

A STUDY ON CHINESE BEL CANTO TEACHING METHODS

Bel canto, as one of the key expressive forms in Western classical music, was introduced to China in the early 20th century – during the cultural transformations of the "New Culture Movement" (around 1919), when the first professional conservatories, such as the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music (founded in 1927), began actively adopting European vocal traditions under the influence of Italian and Russian émigré pedagogues. Since then, bel canto has undergone a prolonged popularization process: from elite professional music schools to a broad spectrum of educational institutions, including secondary specialized colleges, general music education in public schools, and even online platforms in recent decades, making it an integral part of modern Chinese vocal culture.

The aim of the study is to analyze the structure and content of bel canto teaching methods in Chinese music education and to assess their impact on the formation of students' vocal literacy (technical, interpretive, and stage-performance skills).

The main part. In Chinese vocal education, the academic bel canto method has become the dominant approach, particularly in leading institutions like the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. This method has proven its effectiveness by producing a galaxy of outstanding talents – from international competition laureates (e.g., Zhao Chunhun, winner of the "Gold Medal" at the International Vocal Competition in Toulouse) to soloists in the world's leading opera houses. Over decades, substantial pedagogical experience has been accumulated, including the adaptation of European techniques to Asian vocal physiology and cultural specifics.

However, despite these successes, practice has revealed serious issues: a significant portion of graduates (according to internal studies from Chinese conservatories, up to 60–70%) fail to develop a stable scientific vocal state – i.e., a harmonious balance of registers, free breathing, and resonant tone – by the time of graduation. Even students with exceptional natural gifts (flexible timbre, wide range) often must "return to school" for remedial courses or retraining under foreign specialists post-diploma, indicating systemic shortcomings. The root cause lies in teachers' incomplete or superficial grasp of bel canto's core concepts (such as "appoggio" – breath support, "chiaroscuro" – balance of brightness and darkness in timbre) and modern scientific vocal methods grounded in anatomophysiological data (acoustics of the vocal tract, laryngeal biomechanics). This results in mismatched pedagogies: overemphasis on sound at technique's expense, neglect of Chinese vocalists' anthropometric traits, or uncritical replication of European templates without local adaptation.

Optimal vocal education demands that teachers master not only the principle of "aptitude-based teaching" (differentiated approaches accounting for physiology, timbre, and musical background) and individualized treatment of vocal flaws but also strict adherence to objective universal laws of vocal phonetics – from acoustic resonance principles to psychological mechanisms of artistic expression, which exhibit cross-linguistic and cross-cultural consistency. In this context, the present article aims for a systematic analysis of the structure and content of bel canto teaching methods in China, evaluation of their impact on students' musical literacy formation (technical, interpretive, stagecraft), and development of practical recommendations for process optimization – from hybrid lesson formats to integration of extracurricular factors – to achieve superior outcomes in cultivating globally competitive vocalists [1].

The methodological foundation consists of a systemic approach (viewing bel canto as a holistic system with interactions between technique, culture, and pedagogy), a competency-based approach (focusing on the formation of students' vocal competencies), an anthropological approach (accounting for individual psychophysiological characteristics of vocalists in the Chinese context), and a cultural approach (analyzing the adaptation of Western bel canto to Eastern musical traditions). These approaches enable a comprehensive study of bel canto adaptation in Chinese music pedagogy.

The following theoretical methods were employed:

1. Analysis of scientific literature: works by Shen Xiang ("Bel canto vocal pedagogy in China: historical aspect", which examines the evolution of the method since the 1920s and issues of cultural adaptation) and Jin Teling ("Modern challenges in bel canto Teaching", emphasizing the mismatch between traditional European techniques and Chinese vocal anatomy while proposing hybrid models) were studied. Dissertations on vocal pedagogy (e.g., on mastery formation through bel canto techniques) were also reviewed.

2. Comparative method: comparison of traditional (individualistic, experience-oriented) and modern (group-based, motivation-oriented) approaches based on effectiveness criteria, with examples from Chinese conservatories (Shanghai and Beijing).

3. Synthesis and generalization: integration of pedagogical experiences from leading Chinese vocal schools (data from 15 publications, 2015-2025), forming recommendations for method optimization.

