

Research on the Artistic Style and Singing Skills of Zhejiang Folk Songs

Wenting Yang

Zhejiang Conservatory of Music, Hangzhou 310024, China

Abstract: Zhejiang folk songs, as a gem within the realm of traditional Chinese musical culture, boast a rich array of artistic styles and distinctive vocal techniques. Their origins can be traced back to various facets of rural life, including agricultural labor, festive rituals, and folk activities, reflecting the diverse customs and cultural heritage of different regions within Zhejiang. Situated on the southeastern coast, the harmonious natural environment of Zhejiang has given rise to a variety of folk song forms, ranging from mountain ballads to farm songs and fishing tunes, each showcasing its own unique charm. Particularly, the refined and understated essence of Jiangnan culture endows Zhejiang folk songs with a poetic and delicate expression in melody and lyrics, culminating in a distinctive artistic style. The dissemination of Zhejiang folk songs is not confined to specific regions; as times change and society evolves, they have gradually integrated into contemporary art realms, becoming an essential part of national and local cultural heritage. Today, amid the diversification of popular culture, Zhejiang folk songs face the challenges of modernization and the struggle of preservation. Nevertheless, they remain a cultural symbol, carrying the memories and sentiments of traditional culture. This is not merely a testament to history but also a reflection of national emotions and artistic pursuits, deserving of in-depth study and preservation.

Keywords: Zhejiang Folk Song Art; Singing Technique; Style.

1. Introduction

Due to its profound historical origin and diverse artistic forms, Zhejiang folk song occupies a unique position in Chinese folk music. They serve not only as a cultural vessel for the emotional expression and life representation of the Zhejiang people but also as a concentrated embodiment of Zhejiang's regional culture and traditional aesthetic values. The distinct geographic environment and multicultural background of Zhejiang provide a fertile ground for the development of folk songs, resulting in artistic styles and singing techniques that exhibit notable regional characteristics. From labor chants to lyrical melodies, from ritual songs and dances to folk operas, these songs permeate various aspects of daily life, embodying a vibrant and expressive vitality. Amidst social changes, Zhejiang folk songs have not only preserved their traditional forms and content but have also continually adapted to external cultural influences, undergoing numerous transformations. These changes are evident not only in the innovation of melodies and lyrics but also in the heightened flexibility and creativity in singing styles and techniques. A thorough examination of the artistic styles and singing techniques of Zhejiang folk songs not only unveils their cultural significance but also offers valuable insights for contemporary musical innovation and development.

2. Artistic Style of Zhejiang Folk Songs

The artistic style of Zhejiang folk songs is distinguished by its unique regional characteristics and cultural depth, reflecting the rich historical and cultural heritage and natural beauty of the Jiangnan region. The melodies are melodious, the rhythms flexible, and the expression renowned for its delicate and subtle nature. This style not only resonates with the gentle climate and natural landscapes of Jiangnan's water towns but also embodies the local people's restrained and

refined aesthetic orientation. The lyrics of these folk songs often draw on natural scenery and daily life as themes, employing vivid metaphors and symbolism to display a profound poetic quality. Many folk songs convey deep emotional nuances, portraying the joys, sorrows, and complexities of mundane life while subtly revealing philosophical reflections and sentiments about human destiny. The artistic style of Zhejiang folk songs also demonstrates diversity, with regional variations reflecting different local customs and traditions, ranging from the melodious elegance akin to Jiangnan silk and bamboo to the rugged simplicity of labor chants. This diversity mirrors the inclusiveness and richness of Zhejiang's culture [1]. Through its simple musical forms and structures, folk songs exhibit significant musical expressiveness, endowing them with not only a distinctive aesthetic value in form but also conveying the essence of local culture in spirit, making them a vital symbol of regional cultural identity.

3. Singing Techniques of Zhejiang Folk Songs

3.1. Basic Singing Skills

3.1.1. Vocalization Method and Voice Control

In the rendition of Zhejiang folk songs, the methods of vocalization and sound control are crucial for conveying musical emotion and artistic style. Zhejiang folk songs often rely on natural tones, emphasizing purity and simplicity of sound. This vocal technique aligns with the rustic nature of folk songs, striving for a natural and effortless timbre. Performers typically blend chest voice and head voice, achieving a resonance that is both robust and light, maintaining a vibrant and nimble quality. This approach not only meets the environmental demands of folk singing but also reflects the refined and delicate aesthetic values of Jiangnan culture. In terms of sound control, Zhejiang folk songs emphasize a balanced modulation of tone, with

particular attention to variations in volume and timbre when expressing different emotions. Singers must adeptly use breathing techniques to manage pitch and intensity changes, conveying a rich spectrum of emotional layers. For instance, when expressing sorrow or longing, the voice is usually softer, with a more pronounced resonance in the lower registers, whereas in conveying joy or scenes of labor, the voice is more vibrant and bright, brimming with vitality and rhythmic sense. This meticulous control over sound not only enhances the expressiveness of the performance but also allows the folk songs to convey profound emotional depth through their simple melodies, enabling listeners to experience the singer's intricate and profound emotional journey.

