language and style, and in their understanding of character and drama. Although our students have achieved a world-class level of vocal skills, their mastery of language and style, as well as their understanding of characters and plots, is still incomplete"<sup>[12]</sup>. The teacher's technical and artistic training in teaching should focus on the whole Harmony is presented as an issue that needs to be emphasized, marking the formation of an integral part of Zhou Xiaoyan's holistic view of vocal teaching: the holistic view of method.

The vocal artistry of Zhou Xiaoyan stands as a testament to her remarkable ability to integrate and adapt Western vocal techniques harmoniously within the Chinese cultural milieu. Her mastery is that of a cultural bridge builder, which reflects both her deep understanding of Western operatic traditions and the nuances of Chinese musical heritage. Zhou's approach to singing is informed by a range of Western techniques, such as the *Bel Canto* style that emphasizes the beauty of sound, the agility of voice, and seamless legato lines. This she adeptly molded to suit the Chinese language's tonal characteristics, which require meticulous attention to pitch and intonation to convey meaning accurately.

Furthermore, Zhou Xiaoyan's skill at vocal placement and breath control, cornerstones of Western classical singing, allowed her to navigate the complex emotional landscapes found in the repertoire of Chinese art songs, or "Gequ." She demonstrated this through maintaining vocal resonance and clarity without sacrificing the emotional depth and expressiveness intrinsic to Chinese performance traditions. Her pedagogical

methods and vocal techniques also showcase a careful balance of Western methods like the *appoggio* breathing technique, wherein singers learn to breath deep into the lower lungs for superior voice support, with traditional Chinese aesthetic principles, such as "Qing," "Shang," and "Xiu," which translate loosely to emotion, vocal delivery, and refinement.

Zhou Xiaoyan did not merely transplant Western techniques onto Chinese soil; she re-interpreted and judiciously applied them within the specific demands of Chinese music. It is her unique synthesis of these vocal traditions that has made her an icon in the sphere of Chinese classical singing, inspiring generations of vocalists who seek to cultivate a sound that is global in technique yet distinctively Chinese in soul and expression. Through her art, Zhou Xiaoyan has successfully demonstrated how cultural exchange can lead to the evolution of a distinct and enriched vocal art form.

### 4.3 Systematic Expansion of Vocal Training Components

Zhou Xiaoyan, a preeminent vocal pedagogue in China, is renowned for her systematic approach to vocal training. She enhanced the scope of vocal pedagogy by integrating Western operatic techniques with traditional Chinese singing, thereby creating a holistic curriculum that caters to a diverse cohort of students.

She carefully analyzed the physiological aspects of vocal production, ensuring that each student understood the mechanics of breath control, vocal fold operation, and resonance. By doing this, Zhou emphasized the importance of a strong technical foundation. She expanded the technical component of training to include a variety of breathing exercises and vocalises that develop control and flexibility.

Moreover, Zhou Xiaoyan addressed the artistic dimensions of singing by incorporating lessons on interpretation, phrasing, and emotional expression. She believed that understanding the emotional and cultural context of a piece is as crucial as mastering the technical skills. Her aim was to educate well-rounded performers who could not only sing accurately but also convey the depth of the music's narrative.

She extended the curriculum to cover a wider range of music genres beyond the Western classical repertoire, adding Chinese folk songs and even contemporary music. This expansion provided students with the opportunity to explore different vocal styles and techniques, ultimately broadening their capabilities and marketability as performers.

Zhou Xiaoyan's pedagogical contributions also include a focus on performance practices. She actively encouraged her students to engage in recitals, operatic productions, and competitions, facilitating a real-world application of their skills. This aspect of the curriculum was designed to build confidence and stagecraft, key components for a successful career in vocal performance. Zhou Xiaoyan's student, Liao Changyong, shared that she advised him as an actor to be accountable to many on stage: to honor the audience who paid to see him, to respect those who invited him to perform, to be worthy of his teachers who trained him, and to do justice to his own years of hard work. He should strive for success in every performance, which is expected of a professional actor. The day he prioritizes himself over his art is the day he begins to decline.<sup>[13]</sup>

Thus, through Zhou Xiaoyan's comprehensive training philosophy, she systematically expanded and enriched the components of vocal training, ensuring her curriculum remained inclusive, dynamic, and responsive to the evolving demands of the vocal performance landscape. Her legacy lives on in the skilled singers she has trained, who continue to pass on her techniques to new generations of vocalists.

