

THE ART OF BEL CANTO IN THE ARTISTIC SPACE  
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**A Hudamu. The Art of Bel Canto in the Artistic Space of Inner Mongolia.** The development and specificity of bel canto vocal school in the artistic space of Inner Mongolia are first covered in this article. The following features of the academic vocal art of the region are noted: the perception of the world experience of academic vocal as a formed integrity of pedagogical, methodological and performance guidelines, the significant role of foreign, in particular Russian, art community in formation of the national bel canto version; active development of the system of higher professional vocal education; unity of performing, pedagogical and scientific-theoretical components, focus on presentation and promotion of the national version of bel canto in the space of world culture, synthesis of the principles of bel canto, folk and estrada vocal performance by the prominent regional vocalists in their performing activities.

**Keywords:** bel canto, academic vocal performance, music education, music art of Inner Mongolia of China.

**А Гудаму. Мистецтво bel canto в художньому просторі Внутрішньої Монголії.** У статті вперше висвітлюються розв'язки та специфіка вокальної школи bel canto в художньому просторі Внутрішньої Монголії. Зазначаються такі риси академічного вокального мистецтва регіону, як: сприйняття світового досвіду академічного вокалу як сформованої цілісності педагогічно-методичних та виконавських настанов, значуща роль зарубіжних, зокрема російських, діячів мистецтва у формуванні національного варіанту bel canto; активний розвиток системи вищої фахової вокальної освіти; єдність виконавського, педагогічного та науково-теоретичного компонентів, спрямованість на репрезентацію та пропаганду національного варіанту bel canto у просторі світової культури, синтезування у виконавській діяльності видатних співаків регіону принципів bel canto, народного й естрадного вокального виконавства.

**Ключові слова:** bel canto, академічне вокальне виконавство, музична освіта, музичне мистецтво Внутрішньої Монголії Китаю.

**А Гудаму. Искусство bel canto в художественном пространстве Внутренней Монголии.** В статье впервые освещаются развитие и специфика вокальной школы bel canto в художественном пространстве Внутренней Монголии. Отмечаются такие черты академического вокального искусства региона, как: восприятие мирового опыта академического вокала как сформированной целостности педагогически-методических и исполнительских установок, значимая роль зарубежных, в частности российских, деятелей искусства в формировании национального варианта bel canto; активное развитие системы высшего профессионального вокального образования; единство исполнительского, педагогического и научно-теоретического компонентов, направленность на репрезентацию и пропаганду национального варианта bel canto в пространстве мировой культуры, синтезирование в исполнительской деятельности выдающихся певцов региона принципов bel canto, народного и эстрадного вокального исполнительства.

**Ключевые слова:** bel canto, академическое вокальное исполнительство, музыкальное образование, музыкальное искусство Внутренней Монголии Китая.

**Background.** Transcultural and glocalization tendencies, which determine the specificity of the modern world culture, are manifested by the intensification of the diffusion of artistic and performing creativity and art education of the East and the West. This is reflected in the contemporary activities and recognition of Chinese singers on the

world stage, the intensification of links between vocal education systems in China and Europe, and the expansion of Chinese vocal music into Ukraine's cultural space. However, the development and specificity of bel canto in China's musical culture, its synthesis with national singing traditions and mainstream estrada singing, particularly in Inner Mongolia, are not comprehensively covered in musicology. Studying them is an important task in view of the modern universalization of the vocalists' creative self-fulfillment, conditioned by the relevance of "comprehension and practical assimilation of 'multilingual' pieces of vocal creativity" [1, p. 1].

**The analysis of recent studies and publications** allows us to state that, despite the intensification of the research attention to the wide range of issues related to the art of bel canto in Chinese music culture, the issues of the specificity of professional music, including vocal education of China [7; 10; 11], typologies of vocal performing manners [2; 5; 8], cross-cultural relations between the world and Chinese music [1; 4], are primarily in the attention of researchers. The issues of the specificity of the national version of bel canto are covered in single articles, in particular in connection with the issues of the performance interpretation of chamber music by the singers of China [2; 5; 8] and Europe [6]. In fact, the only case of a comprehensive study of the history, performance specificity and national methodological and pedagogical foundations of the national vocal school is the thesis by Yan Bo [9], in which the issues of regional nuances of bel canto national modifications are not raised.