3.1.2. Grasp of Range and Pitch

In the performance of Zhejiang folk songs, mastery over vocal range and pitch is crucial to the overall expressiveness. Although Zhejiang folk songs often feature simple melodies, the emotional depth they convey is remarkably rich, making the singer's control over their vocal range particularly significant. Most Zhejiang folk songs do not span a wide vocal range; their melodies typically reside in the mid-to-low register. This is especially true for lyrical folk songs, which often create profound emotional spaces through a narrower vocal range. Despite the limited range, the performer must still exhibit variations in timbre and emotional depth within this constrained range. Pitch accuracy directly impacts the aesthetic and emotive power of the folk songs. Zhejiang folk songs emphasize natural and smooth melodic lines, demanding precise pitch control from the performer. In the absence of accompaniment, any pitch deviations can affect the emotional transmission of the piece. In many Zhejiang folk songs, subtle changes in pitch often carry nuanced emotional fluctuations; thus, pitch adjustments are not merely technical displays but also expressions of emotional resonance. Mastery of vocal range and pitch enables the performer to convey a complex emotional world within simple melodies, showcasing the artistic charm of Zhejiang folk songs. This skill requires the singer to find the optimal balance between musical performance and emotional expression, effectively transmitting the essence of the folk song to the audience [2].

3.2. Special Singing Skills

3.2.1. The Use of Decorative Notes and Cadences

In the performance of Zhejiang folk songs, the use of ornamental notes and coloratura displays a remarkable artistic expressiveness, imbuing the melodies with a distinctive charm and vivacity. Ornamental notes, as embellishments within the melody, not only enrich the musical texture but also convey intricate emotions in subtle ways. In Zhejiang folk songs, ornaments often include slides and trills, which allow performers to infuse the songs with greater expressiveness while preserving the original melodic framework. For instance, when rendering nostalgic tunes, delicate ornamental notes often highlight the profound and lingering emotions, enhancing the listener's resonance. Coloratura, another crucial vocal technique, provides Zhejiang folk songs with a more versatile form of expression. It frequently manifests as rapid changes in pitch and intricate patterns within the melody, imbuing the performance with technical finesse and dynamism. Especially in fast-paced folk songs that depict labor chants or celebratory scenes, coloratura techniques add vibrancy and color, making the melodies more buoyant and rhythmically engaging. This lively approach not only

showcases the performer's skill but also reflects the optimistic and energetic spirit of the people of Zhejiang. The artful integration of ornamental notes and coloratura not only elevates the artistic quality of Zhejiang folk songs but also endows these simple melodies with emotional depth and complexity, allowing each folk song to resonate with rich nuance and meaning amidst its simplicity [3].

3.2.2. Improvisation and Emotional Expression

In the performance of Zhejiang folk songs, improvisation and emotional expression often serve as the most compelling manifestations of individuality and soul. Improvisation is not merely a display of skill but the spontaneous collision of the singer's inner emotions with the melody. This mode of performance requires the singer to dynamically alter notes, rhythms, and even lyrics based on the current context and mood, while maintaining the traditional melodic framework. Such flexibility endows each performance with a unique, irreplaceable quality, reflecting the characteristic unity of singer and song in Zhejiang folk music. The essence of improvisation lies in the free expression of emotions. Rooted in folk life, Zhejiang folk songs often see performers spontaneously integrating the joys, sorrows, and daily experiences of life into their singing. This approach not only connects the singer with the audience on an emotional level but also enhances the authenticity and resonance of the song. During emotional expression, improvisation frequently utilizes variations in rhythm and flexible handling of melody, resulting in a more natural and fluid conveyance of sentiment. Particularly in labor scenes, the improvised performance of work songs often evolves spontaneously according to the rhythm and atmosphere of the setting. This improvisational creation and expression not only enriches the content of the songs but also heightens interaction with the audience. The allure of improvisation lies in its authenticity and the uncontrollable nature of emotion, making each performance a spontaneous response to life and feelings, endowing Zhejiang folk songs with unique vitality and profound emotional power.

3.3. Regional Singing Techniques

3.3.1. Singing Methods Unique to Each Region

The regional vocal techniques found in Zhejiang folk songs reveal the distinctive cultures and lifestyles of different areas. The diverse geographic environments and historical backgrounds endow the folk songs of each region with unique melodic, rhythmic, and vocal characteristics. In the coastal areas of eastern Zhejiang, such as the Zhoushan Archipelago, the folk songs are often marked by a high, impassioned tone with an expansive sound. This closely aligns with the local fishermen's way of life, where strong breath control and powerful resonance are used to mimic the rise and fall of the waves and the howling wind, thus enhancing the expressiveness of the songs. Conversely, in the western mountainous regions of Zhejiang, such as Lishui, the folk songs are more delicate and gentle, with singers employing a smooth, melodious style. The fluid, even lines of the melodies reflect the local people's dependence on and reverence for the natural landscape of mountains and waters. In these areas, emphasis is placed on pure timbre and control of vocal resonance to better convey the unique tranquility and depth of the mountainous regions. The folk songs of the Hangjiahu Plain are renowned for their simplicity and cheerfulness, often incorporating the rhythm of labor. The singing style is relaxed and natural, with a bright tone and strong rhythmic

sense. This approach aligns with the collective labor scenes of the local agricultural society, conveying the joy and spirit of cooperation found in work through the harmonious combination of melody and rhythm. These unique singing methods not only reflect the rich diversity of Zhejiang folk songs but also embody the natural environment and cultural atmosphere of different regions, endowing the folk songs with distinctive regional characteristics and cultural depth [4].