Based on the methodological analysis conducted, we can now proceed to a detailed examination of specific bel canto teaching methods (Table) in Chinese music institutions. These methods are classified by degree of systematization, student orientation, and lesson format, allowing us to identify their strengths and weaknesses in the context of cultural adaptation of Western vocal traditions.

Table – Teaching Methods

Teaching method	Characteristics	Advantages	Disadvantages	Lesson format
Traditional	Basic training (posture, breathing, muscle coordination, breath stability)	High systematization, solid skill foundation	Passive learning, teacher experience dependency, suppression of individuality	Individual lessons
Integrated	Combination of technique, expression, creativity; practice + peer evaluation	Balanced development, relaxed atmosphere, effective literacy improvement	Requires high teacher qualification	Individual + group (3-5 students)
Modern	Student-centered, games, improvisation, motivation	High engagement, interest development, broadened horizons	Weakening of systematic technical base	Group/small groups

This table compares the three bel canto teaching methods, highlighting their specifics for Chinese music education.

Traditional teaching methods emphasize basic training, mainly in singing posture, breathing methods, muscle coordination, and breath stability, and are usually taught one-on-one. This teaching method is highly systematic and can quickly lay a solid foundation for students' singing; however, it largely relies on the teacher's own experience and understanding, which makes the students' understanding relatively abstract and their learning very passive. This leads to the suppression of individuality and poor learning results. It is basically equivalent to one-way indoctrination and ignores the interactivity and personalization that art education should have [2].

The integrated teaching method combines the advantages of traditional teaching methods with modern music education concepts, emphasizing the coordinated development of technique, expression, and creativity. In terms of course format, it combines individual and group lessons, typically in groups of 3-5 students. The teacher explains, then students practice and evaluate each other, culminating in a summary. This relatively fast-paced teaching style allows for a more relaxed and effective improvement of students' overall musical literacy.

Modern teaching methods are student-centered, emphasizing the stimulation of learning motivation and the enjoyment of the learning process, and are often seen in group classes or small group classes. This teaching method is easy to stimulate students' autonomy and enthusiasm, and increase their aesthetic accumulation of art songs. Classrooms generally use music games, improvisation, and other means to increase student participation, thereby cultivating students' musical interest and broadening their musical horizons. However, if the systematic nature of technical training is weakened too much, it may lead to students having weak basic singing skills [3].

Thus, the analysis of traditional, integrated, and modern bel canto teaching methods reveals their complementarity: traditional methods establish the technical foundation, integrated methods ensure a balance of skills and creativity, and modern methods stimulate motivation and artistic development. The choice of method depends on lesson objectives, students' preparation level, and available resources. Below are the lesson formats that serve as the basis for implementing these methods.

Individualized lessons are the most common form of bel canto instruction, typically one lesson per week, lasting 45 minutes to one hour. This teaching method emphasizes differentiated instruction, allowing teachers to develop personalized teaching plans based on individual student differences and provide immediate and in-depth guidance on specific problems. Its advantages lie in its strong focus and timely feedback, but it may, to some extent, neglect the cultivation of students' musical sensitivity and creativity. Individual teaching methods:

1. Basic training (vocal exercises, including scales, arpeggios and chord progressions, with the teacher emphasizing diaphragmatic breathing, larynx stability and resonance points).

2. Review of the song (after the students sing the song in its entirety, the teacher corrects the pitch, rhythm and pronunciation problems line by line, and provides guidance on emotional expression and musical interpretation).

3. Stage performance guidance (teachers demonstrate singing and guide students to correctly convey the emotions of the song through vocal changes). Through a teaching method that emphasizes both teacher-led technical training and guided musical understanding, students' comprehensive bel canto literacy is improved [4].

Group bel canto teaching methods begin with establishing group rules and dividing students into subgroups by student ID numbers for initial learning guidance. This is followed by theoretical explanations of a specific technical principle, such as "how to master the 'opening' technique in bel canto singing," after which immersive practice engages students directly, allowing them to experience the correct mastery of the "three elements of singing." Groups conduct internal evaluations of the lesson content, followed by inter-group comparisons, with the teacher providing comprehensive evaluation and feedback to each group at the conclusion.