## 5 The Interconnected Components as a Symphonic Whole

### 5.1 The Dichotomy Between the Whole and Its Constituent Parts

Zhou Xiaoyan's teaching philosophy operates on a foundational principle that not only recognizes the multifaceted aspects of vocal education but also emphasizes the integration of these facets into a cohesive whole. Her approach is predicated on the belief that the true value of vocal training cannot be fully appreciated by examining its components—such as breath control, diction, tone production, and emotional expression—in isolation. Instead, she advocates for a holistic view, wherein each individual element is interdependent and vital to the overall fabric of vocal mastery.

Through her teaching, Zhou Xiaoyan underscores the importance of a balanced interplay between technical skill and artistic interpretation. She posits that technical proficiency serves as the vehicle through which emotional nuances are conveyed, and that without this solid technical foundation, the singer's ability to connect with the audience is compromised. Conversely, technical skills devoid of emotional depth result in performances that are mechanically accurate but lack resonance and impact.

In her method, each lesson is designed to build on the last, ensuring that progress in one area reinforces and enhances capabilities in another. Breath support, for instance, is not only crucial for sustaining long phrases but also for modulating dynamics and phrasing, which are key components of emotional communication. Similarly, precision in diction affects clarity and comprehensibility, which in turn supports the delivery of the song's narrative.

Zhou Xiaoyan's philosophy extends to the cultivation of a singer's individual artistic identity. She encourages students to explore the unique color and texture of their voices, and to develop interpretative choices that reflect their personal experiences and emotional truths. By integrating the technical and the personal, her students are trained to become not just singers, but holistic performers capable of delivering powerful and authentic musical experiences.

To foster this development, Zhou Xiaoyan also looks beyond the immediate realm of vocal pedagogy to encompass a broader cultural literacy, encompassing knowledge of musical styles, history, and performance etiquette. China once had a debate in the 1950s about the "local" and "Western" singing styles. Zhou Xiaoyan, a singer who leaned towards *bel canto*, believed that *bel canto* is a scientific singing method, and of course, this scientific approach also includes the scientific elements within the traditions of ethnic vocal music.<sup>[14]</sup> "The exploration of singing Chinese songs with *bel canto* at the Shanghai National Music Academy in the 1930s and 1940s, and its extension and development in the 1950s, provided support for the formation of ethnic vocal music".<sup>[15]</sup> Zhou Xiaoyan was an active promoter and participant in this pro-

cess. This fully corroborates her long-standing view on the holistic approach to culture, style, and vocal technique.

It is this comprehensive framework that renders her teaching philosophy as treating the whole of vocal education more as an interconnected ecology of knowledge and skills rather than as isolated competencies to be mastered. Through this lens, Zhou Xiaoyan's students learn to perceive their education as a harmonious blend where excellence in performance is derived from the rich, interwoven tapestry of insights spanning the breadth of their vocal journey.

## **5.2 Dialectical Approach to Voice Cultivation and Mind Flexibility**

When considering the pedagogical framework proposed by Zhou Xiaoyan, a distinguished professor of vocal music, we can recognize her profound understanding of not only the technical aspects of voice cultivation but also the crucial role that mental agility plays in the development of a singer's talent. Her dialectical approach unifies the physiological and psychological realms, creating a holistic, integrated method for vocal training.

In her method, Zhou Xiaoyan emphasizes the need for students to cultivate their voices with precision, balancing the technicalities of breath control, posture, and articulation, which are fundamental aspects. She employs specific exercises to fine-tune a singer's vocal instrument, enhancing clarity, range, and endurance. Zhou meticulously attends to the physical details, insisting on the strict discipline that underlies any great artistic achievement.

However, Zhou Xiaoyan's methodology is unique due to her simultaneous cultivation of inner mental states. She nurtures students' mental flexibility, a quality that allows them to interpret music with sensitivity and adapt to various singing styles fluidly. By weaving together vocal techniques with emotional intelligence, her approach creates a rich tapestry of learning experiences.

