

Different Masters' Educational Methods on the Same Problem Based on the Present Situation of Vocal Education——Take 8 videos of 6 vocalists as an example

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Abstract. The master class in vocal teaching has a significant impact on the improvement of students' vocal skills. This study aims to analyze the similarities and differences in vocal teaching between China and Western countries by comparing videos of master classes, and explore the cultural and societal reasons behind these differences. Six master classes from renowned vocal masters from both China and Western countries were selected as research samples. The analysis was conducted using a framework that includes cultural background and traditions, teacher-student relationships and interactions, and music theory and technical teaching. The analysis revealed that similarities in vocal teaching between China and Western countries include aspects such as expanding educational enhancements, demonstration and imitation, and personalized teaching. Differences were observed in warm-up exercises before singing, the timing of raising questions during singing, and the overall atmosphere of the class. Based on these findings, it is proposed that future vocal teaching should follow a teaching approach of "question-exploration-communication," preserving the strengths of existing educational models while learning and incorporating advanced aspects of Western vocal education.

Keywords: Vocal music teaching; Chinese and Western vocal master class; similarity and difference analysis.

1. Introduction

With the development of the times and continuous advancements in vocal education models, international masterclasses in vocal training have gained popularity among domestic vocal teachers and students as a novel teaching approach. Simultaneously, many institutions and art organizations in China invite Western vocal masters to conduct lectures.

Due to historical and cultural influences, varying levels of vocal development, and differences in educational philosophies, each vocal master may have distinct perspectives on similar vocal issues encountered by students, proposing different improvement strategies. In China, vocal masters typically provide detailed explanations after students' performances, addressing aspects such as how a particular phrase should be sung and under what conditions. Additionally, they emphasize overall feelings during singing by incorporating demonstrations and improvements in details.^① Western vocal masters, on the other hand, focus on correcting issues promptly during students' song performances, ensuring correction before allowing students to proceed, and integrating technical knowledge into practical application^②.

This study aims to analyze the similarities and differences in vocal teaching between China and Western countries through a comparison of masterclass videos. It seeks to understand the cultural and societal reasons behind these disparities, providing insights into specific aspects of vocal education. By doing so, this research aims to broaden perspectives, enrich teaching knowledge, and guide vocal educators in integrating Western vocal teaching strengths without blindly adhering to Western theories. Furthermore, the comparison of overall content in vocal education between China and Western countries can promote cross-cultural understanding, identify commonalities and distinctive

features in vocal teaching, and facilitate the adoption of effective teaching strategies to enhance vocal education.

Despite significant advancements in China's vocal domain, there is still room for improvement in the overall vocal education system. Some institutions may overly focus on technical details, neglecting students' comprehensive development in music theory, artistic expression, and stage performance. Integrating vocal education with other art forms, such as dance and drama, is crucial for enhancing students' overall artistic literacy.

To meet the demands of personalized, diversified, and international vocal development in the current era, China's vocal education system needs to be reformed. This includes establishing a system where students autonomously learn vocal subjects, with teachers guiding vocal subjects and exploring related art subjects to facilitate students' understanding of vocal learning. Recognizing the importance of traditional Chinese vocal arts, such as Peking opera, alongside Western classical and popular vocal styles, is essential for achieving a well-rounded vocal education.^③

Challenges persist in China, such as unequal distribution of educational resources and a shortage of qualified teachers in some regions. These issues lead to unclear teaching objectives, methods, and key points, hindering effective vocal learning. To address these challenges, it is imperative to enhance the knowledge and teaching philosophies of vocal educators. Combining Western and Eastern elements in vocal education is crucial, and the current debate on how to balance and integrate both perspectives needs further exploration.

In conclusion, this study focuses on the comparative analysis of similarities and differences in vocal teaching between Chinese and Western vocal masters. By examining disparities in vocal education, this research aims to contribute to the better development of research in the field of vocal professional education. The study analyzes and summarizes perspectives from seven vocal masters based on eight videos, exploring different solutions proposed by each master for the same vocal issue encountered by singers.

2. Research Design

2.1. Research Subjects

The research subjects for this study are masterclasses conducted by vocal masters in both Chinese and Western contexts. Specifically, six renowned vocal masters (Carlo Bergonzi, Plácido Domingo, Zhang Liping, Huang Ying, Wei Song, Shi Yijie) were selected for comparison. Although there may be some limitations in the sample selection, it remains beneficial for finding suitable educational methods for each teacher and expanding perspectives.

2.2. Research Process

By searching video platforms in China and Western countries, six vocal videos from the selected masters were obtained. These videos were organized and labeled as A-G. Using a video case study method, the research involved repeated viewings of the six videos to analyze the vocal teaching activities of the masters and their interactions with students, ultimately deriving relevant research findings.

