

## ART AND HISTORY GO HAND IN HAND: THE EVOLUTION OF CHINESE NATIONAL VOCAL MUSIC FROM THE YAN'AN PERIOD TO REFORM AND OPENING UP

Arte e história andam de mãos dadas: a evolução da música vocal nacional chinesa desde o período Yan'an até a reforma e abertura

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### ABSTRACT

The Yan'an area was an important base for China's revolution. It was also in Yan'an that the Chinese Communist Party brought a lot of political and theoretical knowledge to the local people and created a lot of artistic forms, one of which was vocal music. Driven by the "Red Gene," the work of the Red Army in the Yan'an area became smoother, and they communicated with the local people on a spiritual level through vocal works. In the past 40 years of reform and opening up, the development of the times and social changes, the public aesthetic concept has also quietly developed and changed, which has had a great impact on the development of national vocal music: the creation of a large number of excellent national vocal works to glorify the new era; the performance of both the traditional singing bright and sweet and Western Bel canto singing transparent and round. In terms of education, a large number of national vocal educators such as Jin Tielin, Zou Wenqin, Ma Qiuhua, etc. They have established a perfect education and training system and complete singing skills. This Paper discusses the development of national vocal music and analyzes the important breakthroughs and achievements in the field of national vocal music in three stages, composes the characteristics of national vocal music development itself, and analyzes and researches the various factors affecting it, so that we can think of danger in peace and create glory again.

**Keywords:** History; National vocal music; Yan'An period; In the early days of the founding of new china; Reform and opening Up; Development history

### RESUMO

A área de Yan'an foi uma base importante para a revolução da China. Foi também em Yan'an que o Partido Comunista Chinês trouxe muito conhecimento político e teórico para a população local e criou muitas formas artísticas, uma das quais foi a música vocal. Impulsionados pelo "Gene Vermelho", o trabalho do Exército Vermelho na área de Yan'an tornou-se mais suave e eles se comunicaram com a população local em um nível espiritual por meio de trabalhos vocais. Nos últimos 40 anos de reforma e abertura, desenvolvimento dos tempos e mudanças sociais, o conceito estético público também se desenvolveu e mudou silenciosamente, o que teve um grande impacto no desenvolvimento da música vocal nacional: a criação de um grande número de excelentes obras vocais nacionais para glorificar a nova era; a performance tanto do canto tradicional brilhante e doce quanto do bel canto ocidental transparente e redondo. Em termos de educação, um grande número de educadores vocais nacionais, como Jin Tielin, Zou Wenqin, Ma Qiuhua, etc. Eles estabeleceram um sistema de educação e treinamento perfeito e habilidades de canto completas. Este Trabalho discute o desenvolvimento da música vocal nacional e analisa os importantes avanços e conquistas no campo da música vocal nacional em três etapas, compõe as características do próprio desenvolvimento da música vocal nacional e analisa e pesquisa os vários fatores que a afetam, para que possamos pensar em perigo em paz e criar glória novamente.

**Keywords:** História; Música vocal nacional; Período Yan'An; Nos primeiros dias da fundação da Nova China; Reforma e Abertura; História do desenvolvimento

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of the theory of Chinese national vocal music Since the founding of New China still lags behind the singing practice. There are still many problems to be solved in theoretical research. After the reform and opening up, from the ideological awakening of some intellectuals at the beginning to the ideological awakening of all people, we are conscious of our own shortcomings and the direction of future development.

In the new era, Chinese national vocal music has prospered in inheritance and development, exploration, and innovation. While continuously summarizing the development of traditional vocal music, the process of building the theoretical system of national vocal singing has been further promoted. On the basis of paying attention to the promotion of traditional vocal culture, we reasonably draw on the study of Western vocal theory and vocal methods. The development pattern of diversified singing styles of Chinese national vocal music has been formed, and the national characteristics are clear and distinctive in the new era of Chinese national vocal music (Zhou, J, 2004).

Nowadays, with the progress of the times and the speed of economic growth, China's various cultural exchanges with other countries are becoming more and more frequent. China's music culture shows a situation of diversified integration. The diversified development of Chinese national vocal music is also a general trend (Yao, X, 2009). China needs to develop a more systematic and comprehensive theoretical knowledge of national vocal music, not only from the perspective of music and art but also from the perspective of physiology, psychology, social culture, and philosophy, in order to build a more solid theoretical system.