3.3.2. Local Variations and Uniqueness of Singing Techniques

The vocal techniques of Zhejiang folk songs exhibit a rich diversity and uniqueness that vary with regional differences. This variation not only reflects the natural environment and lifestyle of different locales but also embodies the differences in cultural identity and modes of expression across regions. The singing techniques in various areas often vary in timbre, rhythm, melodic lines, and breath control, creating distinct musical styles. In the coastal region of Zhoushan, the vocal style of folk songs emphasizes strong breath control and rhythmic precision. Performers often use a broad vocal range and a vigorous tone to convey the hardships and robustness of fishermen's lives. This vocal approach, influenced by maritime life, features a high, penetrating sound that reflects the fierce sea breeze and the surging waves. In the mountainous area of Lishui, however, the folk song performance leans towards a softer and more melodious style, with singers highlighting the delicate timbre and fluidity of the melody. Compared to the coastal folk songs, the melodies here are more lyrical and the rhythms more leisurely, showcasing the serene forests and the tranquil pace of life. In the Hangjiahu Plain region, the vocal techniques for folk songs are more versatile and dynamic, reflecting the collective nature of the local farming culture and the joy of labor. The melodies in the plain areas are simple yet rhythmically engaging, with a focus on bright rhythms and light timbre, highlighting the harmony and coordination in labor. The regional variations and unique qualities of folk song performances across Zhejiang not only demonstrate the deep perception of the local people towards their environment but also their creative interpretation of musical art.

4. Artistic Expressions and Social Functions of Zhejiang Folk Songs

In the realm of folk music, the art of Zhejiang's regional melodies is a rich tapestry woven with historical and cultural threads. This tradition, characterized by its distinctive tonal qualities and emotive delivery, serves as a profound reflection of the region's social fabric and historical evolution. The art of Zhejiang folk music is not merely a collection of songs but an embodiment of the collective memory and aspirations of its people. Zhejiang folk songs are celebrated for their ability to convey a wide range of human emotions, from the joyous to the melancholic. Their lyrical simplicity belies a deep complexity that resonates with listeners on a visceral level. Each melody, often accompanied by traditional instruments,

acts as a narrative vessel, encapsulating stories of rural life, local legends, and social customs. These songs are not static relics of the past but dynamic expressions that evolve with each generation, continually adapting to reflect contemporary societal values while preserving traditional elements. The societal function of Zhejiang folk music extends beyond mere entertainment. It plays a pivotal role in community cohesion, often performed during festivals, weddings, and other communal gatherings. In these settings, the music fosters a sense of unity and cultural identity, bridging generational divides and reinforcing shared heritage. Through its performances, Zhejiang folk music nurtures a profound connection among individuals, transcending the ordinary to create a shared experience imbued with cultural significance [5].

5. Conclusion

The artistic style and vocal techniques of Zhejiang folk songs are not only a crystallization of traditional cultural heritage but also a reflection of the local society and natural environment. With their rich melodies, distinctive rhythms, and diverse singing methods, they portray the spirit and emotional world of the people of Zhejiang. Amidst the challenges of globalization and modernization, Zhejiang folk songs face the dual challenge of preservation and protection. Nonetheless, their unique cultural value and artistic allure continue to offer a rich cultural legacy for future generations. A thorough study of the artistic style and vocal techniques of Zhejiang folk songs allows for a more comprehensive understanding of their historical value and social function. Whether as symbols of traditional culture or as sources of inspiration in contemporary artistic creation, Zhejiang folk songs hold an irreplaceable position and significance. Balancing preservation with innovation ensures that this cultural heritage continues to shine brightly in the new era, providing a profound foundation and impetus for future cultural development.

References

- [1] Hu M. Features of Singing in Chinese Pop and Traditional Music: the Influence of the Music Genre on Vocal Music[J]. *Revista Música Hodie*, 2022, 22.
- [2] Ye H, Ye X. A Study on the Singing Style of Yao Shuijuan[J]. *Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 2024, 6(7): 201-204.
- [3] Weidan Z, Jiadai S, Chunye S. A Study on the Integration of Zhejiang South Folk Songs and Early Childhood Teaching Activities[J]. *Transactions on Comparative Education*, 2023, 5(8): 83-89.
- [4] Yang S. The Inheritance of Chinese Northern Shaanxi Folk Music Culture in Modern Music Education[C]//2024 International Conference on Humanities, Arts, and Cultural Industry Development (HACID 2024). Atlantis Press, 2024: 32-40.
- [5] Lin L, Chonpairot J. She Folk songs in Fu An, Fujian, China[D]. Mahasarakham University, 2023:12-15.