

Empirical Research and Material Evaluation of Influencing Factors in Chinese Ancient Poetry and Art Songs in Singing

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Abstract

From 1920s to 1940s, it was an important period for the formation and development of Chinese art songs. The art song of ancient Chinese poetry in this period is a new art song form created by Chinese composers who draw lessons from the western art song form and combine it with the ancient Chinese poetry. It has high academic value and artistic value and occupies an extremely important position in the creation, singing and teaching of songs in China. The innovation of this paper is to start from the two breakthrough points with great gap, namely, the short structure of ancient poetry and the ancient poetry works with high artistic quality. This paper selects the representative songs with the most national characteristics in Chinese art songs, classifies and compares these materials, and then explores how to interpret and interpret the ancient poetry songs in this period.

Keywords: Chinese ancient poetry art songs, singing teaching, style hold, material evaluation

I. Singing of Ancient Poems with Short Structures

Among the songs of Chinese ancient poetry art from 1920s to 1940s, considerable work with short structures is selected and explored in this study. Compared with other songs of high artistic quality, this kind of work can reflect its popularity and exhibit the general characteristics of ancient poetry art songs. Huang Zi's "Flowers are not Flowers," Zhou Shu'an's "Spinning Songs" and "Lower Jiangling," Jiang Dingxian's "Cotton," Ying Shangneng's "No Clothes," Chen Tianhe's "Picking Mulberry Songs," and Qing zhu's "Yue Yao Song" are some of the Chinese songs with short structures. These short poetry songs lasts for 20–40 s and occupy a considerable proportion among the art songs in the 20th century. Thus, obtaining the genre, theme, melody, mode, characteristics, piano accompaniment, and other related aspects of the short poetry songs are significant to perform them and understand their general style.

1.1 Understanding of various types of poetry

The singers must know first the genre of ancient poetries with short structures before performing them. This kind of repertoire has a wide range of genres: the *yuefu* of five words and seven words, such as Chen Tianhe's "Picking Mulberry Songs"; the poetry of four words in the Book of Songs, such as Ying Shangneng's "No Clothes"; ancient ballads, such as "Yue Ballads" and "All the People Say the Gods are Good"; and other ancient poetry forms. Another example is the collection of ten songs of The Qing Dynasty, with two poems from the Tang Dynasty and one poem from the Ming Dynasty. The lyrics of the songs include three. Three classic ballads and an ancient ballad are also included. This selection is also short in structure and easy to grasp. For example, considerable work selected from famous poets is mostly five-character and seven-character poems with four sentences. The selection from the ballads tend to be more colloquial and easier to understand. This selection also requires the singer to have a basic understanding of the basic characteristics of various types of ancient poetry, such as level and tone, rhyme pattern, rhythm, and poets' style. In addition, these songs are short, the writers' intention is simple, the purpose is pure, and the meaning is clear. For example, the original poem in the "More Distant Song" of Qing zhu mainly reflects some

customs of primitive society. Qing zhu stated in his annotation, “I only know that common social movements, such as bowing, shaking hands, or offering wine are described in this song. Therefore, I will take from the accompaniment of the piano these acts of prayer, ‘Do not forget the humble’ [1].” The intention behind this creation is direct and simple. Consequently, the singer can easily grasp the author’s intention and correctly interpret the artistic conception of the song.

1.2 Grasp of national style melody

Grasping the national style of the melody of a work is an important link in the performance of ancient poetry art songs. This link directly affects the integrity of the song. Although the structure and melody of the selected ancient poetry art songs are short and simple, the melody features obvious intonation and national style.

1.2.1 Chanting tone

The use of chanting tone is one of the characteristics of ancient poetry songs. Ancient poem performances are usually characterized by slow recitation rhythm, smooth melody, progressive mode, improvisation, lyric melody, simplicity, and elegance. Moreover, the level and intensity of the poetry can form the performance.