### Interpretation of Chinese National Vocal Music

Before the founding of the People's Republic of China, there were two main singing styles in Chinese vocal music: one was the Western

bel canto (commonly known as "a voice trained in the Western style of singing") that originated in Europe; the other was the folk singing that learned from traditional Chinese opera, folk art and folk singing styles (commonly known as "folk-styled singing"). In this period, national singing was the mainstream singing of revolutionary musicians. Due to objective historical reasons, these two singing styles were basically separated from each other and developed in parallel for a long time. After the founding of new China, literary and artistic troupes were adjusted and professional academies were established. A large number of revolutionary musicians and outstanding folk artists have successively become professional singers of professional literary and artistic groups, many as professional teachers of music schools. Accordingly, western and ethnic singing styles sang on the same stage and were taught in the same school. The contradiction between the two singing styles has become increasingly prominent, which has triggered the famous "dispute" in the history of contemporary Chinese vocal music.

Chinese national vocal music is a favorable fruit of the "dispute" in the 1950s and is an independent vocal art form. It has both similarities and differences with Chinese traditional vocal music art, both related, to their own individual features. In recent years, with the continuous deepening of China's reform and opening up, theoretical research on national vocal music has been gradually carried out. The discussion on national vocal music has shown a situation of a hundred schools of thought contending and each going their own way. But generally speaking, there are mainly the following interpretations of Chinese national vocal music.

According to Tang Xuegeng's (1963) *The Development and Improvement of National Vocal Music*: National vocal music in a broad sense includes traditional opera, folk art singing, and folk singing, in various and abundant forms. The national vocal music referred to here is actually national singing. It is an independent art form of vocal music. It

has both similarities and differences with traditional vocal music forms, both related, to their own individual features. Some people have said that "the school of national singing has already existed in our country, why do we need to create it". This is obviously a conflation of the singing traditions of opera and folk art with the new national singing art.

According to Jiang Jiexiang's (1979) *Exploration of National Singing*: The national singing can broadly include opera, folk art, folk songs, and creative singing with these three styles. National singing mentioned here is understood in a narrow sense, mainly referring to the technical styles and some rules used when singing vocal works with strong national styles. They are not only refined and inherited from traditional national singing styles such as opera, folk art, and folk songs, but at the same time, they have drawn on and absorbed the excellent works of Western singing styles.

## 2. OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT HISTORY OF CHINESE NATIONAL VOCAL MUSIC DURING THE YAN'AN PERIOD

The development of revolutionary morality during the Yan'an period was the result of many factors, and the cultural construction during the Yan'an period, especially the Yangge Opera Movement, played a huge role in promoting the spread of revolutionary morality and its role. The Yangge Opera Movement of the Yan'an period was rich in forms, powerful, far-reaching, and with many participants, among which the new opera was a particularly striking art form that drew on traditional art and embodied the style of the times and showed both national and regional characteristics and the expression style of foreign operas, presenting the revolutionary morality of the Yan'an period in a rich and diverse narrative (Yu, L., 2020). Studying the revolutionary moral narratives of the new operas of the Yan'an period not only helps to further understand the history and methods of the ideological and moral construction of the Chinese Communist Party but also has important implications for our understanding of the moral edification function of art. Ferreira da Silva argued that the established policies resulted in a more or

According to Ding Yaxian's (1995) *Selected National Vocal Music Teaching Songs*<Preface>: The national vocal music referred to today does not refer to the general term of various singing arts such as folk songs, raps, traditional operas, new songs, and operas, but a relatively narrow concept. It refers to the unique new national singing art represented by the national vocal music major in the current music academies in our country, which has the characteristics of scientific, national, artistic, and zeitgeist. It is not only different from the singing of folk songs, rap, and opera but also draws on and absorbs the singing theories and advantages of Western bel canto on the basis of inheriting and carrying forward the essence and characteristics of these traditional singing arts.