In addition, this study primarily employed an analytical framework encompassing cultural background and traditions, teacher-student relationships and interactions, and music theory and technical teaching. The analysis of cultural background and traditions focused on exploring differences in music cultures between China and Western countries, including the history, development, styles, traditions, and significant values of music. It also delved into the traditions of vocal music in different cultures, encompassing technical features, singing styles, and musical forms. The analysis of teacher-student relationships and interactions primarily examined interactions and student participation, aiming to accurately assess the interaction patterns between students and

teachers. The comparison of music theory and technical teaching involved analyzing differences in music theory education between Chinese and Western vocal classrooms, including theoretical content and learning methods, to discover disparities in educational approaches and facilitate a comprehensive understanding with the goal of mutual learning.

The use of these frameworks allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the similarities and differences in vocal teaching between China and Western countries, contributing to a better understanding of the cultural, social, and educational aspects influencing vocal education.

3. Similarities in the Teaching of Chinese and Western Vocal Music Masters

3.1. Expanding and Enhancing Vocal Techniques

Regardless of whether in China or West, masterclasses conducted by vocal masters typically require students to have a certain level of music theory knowledge, including basic concepts such as tonality, intervals, and rhythm. For example, in tonality, students are expected to understand the types and characteristics of major and minor scales, how to distinguish them by ear, and then build upon this foundation to elevate their singing abilities in musical performances. This helps students gain a deeper understanding of the structure and elements of songs, thereby enhancing their overall musical literacy.

As seen in the case of the renowned Chinese tenor Zhang Jianyi, who studied under the "Prince of Tenors" Franco Corelli abroad, Corelli's teaching method involved placing a large mirror on the studio wall with a drawn ball on it, striking the ball on the ground, and observing how high it bounced.^④ This metaphor illustrated breath support, emphasizing that the deeper the breath, the higher the rebound. Hence, in masterclasses, students are generally expected to possess a certain level of music theory knowledge to engage with the advanced knowledge presented by the masters. Masters often delve into deeper technical aspects, addressing issues that may arise due to cultural differences, such as high larynx problems influenced by the impression of traditional Chinese opera.

3.2. Demonstration and Imitation in Teaching Methods

Both Chinese and Western vocal masters employ demonstration as a teaching method to facilitate effective imitation by students. Given the abstract nature of vocal and other art disciplines, which are often intangible and require a certain level of perceptiveness, demonstration becomes a powerful tool for conveying concepts efficiently. Students may not always perceive certain aspects due to personal shortcomings or cultural differences, necessitating the need for demonstration and imitation.

For instance, in a masterclass held by the Chinese tenor Shi Yijie in Shenzhen, he emphasized that "how high notes are sung often depends on how the preceding notes are sung." He demonstrated an error by stopping at the cheek while singing "cer can do io vo" in the opera aria "E la solita storia," resulting in a muffled sound and a potential difficulty in reaching high notes in the following lyrics. Subsequently, he provided language-based explanations and demonstrated the correct vocal technique to guide students in rectifying their errors.^⑤ This illustrates the importance of demonstration and imitation, especially in the early stages of learning or when students struggle to find suitable methods.

As the saying goes, "Those rich in creativity must be adept at imitation, as those who are not skilled in imitation cannot create."^⑥ This highlights why vocal masters, both Chinese and Western, incorporate demonstration into their masterclasses and underscores the significance of imitation for students in the initial stages of learning or when facing challenges in finding effective methods.

3.3. Teaching Philosophy of Tailoring Instruction to Individual Needs

In the realm of personalized teaching, whether in China or Western countries, the common approach is to assess students' voice types, vocal ranges, and tonal qualities. By understanding the unique characteristics of each student's voice, personalized training plans or guidance for addressing specific

issues can be designed to help them fully unleash their potential. This principle is exemplified by Chinese tenors Zhang Jianyi and Fan Jingma, both renowned in their country, who studied under the Italian tenor Franco Corelli.

For instance, when facing the high larynx issue in Zhang Jianyi's singing, Corelli used a direct instructional approach, providing guidance such as "Ensure the larynx is not high; the higher you sing, the lower you should feel your larynx." On the other hand, Fan Jingma exhibited signs of excessive imitation during his initial performance in Corelli's class. Instead of immediately addressing the issue, Corelli spent 45 minutes guiding Fan to discover his authentic voice. Through repeated trial and error, discouraging Fan's tendency to imitate his idol, Corelli ultimately succeeded in helping Fan sing in his most natural and genuine state.⁷

This teaching philosophy emphasizes the importance of tailoring instruction to the individual needs of each student, recognizing and addressing their specific vocal challenges and potential imitative tendencies. The goal is to guide students towards discovering and embracing their unique, authentic voices, allowing them to reach their fullest potential in vocal expression.