Moreover, in fostering a receptive learning environment, Zhou encourages her students to listen actively, not only to their own voices but to others', and to the subtleties within music. Active listening develops aural discrimination, crucial for refining one's sound and for blending harmoniously in ensemble settings. Zhou's environment is one where constructive feedback is encouraged, challenges are embraced as growth opportunities, and personal exploration is paramount.

In essence, Zhou Xiaoyan's dialectical approach to vocal education is about equilibrium. It's the balance between strict, rigorous voice cultivation and the nurturing of an adaptive mental space. Students are trained to be technically proficient and yet emotionally expressive, to adhere to the highest standards of vocal performance while being able to experiment and innovate. This fusion results in singers who are not only technically skilled but also versatile and deeply connected to the emotional core of their repertoire, embodying the true spirit of musical performance.

### **5.3 The Interplay Between Psychological and Physiological Factors in Vocal Training**

Zhou Xiaoyan's vocal training framework is an intricate and holistic approach to teaching voice, meticulously designed to account for the intricate web of psychological and physiological factors that contribute to a singer's development. In this approach, psychological aspects such as confidence, emotional expression, and mental resilience are given significant weight, recognizing that a student's mental state can profoundly affect their vocal performance. Techniques like visualization, positive reinforcement, and performance anxiety management are incorporated to aid students in overcoming psychological barriers that may impede their vocal progress.

Concurrently, the physiological components of Zhou's framework are equally emphasized, acknowledging the mechanical and biological underpinnings of vocal production. Students are educated on the anatomy and functions of the vocal apparatus, including the larynx, vocal folds, and resonating chambers, as well as the importance of proper breathing techniques, posture, and articulation. This knowledge is critical in helping students develop a technique that is not only technically sound but also sustainable, thus avoiding potential vocal damage that can arise from improper use.

The methodology integrates these psychological and physiological elements systematically. Through an array of exercises, students are encouraged to explore the limits of their vocal range, power, and expressiveness while maintaining a focused and relaxed psychological state. This is done with continuous feedback and an emphasis on body awareness, which allows for adjustments based on individual needs.

Zhou Xiaoyan's training framework also advocates for a tailored approach, where a student's unique voice and individual characteristics are considered. This customization necessitates an understanding of the student's personal goals, strengths, and areas for development, ensuring that the training they receive supports their specific artistic journey.

By intertwining these psychological and physiological elements, the framework does not view vocal training purely as a physical endeavor but as a symbiotic process where mind and body coalesce. This comprehensive outlook results in a more rounded and adaptable singer, capable of performing under varying conditions while maintaining vocal health and emotional expressiveness. Therefore, Zhou Xiaoyan's framework stands as a testament to the importance of addressing both psychological stamina and physiological capability in tandem, for the betterment of vocal pedagogy and performance.

## **6 Conclusion and Pedagogical Implication**

### **6.1 Synthesizing Zhou Xiaoyan's Contributions to Vocal Music Education**

Zhou Xiaoyan's legacy in vocal music education is a mosaic of pedagogical innovations, tireless mentorship, and a deep understanding of the artistic and technical aspects of vocal performance. Her teaching philosophy was rooted in the concept of holistic vocal education, which entails the development of not just the voice, but the entire



person behind the voice. This approach recognizes that optimal singing involves a complex interplay between physical, psychological, and emotional elements.

Zhou Xiaoyan strove to integrate a comprehensive understanding of vocal anatomy and physiology in her teachings. She emphasized the importance of breath control, proper posture, and voice placement, providing students with the foundational tools necessary for mastery over their instrument. By incorporating scientific principles of voice production, she equipped her students with the means to produce sound efficiently, reducing strain and promoting vocal longevity.

Moreover, Zhou Xiaoyan believed in nurturing the psychological well-being of her students. She understood that confidence, stage presence, and emotional connectivity are as critical to a performer as their vocal ability. Through personalized coaching, she sought to instill a sense of self-assuredness in her students. By focusing on the individual's strengths and addressing their specific challenges, she was able to help each singer unlock their potential and develop a unique artistic identity.

Zhou Xiaoyan also valued the importance of a broad musical education. She encouraged her students to engage with a wide repertoire, spanning different genres, languages, and historical periods. Exposure to a variety of musical styles allowed students to become versatile performers, sensitive to the nuances and demands of different vocal traditions.