These short ancient poetry songs have a verse style of five to seven words. They are also characterized by a distinctive intonation tone. The structure is square, and the main features are longer than the words and chant. The style and rhythm are full of pattern that is extremely suitable for the practice of chanting tone. The melody does not fluctuate much. However, the typical Chinese word-one-tone rhythm tends to be poetic, which is characterized by the fluctuation of intonation. The prominent stress of the song is conducive to grasp further the metrical characteristics of the poetic form, thereby reflecting the level and tone fluctuation of the poetry intonation. These characteristics are evident in “Hit the Soil Song,” “Zheng Fu Ci,” and “Wuling Spring.”

To perform this kind of work, the singer needs to understand the ups and downs of the melody and the rhythm of the song through recitation. In this way, the singer can easily comprehend the meaning of the poetry and master the characteristics of embellish cavity in the singing technique.

1.2.2 National mode

Most of the melodies of ancient poetry and art songs are of national mode. Some of them are a combination of national mode and western major. Therefore, enhancing the melody sense of national mode in bel canto training by using embellish cavity, adjusting tone color, and enunciating rhymes is important to perform the Chinese art songs. The use of national mode is extremely common in ancient poetry art songs. The melody of these songs is mainly composed of five and six tones. For example, in Qingzhu’s Collection of Qing Songs, the melody is composed of five tones: “Burning like a Blazing Sun” uses the G-sign pentatonic mode, “Return to the Village” uses the A-angle pentatonic tone, and “The More Distant Song” uses the C-sign pentatonic tone. Although the structure is simple, the intention of the songs with five-note melody is extremely vivid.

To perform this kind of work, the singer needs to establish a sense of national tone and strengthen the application and training of national scales, including interval relationship, termination mode, articulation, embellishment, and tone. These factors are all beneficial to grasp accurately the melody style of ancient poetry art songs.

1.2.3 Coordination with piano accompaniment

Agreement with the piano accompaniment is necessary to perform art songs, including ancient poetry art songs. All the selected songs in this study belong to the entry-level repertoire. The piano accompaniment is relatively simple, with a relatively fixed accompaniment technique and a two-line score piano sketch.

For example, Qingzhu’s Collection of Qing Songs have two lines of music for the melody and accompaniment. The

accompaniment is mainly monophonic, with few harmonies. The main melody of the song is the treble accompanied by the piano. The singers can sing along with the melody played by the piano when they perform these songs. These songs can be played as a piano sketch, which is an extremely popular form of creation.

Although the style of this piano sketch is simple and lacks rich colors and changes of harmony, it can still reflect the gist of this kind of short poems. For example, “Yue Yao Song” reflects the urge to drink, beg, and other movements through the accompaniment of single sound realistic performance; from you ride to for you, every sentence has this movement intention. As Qing zhu said, “The whole piano accompaniment is extremely simple. I do not want to use the accord composed of several different tones, because I think I need to know a little harmony. Instead, I will make a disorderly match. I do not need any capital, so I can always avoid it [2].” This statement shows the intention behind his creation. The relatively fixed style of accompaniment means that most of the accompaniment is dominated by pillar or broken chords, with few changes in the tone pattern. This style also emphasizes the artistic conception of the melody and poetry of the song, such as “Flowers are not Flowers.” In the writing of the accompaniment timbre, the composer repeats the melodic tone in a low voice, thereby sandwiching the harmony in the middle. The timbre of the accompaniment is simple and echoes the vagueness of the lyrics.

This form of piano accompaniment has less complex harmony and includes a melody. Thus, it is easy to play, and the singer is easy to accompany. At the same time, this form of accompaniment makes the melody and artistic conception of the song more prominent, which is also a good hint for the singers. Given that this form is easy to play, the singer can also play and sing it by himself/herself, which is convenient for practice.

As previously mentioned, grasping the genre, national melody style, and piano accompaniment is crucial to understand the relatively short structure and singing style of these modern and recent ancient poetry art songs.