Therefore, this article starts with a narrow definition of Chinese national vocal music and further explores it.

less profound revision of some works according to the new values and ideas to be disseminated by the Chinese Communist Party (Ferreira, 2023).

The Construction of revolutionary morality during the Yan'an Period

The generation and development of Chinese revolutionary morality is an unprecedented revolution in the field of ethics and morality, marking the end of the feudalist ethical and moral system and creating a new stage in the development of Chinese ethics and morality, which has indelible epoch-making significance (Zhu, 2022). Chinese revolutionary morality refers to the fine morality formed by the Chinese Communists, the people's army, all advanced elements and the people during the New Democratic Revolution and the socialist revolution and construction in China. Chinese revolutionary morality sprouted around the May 4 Movement in 1919 and started from the great workers' and peasants' movements that flourished after the founding of the Chinese Communist Party. After the Long-term development of the Agrarian Revolutionary War, the War of Resistance against Japan, the War of Liberation and the Socialist



Revolution and Construction, it was gradually formed and carried forward (Luo, 2000).

#### The Yangge Opera Movement in Yan'an Period

The arrival of the Central Red Army in northern Shaanxi after the Long March attracted a large number of young artists and patriots to Yan'an, which became the high ground for leading China's resistance and a dazzling beacon to guide the direction of the Chinese revolution. From 1935 to 1948, under the leadership of the Communist Party

of China, the vast number of literary and artistic workers in Yan'an began to transform and develop traditional folk tunes from content to form in an organized and purposeful manner and set off a literary and art rectification action. A large number of excellent literary and artistic works emerged from this literary and art rectification action, among which the Yangge Opera is a magnificent flower of art in this remote but culturally profound land on the Loess Plateau, such as the Yangge Opera "Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland" shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1** - Yangge Opera Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland



**Source:** Wang Dahua and Li Bo from Yan'an Lu Xun Academy of Literature and Art performed the Yangge Opera "Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland" for the public at the square.

Released by Xinhua News Agency (photographed by Wu Yinxian)

[http://fms.news.cn/swf/2018qmtt/4\\_14\\_2018\\_qm/#zdg](http://fms.news.cn/swf/2018qmtt/4_14_2018_qm/#zdg)

Opera is originally a Western stage art, also known as "singing rather than speaking" vocal music. The theater tune of historic Greece is the beginning of opera, which seemed in Florence, Italy, around the seventeenth century and then unfolded swiftly around the world. Western opera is a fusion of regional and countrywide factors that have led to exclusive genres, such as

German opera, French opera, Russian opera, English opera, Spanish opera, etc. But opera is additionally special in that it is a kind of vocal song that makes use of singing and tune exceptionally or completely to provide an explanation for and specific the plot of the play. When opera used to be born in the early seventeenth century, the authentic intention used to boost an "elegant"

humanistic artwork for the enjoyment of the aristocracy and the excessive society. However, in the process of opera's dissemination, nationalization, and popularization became the important foothold of opera. Western opera was introduced into China during the May Fourth Movement, the art form was faced with the problem of integration with Chinese culture, and the idea of developing a "new opera" with Chinese characteristics was gradually proposed (Man, 2006).

#### The Revolutionary Moral Narrative of the New Opera

The creation and development of the new opera during the Yan'an period is a product of a special historical period, and its own value and significance go far beyond pure art itself; that is to say, the creation of the new opera is by no means the result of art for art's sake, but essentially it is an important artistic medium for the Chinese Communist Party to construct revolutionary moral identity, and the way it accomplishes revolutionary moral

identity is revolutionary moral narrative or revolutionary moral storytelling story. In layman's terms, narrative means storytelling and moral narrative means telling moral stories, or the stories told contain profound moral evaluation elements, that is, the purpose of promoting good and suppressing evil through storytelling. To construct a revolutionary moral identity in the form of opera is actually to complete the revolutionary moral narrative through opera and to influence the public extensively. The moral narrative of opera is a combination of various elements, such as the content of the moral story told, the narrator, the way of telling, and the effect of telling (Yu, L., 2020). Through the joint operation of these elements, it conveys to people the correct outlook on life, values, and morality and promotes the development of their moral character. The moral narrative of the new opera is more imaginative, vivid, and infectious, and thus more conducive to spreading revolutionary morality, as shown in Figure 2, the classic opera of the Yan'an period, The White Haired Girl.