The theoretical uncertainty of the regional perspective of bel canto research in China's vocal art makes it possible to outline **previously unresolved parts of the overall issue** – coverage of the peculiarities of development and methodological and pedagogical foundations of the academic vocal school, as well as the creativity of vocalists and composers of Inner Mongolia. The intensification and global recognition of the latter's activities, corresponding to the contemporary processes of cultural interaction, determine **the relevance** of this study. **The objective of the article** is to cover the directions of mastering and national adaptation of bel canto principles in vocal education and in the performing practice of singers of Inner Mongolia of China.

**Discussion.** The development of bel canto in the music culture of Inner Mongolia province (which has been defined as a territorial unit of China since 1912) is a clear testimony to the ontological

and phenomenological complexity of the process of interplay of national and world culture. Due to the specific political and historical-cultural reasons, the region's vocal art is involved in this process with some delay (compared to other regions of China). The peculiarity of mastering bel canto in the artistic space of the region was based on the long-standing experience of Chinese music and vocal education, as well as the actualization of the preservation of own, local traditions and a sense of "musical identity".

Formation of a national "version" of bel canto in the artistic space of China in the 20<sup>th</sup> century occurred under the conditions of a long and complicated adaptation of the Chinese audience to another cultural vocal tradition, which differed dramatically from the national vocal art in terms of sound production, sound leading, articulation, breathing, dynamics, performance position of the singer, etc. However, the success of bel canto in China since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is explained by the strong tendency of cultural rapprochement of the East and the West and the undeniable skill of vocalists of Europe and Russia. The tours of F. Chaliapin, N. Engelhardt, O. Mozhukhina, S. Lemeshev and other singers were the representation of European vocal art that intensified the process of its national modification.

The development of bel canto in Chinese vocal art has also been linked to the active educational activities of foreign musicians. In the absence of national specialist educators, including the bel canto performance guides, the activities of Russian teachers (K. Horvath, G. Achair-Dobrotvorskaya, V. Shushlin), as well as the establishment of educational institutions by them (Harbin Higher Music School by O. Glazunov, 1927) and vocal studios (A. Solovyova-Matsulevich, N. Yosipova-Zarzhevskaya and others) were of great importance in shaping the newest generation of Chinese singers in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, mastering and nationally interpreting the world vocal and performing experience would not have been possible without the involvement of Chinese artists and educators. Significant impetus in the development of bel canto art in the musical culture of China was the work of a renowned composer and teacher Xiao Yumei, director of the Musical Research Group of the Beijing University. Thanks to the musician's direct perception of the experience of Western European art (from 1909 to 1916, he received his professional education at the Leipzig Conservatory) and the conscious desire to modernize the traditional national artistic space, the introduction of bel canto into the professional education system was initiated. This program became the foundation of professional vocal training at the National College of Music (founded in 1927) and demonstrated the specificity of Chinese vocal education which faced the need to take European experience as a system and to synthesize the national vocal art traditions with the world vocal pedagogical and methodological experience. The vocal tradition of bel canto and its vocal-performing and vocal-pedagogical presentation in Europe and China also

included a galaxy of Chinese singers who were educated in the conservatories of Europe.

A significant trend in the development of bel canto principles in China's vocal art is their synthesis with national vocal traditions in composing art. One of the first examples of such synthesis were the works by Huan Yunlo *Qiu Ji* (1942) and *Gray-Haired Girl* (1945) by the collective of the authors of the Lu Xin Academy. In this work, a case of "using the European bel canto singing by Chinese singers" [7, p. 76], the Academy vocalists "finished off a special opera-singing style that was characteristic solely of Chinese singers and combined folk singing with the technique of the Peking Opera singers and elements of European vocal school" [ibid].

The integration of the bel canto principles into the artistic space of Inner Mongolia is associated with the opening of the School of Arts of Inner Mongolia (1957) in the city of Hohhot. In the 1980s, it was reorganized into the national secondary school under the management of the Ministry of Culture, in 1987, when the School of Arts was merged, and the Art College of Inner Mongolia University was established. In 2015, this educational institution acquired the status of the Fine Arts Academy of Inner Mongolia. Vocal teaching at the Fine Arts Academy at the present stage of the region's arts development is provided by a group of experienced teachers whose performing, pedagogical and scientific activities are well-known in China and worldwide. The leading vocal teachers of the Academies are Shi Yongqing, who synthesizes in his pedagogical practice the latest methodological developments and guidelines of traditional vocal art of Mongolia, in particular, taking into account the regional peculiarities of vocal styles, as well as Liu Li, Li Baoru, Lo Ying, Qi Shanri, Zhang Suhua, Xing Wei, Yang Guang, Sun Idi, Sin Qiqige.