II. Singing of Ancient Poetry Songs with High Artistic Quality

Some of the ancient poetry art songs of the 1920s and 1940s with short structures reflect high artistic quality and are widely used in vocal music singing. Qingzhu’s “Go East along the Great River” and “I Live in Changtuo”; Liu Xuean’s “Red Bean Ci”; Huang Zi’s “Nan Xiang Zi,” “Point Drop Lip,” and “Flower is not Flower”; and Zhao Yuanren’s “God” are all excellent representative songs of ancient poetry.

2.1 Music is more expressive

These classical pieces have richer musical performance and more color of drama than those with short structures. These pieces also have the characteristics of drama style and the color of narration. The substitution of this rich musical element provides a large space for the singer’s interpretation. Some of these classical pieces are Qingzhu’s “The Eastward Passage of the Great River” ([Song] Su Shi’s poems) and Lin Shengweng’s “All the Rivers are Red” ([Song] Yue Fei’s poems). Given the dramatic melody characteristics of these songs, the singer needs to accurately grasp the intensity of the words, tone tension, and melody promotion to increase the appeal of these songs.

2.2 It is more comparative

These classical pieces are more comparative in timbre, strength, and speed, such as the contrast of sound strength and intensity, the speed and urgency of the first words, and the contrast of sound reality and emptiness, than the ancient poetry art songs with short structures and simple phrases. The song of Qing zhu “I live on the Changjiang River” ([Song] Li Zhiyi) requires the singer to master good singing skills to achieve sound strength, virtual reality, speed, and other relative factors improving the overall control and performance.

2.3 It is more layered

In terms of structure, this part of the song focuses on absorbing the characteristics of western composition techniques from the traditional structure and techniques. It also highlights the change and reproduction of lyrics to strengthen the layer sense of the song. Huang Yongxi's "Yangguan Triassic" ([Tang] Wang Wei) is a good example. This song requires the singer not to break away from the original structure of the poem and clarify the structure of the song to make a balanced arrangement and distribution of the singing layout and achieve the rendering effect of the song.

2.4 Improvement of artistic conception

These songs also put forward higher requirements for the poetic artistic conception of the songs, such as Chen Tianhe's "Night Mooring at Maple Bridge" (lyricist, Zhang Ji [Tang]). This song does not only require the singers to have good singing skills and musical expression, but it also requires them to have excellent aesthetic and appreciation ability. In this way, the singers can develop a deeper understanding of the connotation of poetry and fully interpret the unique artistic conception of ancient poetry and songs.

Given the relatively high artistry and popularity of this kind of works, learning from various versions of performances is possible through exploration of diverse singing methods, singing parts, and multi-angle artistic treatment and innovation.

2.4.1 Diversity of singing methods

As a kind of art songs, bel canto is mostly applied in different singing methods. This kind of work is also used in teaching as the repertoire of bel canto. However, this approach follows the common characteristics of ancient poetry songs as art songs, thereby ignoring the unique characteristics of traditional Chinese culture [3]. When performing Chinese works, integrating the connotation of traditional Chinese singing according to bel canto vocalization method is important. This study argues that the most important thing is to consider the pronunciation habits and requirements of native culture. These issues are always discussed when exploring the performances of these works.

As a representative type of Chinese songs, ancient poetry art songs must be performed as a reflection of the diversified application of singing methods and styles. In the existing audio and video materials of this part of the classical repertoire, only few singers have used bel canto. The singing method of ancient poetry and art songs still follows the traditional concept. However, some exceptions are also observed. For example, as a classic piece of bel canto, "Red Bean Ci" has been used in teaching and singing for a long time. In audio and video materials, the performance of "Red Bean Ci" by soprano Yang Guang with bel canto focuses on the coherence of sound and the artistic conception of timbre, thereby reflecting its high artistic quality. Another attempt is the interpretation of the national singing method of this song. The singer Peng Liyuan has performed this song with the national singing method, which gives full play to the advantages of this method, highlights the features of the tone color and the words and rhymes, and presents the lingering euphemism of the song incisively and vividly. The ancient poetry art songs have a relatively broad space in singing [4].