On a communal level, Zhou Xiaoyan contributed to the shaping of a supportive vocal community. She stressed the significance of peer learning and collaboration, fostering an environment where students could learn from one another and grow together. Her educational framework was also marked by a commitment to cultural exchange, positioning vocal music as a universal language capable of bridging diverse backgrounds and experiences.

In sum, Zhou Xiaoyan's monumental contributions to vocal music education are emblematic of a comprehensive teaching style. By bridging the gap between technical skill and personal artistry, she left behind a rich legacy that continues to influence vocal pedagogy today. Through the lens of holistic vocal education, her impact resonates with those who seek to form not only exceptional vocalists but well-rounded artists capable of expressing the fullest range of human emotion and experience through their voices.

## **6.2 The Influence of Zhou Xiaoyan's Integrated Teaching Model**

Zhou Xiaoyan's integrated teaching model in vocal pedagogy has profoundly reshaped the way voice training is approached within the realm of classical music education. Her innovative methods, placing a significant emphasis on the amalgamation of Western opera techniques with traditional Chinese vocal expression, have opened a gateway for a more holistic and culturally inclusive approach to singing. Zhou, a revered figure in the world of vocal performance and pedagogy, has long advocated for the seamless integration of vocal technique, musical interpretation, and emotional conveyance within the learning process.

Her model diverges from the conventional, technique-centric approaches, which often compartmentalize the various elements of singing, leaving students to separately

hone their vocal mechanics, musicality, and performative aspects. Zhou's integrated model suggests that these elements should not be isolated but rather taught in conjunction with one another to produce well-rounded performers. This has led to the development of a more comprehensive curriculum in vocal studies programs that mirrors Zhou's philosophy.

In her model, students are encouraged from the outset to imbue their performances with emotional depth, channeling the expressive demands of each piece while maintaining technical precision. Furthermore, masterclasses and one-on-one training under this model frequently address the subtleties of linguistic enunciation and its impact on vocal timbre and expression, whether in Italian arias, German Lieder, or Mandarin art songs.

The influence of this integrated approach is evident in the changing repertoire requirements for students. In Zhou Xiaoyan's esteem, a singer's education is incomplete without exposure to and mastery of a broad range of stylistic genres. Consequently, academic programs are increasingly emphasizing versatility and expanding their curricula to incorporate a vast repertoire that spans geographical and cultural boundaries.

The implication of Zhou Xiaoyan's teaching model extends beyond curriculum design—it affects the selection of faculty as well, who must now possess a diverse skill set to guide students through this more expansive form of study. The impact of this pedagogy also permeates the expectations of audiences, who now appreciate a performer's ability to navigate diverse musical landscapes with both technical prowess and expressive authenticity. Zhou Xiaoyan's integrated teaching model has therefore not only transformed vocal education but also elevated the standards and appreciation of vocal performance in the contemporary classical music scene.

### **6.3 The insights for vocal music education in China and non-Western cultural contexts**

Zhou Xiaoyan's holistic approach to vocal music education provides valuable insights and inspiration for vocal music education in non-Western cultural contexts. By integrating vocal music with disciplines such as music engineering and art management, there is an opportunity to promote the comprehensive development of vocal art. This interdisciplinary cooperation can enrich the content and form of vocal music teaching, making it more relevant and engaging for students.

Platform building is emphasized by Zhou Xiaoyan as a crucial aspect of vocal music education. By establishing exchange platforms and promoting resource sharing, the overall level of vocal music education can be improved. This is particularly important in non-Western cultural contexts, where there may be limited access to resources and opportunities. Building platforms for collaboration and sharing can help bridge this gap and enhance the education experience. Zhou Xiaoyan placed great emphasis on cultural exchange. She taught her students: to sing Chinese songs well in China to be loved by Chinese audiences; to sing Chinese songs abroad to help more people understand Chinese music culture; and to sing foreign songs in China to introduce foreign cultures to domestic audiences.<sup>[16]</sup>

Scientific and standardized teaching methods are advocated by Zhou Xiaoyan to improve the quality and effectiveness of vocal music education. This approach can be applied to non-Western cultural contexts by developing teaching standards and assessment systems that ensure educational quality. By following a scientific and standardized approach, vocal music education can be more efficient and impactful.