Mastering the bel canto art in the province is the basis for the introduction of professional academic vocal education into higher education curricula. For example, since 1954, the Pedagogical University of Inner Mongolia has been operating the College of Music (the Department of Vocal Music) and the established College of Ethnic Music (2010). Among the latter's specializations are the Musical Performance and the existence of an optional training program of Opera Music Performance.

The vocal pedagogy principles of the teachers at the vocal department (section) of the Baotou Pedagogical College are connected with the vocal and pedagogical guidelines laid down in the above institutions of professional education. The Vocal Department is headed by Bai Yan, the graduate of the Tianjin Conservatory, who is known outside China for her academic visits to the Belarusian National University of Culture and Arts (2012) and the University of California in the USA (2015). The academic vocal at this educational institution is also taught by Bai Hua, Liu Fang, Ma Ju Yun, who combine the pedagogical, scientific and performing activities.

The departments of vocal that provide teaching of academic singing are the structural units of the

Institute of Music of the Hulunbuir University and the Faculty of Music of the Chifen College.

The specificity of the national representation and modification of bel canto in the musical culture of Inner Mongolia is not only related to the intensive development of the professional vocal education. The multifaceted areas of mastering the academic singing are the result of the active scientific and methodological activities of the vocal teachers, and such activities are relevant due to the need for modern theoretical and methodological substantiation of the bel canto guidelines in the context of national culture. For example, numerous scientific and pedagogical-methodological explorations belong to the vocal teachers of the Fine Arts Academy of Inner Mongolia. The synthesis of the world experience, methodological innovations and guidelines of traditional vocal art of Mongolia, including the regional performance features are the basis of the textbook *Choosing Mongolian-Style Songs*, the monograph *Aesthetic Characteristics and Cultural Connotation of Erdos Folk Songs* by Shi Yujing. A wide range of issues related to the specifics of bel canto and the difficulty of reproducing it by Chinese singers are highlighted by Li Ni Na in the monograph *The Study of Bel Canto Practice*.

The study of academic and folk performance is addressed by the vocal teachers of the Baotou Pedagogical College. The thorough works by Bai Yan (*On the Artistic Features of Mongolian Long Folk Songs*) and Zhang Wenhua (*Introduction to Bel Canto*), scientific research by such authors as Cao Yuan, Ma Ju Yun, Jiao Yihui [3], in which the issues of vocal art are raised from different perspectives, demonstrate the persistence of modern teaching methods, the high level of understanding of the performing peculiarities of folk and academic singing, the formation of the principles of the modern vocal and pedagogical school of Inner Mongolia.

The intensive scientific, theoretical and methodological activities of modern Chinese vocal educators are also aimed at comprehending the problems that arise in the professional vocal education system both in the country as a whole and in the artistic space of the provinces of China due to the external, historical, cultural and internal factors. For example, Yao Yaming notes such shortcomings in the system of professional vocal education as closedness, focus primarily on the preparation of a vocalist, dominance of the theoretical component [11, p. 174–175], the predominant orientation on the “folk singing style, which is characterized by a raised larynx and piercing main sound” [11, p. 175], which does not conform to bel canto principles. Given the active integration of Chinese singers in the world artistic space, especially challenging becomes overcoming the mental complexities that Chinese singers experience when mastering the works of the Western European tradition – “the specificity of the language apparatus, differences in the breathing system (technological aspect) and the artistic and imaginary comprehension of the hero’s world (artistic and performing aspect)” [6, p. 89].

The modern bel canto vocal school of Inner Mongolia is being actively integrated into the global artistic space. This is evidenced by the participation of the performers in numerous contests and festivals of opera vocal art – Bai Hua is the winner of the *Excellence Award* of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> contests of young singers organized by National Television, Liu Fang has participated in many regional contests. The world also recognized the creativity of Ma Ju Yun, who received the 2<sup>nd</sup> prize at the Vedena Contest (France, 2009) and a gold medal at the Genius Youth Contest in Belarus (2010) [3]. The singer Li Ni Na received the first prize at the Bel Canto chamber music contest in Inner Mongolia and became the Award Winner of the Sun Idi International Opera Contest (Hong Kong) in 2011. Li Ni Na also participated in the International Vocal Master Class of the Italian master N. Martinucci (Milan, 2017).