Given the differences in cultural concepts and regional customs, more singers must attempt to sing this song and reflect the opera elements, chanting characteristics, and folk styles of ancient poetry art songs in music. In this way, the perfect interpretation of the style of this kind of work can be achieved. In addition to the combination of scientific vocalization methods, learning from traditional singing methods, such as opera singing, national singing, folk song minor singing, improving articulation, and embellishing skills are important to form diversified singing characteristics and unique singing styles.

2.4.2 Variety of vocal parts

The diversification of vocal part utilization means that a piece of music is not limited to one part. Thus, a single piece can be used for multiple parts. Few songs can be fully used in vocal music teaching. For example, soprano songs can also be used for other parts, such as mezzo-soprano or baritone. For the commonly used classical songs, the voice requirements of the original piece are usually respected, and thus attempts of changing the voices are rare. Some artistic songs have similarities in the singing of high, medium, and low voices between men and women without too many role limitations. However, singing a song in multiple parts is the best way to show and inherit the styles of ancient poetry art songs.

In line with the above argument, some singers have attempted to perform “I Live Upstream.” For example, the original in the collection of audio and video data is a soprano repertoire, which can be roughly divided into three kinds. The first kind is a soprano performing the song. Many sopranos have sung in G major to perform the song, such as the old generation of singers in Richard Zhang Quan, middle-aged singer Wang xiufen, Di bayer, and young singer Hang Ying. They have represented different times for the deduction of the song and performed a soprano of gentle, tactful tone, miss song lingering, and performance incisively and vividly. The second kind is tenor voices singing men and women, with bE in singing, such as the baritone Liao changyong and mezzo-soprano singer Liang Ning. They have used alto vigorously and full of sound, which are unique for the song. Their performances are richer in connotation and appeal. The third kind is to sing as tenor department, such as young tenor singers Shi Yijie and Fan Jingma. They have used the luxuriant timbre that tenor place must be interpreted with a piece of work. Consequently, they have provided distinct styles: firm and passionate and melodious and deep. Their performances have delivered a whole new audio–visual effect. The above examples well reflect the diversity of the use of voice parts in performing ancient poetry art songs.

2.4.3 Multi-angle artistic treatment

Pursuing scientific singing skills and focusing on cultivation and improvement of awareness and ability of interpretation are important in performing ancient poetry songs. In particular, the performance of ancient poetry art songs requires the singer to grasp accurately the connotation of the works and have a personal singing style when interpreting the songs. In this way, they can bring the artistic treatment of the works to new heights. Different singers performing the same piece of music present completely different musical styles. For example, the “Go East along the Great River” performances of two baritone singers Yang Xiaoyong and Liao Changyong are compared and studied. Yang Xiaoyong’s performance has shown an expression of emotion and a contrast between real and unreal voices. He also interpreted the whole song with a rich sense of hierarchy. While performing, Liao Changyong’s teacher has provided full play to the advantage of singing the Chinese work clear and strong. His voice has a natural sound, even though he has attempted to vary his tone. He put his focus on the coherence between phrases and poetic lines. Consequently, his expression is extremely clear, and his performance has rendered inner emotions incisively and vividly. Both singers are baritones, but they can start from their own advantages and show their unique personalities in their performances. The other version is performed by tenor Mohualen. As a dramatic tenor, Mohualen has focused on the narrative color of the song, thereby providing a full play to the dramatic conflict in the song and the tension of the music with a prominent sense of role.