**Figure 2** - Opera The White Haired Girl



**Source:** <http://www.cnoddt.com/cont.aspx?newsId=794&TId=9>

### 3. OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT HISTORY OF CHINESE NATIONAL VOCAL MUSIC IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE FOUNDING OF NEW CHINA

#### The Collision of the "Dispute"

There are two propositions in the process of the "dispute" in the vocal music circle at the beginning of the founding of New China. As shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** - Bel canto-oriented and National singing-oriented have their own opinions

Bel canto-oriented	National singing-oriented
It is believed that Bel canto is a complete and scientific theoretical system, which has a thorough and detailed explanation of the actual knowledge of human physiology, and has a set of practical research on the training of voice function. It is feasible.	It is believed that national singing is built on the basis of traditional Chinese opera and folk songs. It meets the national language requirements, has distinctive national characteristics, and is a powerful inheritance of traditional Chinese culture rooted in the broad masses of the people.
It is considered that advocating "national singing" is "pseudo-science", with a narrow range and hoarse timbre.	It is considered that advocating "bel canto" means "being subservient to foreigners", and that the bel canto has unclear pronunciation and pretentious expression.

In fact, the original intention of the discussion on the two singing styles is to explore the integration and innovation of the national singing style and Bel canto, to speed up the development of Chinese national vocal art and better serve the broad masses of people. However, it eventually turns from the academic contending of "dispute" into a controversy with extreme political slogans. It can be seen that the two singing styles existed in isolation during this period. This is their first collision, sparking greatly but not converging (Zhang, 2009).

#### The Convergence of "Dispute"

After several years of learning, understanding, and interpenetrating between "folk-styled singing" and "a voice trained in the Western style of singing", musicians have found that if they want to develop Chinese national vocal music, they must learn from Bel canto's advantages. Therefore, some musicians put forward the idea of establishing a "Chinese New Singing Style". In this regard, the "dispute" has gradually eased and moved towards "convergence". In 1957, China's first National Vocal Teaching Conference was held in Beijing. The meeting proposed that the Chinese new singing style should be closely related to the real life of the Chinese, absorb the essence of traditional Chinese folk singing, organically accept the advanced theories and methods of foreigners, create a

new music art that expresses the thoughts and feelings of the people of New China, is full of national style, and is rich in local national characteristics, and serve the goal of realizing the new socialist culture. The majority of musicians agree with this view, and finally determine to realize the unified thinking of "Sinicization of bel canto" and "Scientization of the folk-styled singing" on the basis of "national singing" and "bel canto". They propose to take its essence to remove its dross, learn from each other's strengths and move towards perfection so that this new singing art can be "national, scientific, and popular." The "Chinese New Singing Style" is different from the "bel canto" and "folk-styled singing". While fully absorbing the nutrients of the two singing styles, it must also meet the aesthetic and realistic needs of the Chinese. This conference enables the Chinese vocal music circle to basically reach a consensus on the two singing styles. Then, how to better combine the scientific and national characteristics of national vocal music, and promote the development of national vocal music in the direction of duality has become the focus of the vocal music circle. The convergence of the "dispute" has made everyone aware of the positive effects of Western Bel canto and traditional Chinese vocal art in developing Chinese national vocal music and even the development of Chinese vocal art. Therefore, everyone has ultimately maintained a calm and objective



attitude and has not been one-sided and emotional (Wang, S., 1995).