The teaching process in music classes represents musical practice itself, accounting for students' differences in age, living conditions, and personal experience, which influence their understanding and imagination of musical works. Teachers must address these individual differences by creating an equal and harmonious classroom atmosphere, flexibly employing appropriate methods and tools, helping students build confidence and courage, guiding them toward active participation in practice, and igniting their passion for learning through hands-on experience to effectively achieve educational objectives.

The methodological hallmarks of this approach lie in using activities as a medium, emphasizing interaction, collaboration, and creativity, while integrating technical training into games and experiential learning.

Conclusion. The application of teaching methods spans basic training – an indispensable foundation of bel canto regardless of format: in individual lessons, it is personalized to students' specific issues and ability levels, while in group lessons, it develops through collective practice and collaboration. Repertoire study, as the core of instruction, involves selecting pieces matched to singing levels and vocal ranges in individual settings for targeted mastery of technique and expression; in group lessons, selections suit the group's average level to expand musical understanding through interaction and joint performance. Stage performance, a vital aspect of artistic practice, receives detailed demonstrations in individual lessons, whereas group settings enhance musical expressiveness via interactive collaboration, including opera analysis and improvisation, to cultivate keen emotional perception.

Moreover, bel canto mastery quality depends not only on classroom technical training but also on extracurricular factors like cultural literacy, language skills, and psychological well-being. Private lessons alone cannot cultivate well-rounded talents, so students are encouraged to explore Eastern and Western music history, literature, and religion to deepen work comprehension; master foreign language pronunciation via a "pronunciation-semantics-tone" model; and combat performance anxiety through cognitive-behavioral therapy, relaxation exercises, and low-risk platforms. Teachers boost confidence via musical activities and real scenarios like concerts, transcending the "practice without performance" model. Higher art institutions should foster interplay between in-class and extracurricular activities, integrate technology and humanities, incorporate these factors into teaching design, and guide students from "technical performers" to "complete artists" – with teachers providing practice platforms and support, and students embracing extracurricular exploration as integral to professional growth.

Since its introduction to China in the early 20th century, bel canto singing has become widespread in music education, but it faces challenges from inappropriate teaching methods. Currently, there are three main teaching methods: traditional, comprehensive, and modern. The traditional method emphasizes basic training but neglects individuality and interaction; the comprehensive method integrates technique, expression, and creativity and combines individual and group lessons; the modern method is student-centered and emphasizes learning motivation and enjoyment but may weaken technical training. In terms of course format, individual lessons emphasize individualized instruction, while group lessons emphasize interaction and cooperation. Teaching methods have different focuses in basic training, repertoire learning, and stage performance. At the same time, extracurricular factors such as cultural literacy, language ability, and psychological qualities have an important impact

on bel canto learning. Future teaching should focus on the diversity of methods, the complementarity of course formats, and the integration of extracurricular factors to improve teaching quality.

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**PROBLEMS IN MODERN PIANO TEACHING METHODS
FOR CHILDREN**

Piano education is an important part of aesthetic education for children worldwide. In recent decades, with the rapid development of economy, culture and educational technology, piano learning has become increasingly popular among families. However, behind the prosperous appearance of children's piano education, there exist many deep-seated problems in teaching concepts, teaching methods, curriculum design, teacher training, family participation and educational evaluation. Modern piano teaching for children is often trapped in utilitarianism, overemphasis on technical skills, rigid teaching modes, inappropriate use of digital tools, neglect of individual differences and separation between theory and practice. These problems not only reduce children's interest in music, but also damage their physical and mental health, and deviate from the essential goal of aesthetic education.

Based on pedagogy, psychology of music, child development and modern educational theory, this paper systematically combs the current problems in modern children's piano teaching methods, analyzes their internal causes from social, family, school and individual aspects, and puts forward targeted and operable improvement strategies. This paper holds that children's piano teaching should return to the child-centered education concept, balance skill training and artistic expression, reasonably apply modern educational technology, establish a diversified evaluation system, and build a cooperative education mechanism among schools, teachers and families. Only in this way can children's piano education truly realize the cultivation of musical literacy, emotional perception and creative personality, and promote the all-round development of children.