III. Analysis —of “I Live on the Yangtze River”

3.1 Genre and subject matter of the poetry

The lyrics to “I Live on the Yangtze River” are originally written by a poet in the Northern Song Dynasty named Li Zhiyi. This study describes a woman’s deep feelings of missing her beloved by using the “divination operator” word plate and the pure and plain language tune of the folk song. It is a love song that celebrates constancy of love. The composer is known for his fresh and distant music, thereby providing the original poem with a deeper meaning [5]. Qing zhu is a revolutionary man with military achievements in the Revolution of 1911. He also provided his service

in the Great Revolution of crusade against the Northern warlords. He has witnessed the sacrifice of his comrades in arms for the revolution paid by the price of their blood. While composing the song “I Lived on the Yangtze River,” he has no choice but to live a life of self-proclaimed “desperate music” in obscurity. These special experiences and situation have encouraged him to rely on ancient love poems to express his deep yearning for the past years of fighting and his martyr comrades. Li Zhiyi’s poem has become the best medium for his expression of his feelings during these years of war.

3.2 Form, tone, and structure of piano accompaniment

“I live on the Yangtze river” has a long tune, and its music has a national style. However, this song is different from the folk song minor because it reflects sincere feelings and strict structure. It is a typical piece of Chinese traditional technique art song. The structure of the song has broken the “divination operator” of the original traditional structure of the word plate, that is, double diao. Que has generally adopted parallel repeated structure, but to tie down “When the water? Since when? I only wish you like my heart and live up to the meaning of acacia.” This song has been repeated for three times with different tonal colors, which have provided an increasing feeling of excitement. Finally, the *ff* passion has ended in the high-pitched area of the whole song.

The end of the phrase often appears downward or upward drawl. Both have the sound of reciting ancient poems, but this sound is more passionate than reciting poems. The composer has mostly used the common major and minor triads and seventh chords. Moreover, he has only used the reduced seventh chords in some places to add some pathos. The harmony is mellow, with natural tonal colors and national charm. The melody is broad, and the rhythm is extremely smooth, thereby forming a tight and slow effect with the accompaniment, symbolizing the endless love, and showing a kind of simple and mellow emotion. The piano accompaniment is composed of flowing sixteenth notes and broken chord patterns, as if a river of flowing water runs through the whole song.

3.3 Artistic treatment of the performances

Many singers have performed this work, such as soprano Zhang Quan, Wang Xiufen, Huang Ying, mezzo-soprano Liang Ning, and baritone Yang Xiaoyong. They have successfully performed different singing styles with their own understanding and interpretation of the work and treated their pieces differently.

3.3.1 Accurate grasp of emotional tone

Many people treat it like a love song when they sing it. Deeper understanding of the green master by embodying artistic conception based on the original word cannot have a new meaning. Thus, the singer must clearly know how to express a work of artistic conception reasonably and accurately. In particular, the singer must not simply perform it as a love song. Instead, they must embody the emotion of “love.” However, their embodiment of personal emotions must not limit the concept of love. Instead, they must channel the love of revolutionary workers sublimation of nationality and country love. They must learn not only to love deeply but also tragically. They also must learn how to control their speed to do a calm and unhurried expression of the meaning of the song. According to Professor Zhang Quan, a performance must reflect the feelings of “cold outside and hot inside.”

3.3.2 Experiencing the harmony of poetry and music, while grasping the relationship between emotion and sound

In the performance of this work, the singers must focus on the interdependence of emotion and sound through the sound of the close, play, rise, fall, and fusion of music lines to express emotion. In this way, music and poetry become one. Figure 1 shows the way Professor Zhang Quan perform the lyrics of “Will not disappoint your love.”



Never fall in love with each other

Fig 1. Will not disappoint your love

A good connection is used from the middle sound area down to the D sound, which is slightly close to the chest sound, to obtain a bit thicker, darker timbre. In this way, the song can be performed in line with its emotional needs. As a colorado-soprano, she can even sacrifice some beautiful voices to match further the content and emotions of the work [6]. The singers must make sound not only for sound's sake and use sound as a means of expressing content and emotional needs.

3.3.3 Forming sentences through words without destroying the integrity of the sentence

Words forming sentences is important when performing this song to create coherent expression of a complete meaning. Figure 2 shows an arrangement for the lyrics of "May your heart be like my heart", and "Will not disappoint your love."