In 2017, the teachers and students of the College of Ethnic Arts of Pedagogical University of Inner Mongolia participated in the Renato Bruzon International Contest held in Hubei Province. The second place of Liu Jianfen was recognition of the world-class level of the vocalists’ performing art. Chen Hongyu, a vocal teacher at the University of Arts of Inner Mongolia, in 2018, won the 2<sup>nd</sup> prize at the 53<sup>rd</sup> Antonin Dvorak’s International Singing Contest and won the Special Jury Prize. The pedagogical path of the performer is linked to the European tradition not only by the performing priorities – Chen Hongyu received his professional education in Germany (Mannheim).

A characteristic feature of the vocal and pedagogical school of Baotou is its focus on the formation and development of intercultural scientific dialogue. For example, Ma Ju Yun is a graduate student at the Belarusian National Conservatory, which testifies to the conscious orientation of the College teachers to national adaptation and theoretical substantiation of the bel canto principles.

The national version of bel canto in the artistic space of Inner Mongolia reflects the peculiarities of “cultural border-zone”, a cultural situation marked by the ambiguity and complexity of the synthesis of the world trends and national traditions. In the art of vocal, this is manifested in the performing diversity, caused by the tendency to preserve the autochthonous cultural heritage (most pronounced in the work of Sogtin Dolzhin, the Professor of the Hulunbuir University of Arts, known as Dolzhin Baggsha, the folk singer of Mongolian folk songs) and the presence of academic, folk and estrada “streams” of vocal. At the same time, this diversity is the result of a synthesis of the folk, academic and estrada performance, which defines the creative priorities of the prominent vocalists of the region.

Preserving the national vocal heritage is the creative goal of Jiang Dawei, a prominent tenor. In the 1968 – 1970s, he was part of the agitation team of the Hohhot suburb, and the team’s repertoire consisted of the Mongolian, Chinese, Uighur songs and the works by Mongolian and Chinese composers, the stylistics of which implied reliance on the principles of academic vocal. This determined the

repertoire landmarks of the singer known worldwide for performing the lines in the operas of Western European artists, the folk songs (including in the China National Ethnic Song and Dance Ensemble) and the estrada works.

From the School of Arts of Inner Mongolia, Dedema started her artistic career, one of the world's most famous singers in the region. Her popular name amongst the audience, the Nightingale of the Meadows, reflects the specific vocal role of the artist, which combines the traditions of the Mongolian long song and bel canto. It should be noted that Dedema's artistic path is a testament to the strength of national traditions of professional vocal education. The extraordinary extent of China and Inner Mongolia, in particular, the tendency of concentrating education and the newest tendencies of cultural life in metropolitan areas, etc., particularly toughen the problem of ensuring a high level of professional education in the periphery. The educational and national-cultural priorities of Dedema's activities were reflected in the fact that she founded a school for gifted children in 2007 [12], the graduates of which are part of the artistic ensembles of Inner Mongolia.

An example of the synthesis of the academic, estrada and folk vocal and, at the same time, the promotion of Inner Mongolia's artistic heritage on a global scale is the performing activities of Sainbayarin Tenger (tenor), an outstanding graduate of the College of Arts of Inner Mongolia. The soloist of the China National Opera Aoyun Gerile (mezzo-soprano), known at the world concert and opera stages, organically combines the principles of traditional Mongolian singing and bel canto. The talent of the young generation of vocalists in the region was recognized by her brilliant performance in *Aida* by G. Verdi, *Symphony No. 9* by L. van Beethoven and *Symphony No. 8* by G. Mahler.

The creativity of the young singer Vulcan Suerong (soprano), a native of Inner Mongolia, demonstrates the synthesis of bel canto with Humeiy overtone singing and instrumental performance with national instruments, including morin khuur. Creating performances that bring together the pieces of Chinese, Tibetan, Uighur folklore, various vocal techniques of academic, folk and estrada singing, the latest visual technologies and special effects, Vulcan Suerong represents the contemporary layer of World Music with expressive national color.

**Conclusions.** The bel canto vocal school of Inner Mongolia is a distinctive phenomenon of the musical culture of China, marked by such features as: the perception of the world experience of academic vocal as a formed integrity of pedagogical, methodological and performance guidelines, the significant role of foreign, in particular Russian, vocalists and teachers in mastering bel canto; active development of higher professional vocal education; unity of pedagogical, scientific-theoretical and performing components, active presentation and promotion of the national version of bel canto in the space of world culture, synthesis of the principles of bel canto, folk and estrada singing in the vocalists' performing activities, etc.

**The prospects for further exploration** are to study the peculiarities of creativity of Inner Mongolia's vocalists, in particular on the basis of creativity of the leading composers of the region.

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