Looking back on this "dispute", it can be seen that the scope and nature of it have far exceeded the field of vocal music teaching and vocal performance. It has a profound impact on Chinese vocal music education

and has a universal significance on the development of contemporary Chinese music. The hidden historical reasons behind it are also worth pondering. During this period, China also gradually established some professional music colleges, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2** - Overview of the Development of Chinese national Vocal Music in Universities since In the early days of the founding of New China

<b>March 16, 1956</b>	The National Music Department of Northeast Music College (the former Shenyang Conservatory of Music), including the folk singing major, was established. At that time, the establishment of folk singing classes was called a milestone.
<b>1957</b>	Led by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, vocal music teaching conferences were held nationwide.
<b>1958</b>	The Folk Singing Major of Shenyang Conservatory of Music was merged into the Department of Vocal Music. The Vocal Music Department of the Middle School, Affiliated with Shenyang Conservatory of Music, created the "National Opera Class", which launched a 9-year or 10-year trial of national opera education from junior high school to university.
	Shanghai Conservatory of Music offered a major in national folk singing, mainly for minority students.
	Central Conservatory of Music set up a "National Vocal Music Room" in the Vocal Music Department.
<b>1961</b>	The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China made folk singing a formal major in music academies in its educational work plan and named it the national vocal music major.
<b>1963</b>	Hubei University of Arts (the former Wuhan Conservatory of Music) officially established the National Vocal Music Major.
<b>1964</b>	China Conservatory of Music was established. It began to uphold the critical mission of cultivating professional talents in national vocal music.

#### 4. OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT HISTORY OF CHINESE NATIONAL VOCAL MUSIC AFTER THE REFORM AND OPENING UP

By Chinese national vocal music mainly refers to the use of the Chinese language, singing vocal works in line with the aesthetic characteristics of the Chinese nation, it is a vocal art form based on opera, rap, and folk songs. After the founding of New China, under the Party's "blossoming of a hundred flowers", "pushing out new ideas", and "using the ancient for the present", "using the foreign for the Chinese", etc. The Party and the government vigorously supported national vocal music.

The period of vigorous development of national vocal music

After the reform and opening up, along with the historical flood of reform and opening up, China entered a period of rapid development, and China's cultural and artistic undertakings have changed rapidly. Many national vocalists were freed from their previous ideological constraints, and music education began to develop rapidly, resulting in the emergence of many outstanding musicians. During this period, the art of national vocal music took a new leap forward in terms of composition techniques, subject matter, genre singing techniques, voice cadences, character and style of works, artistic expressiveness, etc (Li, 2022). China also established more disciplines and music universities specializing in vocal music during this period, and Chinese vocal music also ushered in the spring of development, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3 - Overview of the Development of National Vocal Music in Chinese Universities after the Reform and Opening up**

<b>June 8, 1985</b>	The National Vocal Music Department of the Shenyang Conservatory of Music was established, which was the first department-level organizational system established in the higher music academies nationwide after China's reform and opening up.
<b>July 1990</b>	Peng Liyuan, China's first master's degree student in national vocal music, graduated from the China Conservatory of Music.
<b>2009</b>	China Conservatory of Music recruited doctoral students in the field of national vocal performance art for the first time.
<b>2019</b>	China Conservatory of Music officially renamed the "National Singing Direction" recruited by the Department of Vocal Music and Opera as "Chinese Vocal Music" in its admissions guide.
<b>2020</b>	China Conservatory of Music established the China Academy of Vocal Music Art.
<b>2021</b>	China Conservatory of Music named the Department of Vocal Music and Opera as the "China Academy of Vocal Music Art" in its admissions guide.

The rapid development of national vocal music education after the reform and opening up

After the 1980s, many famous foreign singers and vocal educators came to China to exchange or lecture, which enriched Chinese vocal art resources. A number of excellent vocal educators emerged nationwide, such as Jiang Jiaxiang and Jin Tielin. They have gained a deeper understanding and insight into the theoretical system of vocal methods and other aspects of Western Bel canto through their studies. They have borrowed the strengths of Western Bel canto education and applied them to Chinese national vocal education, which has brought Chinese national vocal education to a flourishing stage. The author mainly focuses on Professor Jin Tielin as the representative. Jin Tielin is a famous Chinese

vocal educator. He made an indelible contribution to the development of Chinese national vocal music. He has created a scientific system of national vocal theory, trained a large number of excellent national musicians, and written many theoretical teaching materials. He proposed the development direction of "scientific", "artistic", "national," and "contemporary" for the field of Chinese national vocal music. He also created the "Seven Character Criteria" for national vocal music, namely, sound, emotion, enunciation, taste, performance, cultivation, and image, which defined a standard for national vocal music (Yang, 2005). Combined with the Western Bel canto theories and techniques of a beautiful voice, he created a series of scientific theoretical systems and standards for Chinese national vocal music. Figure 3 shows the famous vocal music educator Jin Tielin.