Fig 2 “May your heart be like my heart” and “Will not disappoint your love”

Taking a breath until the word “negative,” instead at the second “heart,” damages the integrity of the sentence and does not conform to Chinese grammatical habits. Some people are taking a breath before the “phase” of “living up to the meaning of love” and directly sing the beginning of the fourth paragraph “When will this water stop?” with one breath. This technique does not only lack completeness but also break the feeling of the continuous music segment.

In this study, changing the tone after the word “negative” in the final phrase “live up to the loathsome meaning” is more appropriate than ending the whole song with full and firm breath. Other phrases must also cooperate with one another according to the meaning of the sentence and take breath one by one to maintain the coherence and integrity of the words and phrases. This technique is not only a test of one’s singing ability but also a reflection of individual musical aesthetics and literary accomplishment.

3.3.4 Using good breath control force and sound with multi-level changes

As shown in Figure 3, the word “shui” in the fourth sentence of the song means “to drink the water of the Yangtze River together.” This expression makes a four-degree jump from the small character E to the sound A.



Fig 3 Jump from the small character E to the sound A

Breath control can be used in the performance of the song to gradually change the sound intensity from P to PP to PPP and extend it to the next rest bar. The intensity of the above sound processing leaves a room for emotional expression, which is in line with the continuous artistic conception. Performing the central sentence of the whole song, “Never fall in love,” can be difficult for soprano, because this sentence is in the middle area. The “thought” can be used as appoganda processing. This technique sounds emotionally intimate and makes the connection of the “meaning” of the D sound easy and steady underground. This technique is also used at the end of the last sentence of the song. However, the ending sentence must be performed differently from the previous one. Taking a breath after the phrase “live up to it” interprets “lovesickness” with firmness, fullness, deep feeling, and strength. The word “meaning” falls on the G note of the two groups of small characters and has free extension processing, with the piano accompaniment chords. Long phrases have gradually disappeared. This song is full of thoughts about the distant motherland.

3.3.5 Comprehensive understanding of “round words”

The song is composed of “round words,” such as “Chang” (Figure 4), “drink the water of the Yangtze River together” (Figure 3), and “Shi” (when will the water stop).



Fig 4 Drink the water of the Yangtze River together

If these words are sung in accordance with the original music, they will be misheard as “drink together chang Jiang water” and “this water a few wet rests.” Thus, Professor Zhang Quan’s processing method can be used to solve this problem. A small third appogion is added to the word “long” to avoid inverted characters. Moreover, the closed

vowel “EI” sound must be released when performing the song to achieve “narrow word and wide song.” This technique also follows the rhythm of the word “water” and avoids sound congestion and jams. Professor Zhang Quan has handled this sentence in the same way. By listening carefully to recorded performances, he could easily distinguish the transition of “water” from “EI” to “AI.”

As for the understanding of the authentic Chinese word “word,” Professor Zhang Quan believes that being comprehensive is necessary, that is, focusing on the “word” and using correct pronunciation method to achieve the “cavity circle.” In actual performances, combining the national style with scientific methods is encouraged to achieve the integration of Chinese and western styles.

Among the ancient poetry and art songs in the 1920s and 1940s, “I Live on the Yangtze River” is chosen in this study as an example for analysis, because it has relatively high difficulty and depth and high artistic quality. Skills and singing techniques, sufficient desk work before the performance, in-depth study of the lyrics and music, appropriate grasp of emotional tone, and artistic background and musical accomplishment of the singers can bring great challenges to the interpretation of the work.

IV. Conclusion

The importance of art songs is evident to the development of the overall form of Chinese music in the 20th century. Moreover, 1920s to 1940s are the most important period of Chinese ancient poetry art songs. The songs in this period can also be considered the earliest representative of modern Chinese music culture reflecting the temporal development and overall progress of the nation. The ancient Chinese poetry songs in this period have influenced the creation and singing of Chinese music in the 20th century to some extent.

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