Zhou Xiaoyan also highlights the importance of social engagement and market demand in vocal music education. By aligning education with social needs and market trends, vocal music education in non-Western cultural contexts can cultivate talents that meet market demands. This not only enhances the relevance of vocal music education but also contributes to the social and cultural development of the community.

In conclusion, Zhou Xiaoyan's holistic view of vocal music education offers valuable lessons for vocal music education in non-Western cultural contexts. By focusing on cultural heritage, innovative practice, scientific teaching, and social responsibility, vocal music education can be comprehensive and impactful, promoting the development of talented vocalists in these contexts.

#### 6.4 Implications for Current and Future Vocal Educators

In the aesthetic view of the nature of artistic beauty. There is this description, "The content of artistic beauty comes from the artist's experience of social beauty (and the related ugliness), and the form of artistic beauty is the result of the artist's self-conscious processing of natural beauty and things in nature"<sup>[17]</sup>. Vocal music teaching is to let students understand the process of artistic beauty and embodiment of artistic beauty, understanding artistic beauty is the content, and embodiment of artistic beauty rely on thousands of vocal techniques to achieve the purpose of the performance of the content. In specific teaching, there is a need for a concept to integrate the relationship between content and form. The overall concept of vocal music teaching is a guiding idea to solve the problem of how to view the combination of other arts and vocal art in vocal music teaching from a macro point of view. With the guidance of the holistic concept of vocal music teaching, it is possible to produce a purposeful, stage-by-stage, planned and evaluated method under the macro-objective.

From the examination of the motivation and process of Zhou Xiaoyan's vocal teaching idea, any kind of guiding idea can not be separated from a large number of positive and effective practices. It is in the rich practical experience that Zhou Xiaoyan summarized the problems encountered in teaching and put forward the idea of unifying the many contradictions in vocal teaching with the concepts of holistic learning and holistic education, which marks the fact that Zhou Xiaoyan's vocal teaching has departed from the traditional "empirical" teaching mode and has entered into the mode of "refining ideas from practice and guiding teaching practice with ideas". Zhou Xiaoyan's vocal music teaching has left the traditional "empirical" teaching mode, and has entered the higher realm of "refining ideas from practice and guiding teaching practice with ideas".

Zhou Xiaoyan's vocal teaching philosophy, which integrates a broad understanding of Western operatic tradition with a deep appreciation for the nuances of the human voice, offers a wealth of implications for current and future vocal educators. Her ap-

proach, which emphasizes the individuality of the singer and the importance of emotional connectivity, can guide instructors as they strive to bring out the best in their students.

One of the key takeaways from Zhou's philosophy is the importance of customization in vocal training. Vocal educators are reminded that each voice is unique, and an effective teaching strategy requires recognizing the specific needs and strengths of a student. Indeed, what works for one singer may not work for another, and Zhou's nuanced approach encourages teachers to develop flexible methods catered to individual vocal characteristics.

Additionally, Zhou's innovative techniques highlight the significance of a comprehensive pedagogical approach that combines technical skill with emotional expression. Vocal educators are encouraged to not only focus on the mechanics of voice production but also to foster the expressive capabilities of their students. By doing so, they can help singers connect with their material on a deeper level, ensuring performances that are both technically proficient and emotionally resonant.

Moreover, Zhou's teaching underscores the importance of continual learning and adaptation within the field of vocal education. As music and vocal techniques evolve, so too must teaching strategies. Educators are thus inspired to stay abreast of new research and methodologies in voice pedagogy to provide students with the most current and effective instruction.

Finally, her philosophy calls for a balanced approach to vocal health, recognizing the rigors of vocal performance and the need to maintain a singer's vocal longevity. Educators are reminded of the responsibility to teach safe and healthy vocal techniques that preserve the voice, preparing students for sustainable careers in performance.

In summary, the implications of Zhou Xiaoyan's comprehensive and innovative vocal teaching philosophy for current and future vocal educators are multifaceted. These educators are encouraged to personalize their teaching, integrate emotional expression with technical training, adapt to evolving pedagogical trends, and emphasize the importance of vocal health, thereby shaping a new generation of skilled and expressive vocal artists.[1]

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