4. Differences in Vocal Teaching between Chinese and Western Masters

4.1. Disparities in the Duration of Vocal Warm-up Exercises

Western vocal masters tend to place greater emphasis on the holistic functioning of the body during singing. For instance, an American university professor incorporates a series of warm-up exercises before singing. These exercises range from head and neck movements to shoulder, waist, leg, and full-body exercises, interspersed with breath exercises.⁸ This approach facilitates the comprehensive opening and mobilization of bodily functions, achieving a state of relaxation, naturalness, and correctness in singing while ensuring adherence to standard techniques. This method aims to enable singers to perform with a relaxed, natural, and correct utilization of various body parts during singing or performing. In contrast, Chinese vocal classrooms often lack pre-singing warm-up exercises⁹, focusing primarily on voice, breath, and resonance exercises. Such practices fall short in achieving a comprehensive opening of the overall physical state because singing involves coordinated functioning of the entire body. Singing is a holistic engagement that requires coordination and collaboration of vocal, respiratory, and bodily components. To elaborate further, singers not only need to sing but also to perform; meaning they should express the emotions of the song through appropriate gestures and facial expressions. If the emphasis is solely on internal vocal aspects and neglects external expression, the overall performance may suffer.

Therefore, the incorporation of pre-singing warm-up exercises, as seen in Western vocal teaching methods, ensures a more thorough and effective preparation of the body for singing, encompassing both physical and expressive elements of vocal performance. This approach enhances the overall singing experience and contributes to a more compelling and well-rounded vocal presentation.

4.2. Differences in the Timing of Master's Questions during Teaching

Western masters tend to be more meticulous and detailed in their teaching process. For instance, in the master class of the renowned Italian tenor Carlo Bergonzi, when instructing students on singing the tenor aria "E la solita storia" from the opera "L'Arlesiana,"¹⁰ he promptly stops the pianist when a student encounters an issue with a specific detail, provides correction, and allows the student to continue only after the problem is addressed. In contrast, many Chinese masters prefer to wait until the student completes the entire piece before summarizing specific shortcomings and offering improvement suggestions. For example, in the video featuring the Chinese tenor master Wei Song guiding a student preparing for an artistic exam, this approach is applied.¹¹ It is not to say that Wei Song's method is inferior; however, in a personal opinion, Bergonzi's approach demonstrates a more targeted educational strategy by correcting and guiding students at the first instance of a problem.

This can prevent the formation of muscle memory from the initial flawed performance, reducing the likelihood of developing incorrect singing habits in the future. Moreover, immediate correction by Bergonzi's method can capitalize on the potential state of memory reset immediately after singing, whereas the summary-based approach may be less effective in addressing this phenomenon.

4.3. Differences in the Dynamism of the Master Class Teaching Atmosphere

Due to historical and educational differences, the atmosphere in western teachers' classrooms is generally more relaxed and lively. They often use humorous language or mimic animal sounds to guide student learning, as seen in the cases of Luciano Pavarotti and soprano Mirella Freni. Such methods can encourage and inspire students to actively engage in vocal learning while allowing them to associate abstract vocal techniques with real-life objects, resulting in a more effective learning outcome. In contrast, influenced by Confucian culture, Chinese teachers often create a more serious atmosphere, with fewer using external teaching methods to vividly instruct students on the correct singing techniques. Additionally, the traditional emphasis on criticism before encouragement in the Chinese education system has contributed to a more stringent approach. While this approach helps cultivate students' resilience, motivation, diligence, and solid foundational music knowledge, it can also lead to increased academic pressure, diminished interest, and even boredom, which are not conducive to effective learning.

5. Research Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, it is evidence that Chinese and Western vocal masters share similarities in expanding and enhancing vocal techniques, the use of demonstration and imitation in teaching methods, and the teaching philosophy of tailoring instruction to individual students. However, differences exist in the duration of vocal warm-up exercises before teaching, the timing of master-initiated questions during teaching, and the dynamism of the atmosphere in master classes. It is crucial not to blindly assume that Western vocal teaching is universally superior to Chinese vocal teaching.

In light of these findings, improvement measures in vocal education can follow the steps of "problem-exploration-communication." In future vocal teaching, it is essential to retain the strengths of current methods while learning and incorporating teaching styles and approaches from Western vocal education. This should be done in consideration of the specific circumstances of Chinese students. The goal is to enhance learning efficiency, vocal performance levels, and cultivate talents that align with the trends of the new century.

However, this study has certain limitations. Firstly, while it mentions several vocal masters such as Bergonzi, Domingo, Wei Song, and Zhang Liping, there is still a shortage of specific cases, potentially leading to a lack of objectivity. Therefore, more cases involving various vocal masters are needed to strengthen the study's objectivity. Secondly, the lack of data support weakens the theoretical foundation. The inclusion of practical data, such as students' academic performance and feedback from musical performances, would enhance the robustness of the theoretical framework.

Given these limitations, future research could adopt an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating fields such as psychology and education to gain a more comprehensive understanding. When conditions permit, on-site research methods, including direct observation of master classes and interviews with students and vocal masters, could provide more specific and in-depth data.

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