**Figure 3 - Famous vocal educator Jin Tielin**



**Source:** [https://m.thepaper.cn/baijiahao\\_20748666](https://m.thepaper.cn/baijiahao_20748666)



At the same time, he struggled in the front line of national vocal music education, teaching and educating people tirelessly, treating students according to their abilities and training a large number of excellent musicians, such as Li Guyi (Figure 4), Yan Weiwen, Song Zuying and so on. He has published monographs and audio-visual products such as "Jin Tielin's Vocal Music Teaching Method", "Jin Tielin's Art of Vocal Music Teaching" and "Jin Tielin's Selected Vocal Music Teaching Songs", which provide reliable theoretical reference materials for Chinese national vocal music education. At

the same time, he did not forget to conduct various lectures on national vocal music and participate in various national vocal music seminars. At this time, Chinese national vocal education had entered a stage of vigorous development, both in professional music colleges and schools and in teacher training. In 1980, the Ministry of Education issued the "Four-Year Undergraduate Music Teaching Plan for Higher Teacher Training Schools (Draft for Trial Implementation)" (Sun, 1990), which led to the standardization of teacher training and the emergence of various national vocal music events.

**Figure 4 -** Famous singer Li Guyi



**Source:** [https://www.sohu.com/a/397864489\\_99895911](https://www.sohu.com/a/397864489_99895911)

After the 1980s, professional music education entered a flourishing stage. Under the leadership of Jin Tielin and others, Chinese national vocal education reasonably borrowed from the Western Bel canto vocal theory system and cultivated a large number of singers with national characteristics and individuality of the times. In the vocal method, the true-false mix of the Western Bel canto

vocal method was borrowed to make the vocal range more harmonious and unified, while the core of the traditional Chinese vocal music method was continued without losing the Chinese traditional charm (Dai, J., 2017). As shown in Figure 5, Song Zuying and Domingo sang the theme song "Flame of Love" of the closing ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

**Figure 5** - Song Zuying and Domingo sang the theme song "Flame of Love" of the closing ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games



**Source:** <http://yule.sohu.com/20080825/n259197042.shtml>

The development of national vocal music has been promoted by the holding of various seminars and musical events

After 1978, musicologists, composers, singers, and music educators from all over the country often held music seminars throughout the country, such as seminars on national vocal music. This not only promoted the perfection of national vocal theory but also created an atmosphere of academic discussion about national vocal music, and it is said that there is progress only when there is a discussion (Li, 2022).

The improvement of people's living standards and the introduction of new media technology

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, today, Chinese national vocal music has always been advancing with the background of social changes and political and economic prosperity. The construction of the discipline system of Chinese national vocal music is an evolving process and is closely related to the specific level of understanding of each period. At present,

in this period made music events appear in people's view, such as the first CCTV Young Singers Television Grand Prix, which was founded in May 1984 and was dedicated to promoting the art of national vocal music and popularizing music knowledge, raising people's awareness of national vocal music, and cultivating a number of mainstays of Chinese national vocal music, such as Peng Liyuan, Yan Weiwen, Zhang Ye, Song Zuying, etc (Zhao, 2008). After the reform and opening up, with the holding of various seminars and musical events, the popularity and development of Chinese national vocal music have been greatly promoted.

Chinese national vocal music has made remarkable achievements in creation, performance, and theory. It has formed a sound momentum of unprecedented prosperity and the joint development of various performance styles. No art is immutable. Facing the diversified development trend of world culture, Chinese national vocal music will definitely continue to learn from others' strengths and make

continuous corrections. On the basis of abiding by the characteristics of the national style and color temperament, Chinese national vocal music will actively absorb the essence of other music and art, thereby enriching and strengthening itself, and forging ahead in the direction of diversification. While Chinese national vocal music is booming at present, it should gather more strength to create new brilliance, develop itself with a more open mind, keep up its unique charm, to create our own school of vocal music, so that Chinese vocal art can be unique in the world of music and stand proudly in the world vocal art forest.

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