

# *Singing in Musical and Aesthetic Education: China Experience*

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the key professional problems of effectively preserving the precious heritage of Chinese folk singing by means of current school musical and aesthetic education. Scientific approaches to the definition and structure of the aesthetic value of traditional singing in China are revealed in a comprehensive historical perspective. A series of important goals (educational, cultural and developmental) achieved by teachers of singing and music in the diverse polyartistic environment of China in the 21st century are systematically presented. The most significant achievements of musical and aesthetic education through singing in modern Chinese schools are clearly characterized.

## **1. Introduction**

People always need music. The Chinese in the traditional art of calligraphy write the words «music» and «beauty» with the same character (Yinyue), which differs only in pronunciation. Musical and aesthetic education is the formation and development of a value attitude to the phenomena of the surrounding world on the basis of the creative development of the content of a musical work that carries universal human values: worldview, ethical, aesthetic. The best educators in the world have always known this. The teacher Vasily Sukhomlinsky said: «Musical education is not the education of a musician, first of all it is the education of a person»<sup>[1]</sup>. Singing is the simplest introduction to music. Chinese culture is an exact confirmation of this thesis since Ancient China (pre-imperial and imperial China).

Musicologists T. B. Budaeva, E. V. Osipova, anthropologist E. K. Darashevich (and others) analyzed the traditional singing of Eurasia as a phenomenon of art and culture; the purpose of this article is to analyze the implantation of the heritage of Chinese folk songs in the musical and aesthetic education and protection of the intangible cultural heritage of China in the 21st century.

## **2. Historical Foundations and Aesthetic Values of Chinese Singing**

Ancient China has accumulated rich traditions in various areas of cultural life. The achievements of Chinese culture amaze our imagination: silk, paper, compass, gunpowder, etc. China has not only achievements in material culture, without which the modern world is unthinkable. China demonstrates an amazing sense of nature, the ability to see the whole in its individual manifestations.

A person in this cultural atmosphere strives not for the subordination of nature, but for harmony and balance with nature. All social processes must fully coincide with natural phenomena. Man was the link between Heaven (the highest non-material world) and Earth (the material world). Based on this, we can talk about the anthropocentrism of Chinese culture <sup>[2]</sup>.

### **3. Traditional Theater and the Heritage of Folk Singing**

#### **3.1 The Evolution of Professional Musical Theater and Schools**

In the 7th–11th centuries, a professional musical theater and schools for the professional training of actors-singers appeared in China, and in the 16th–18th centuries, a national Chinese musical theater and a system of aesthetic education of actors-singers and musicians for this theater developed. The Chinese theater has retained a lot of paratheatrical (interactive, focused on involving the viewer in the action itself, spontaneous and improvisational, acutely topical and satirical, as well as ritualized) art forms. Scientists say that «Chinese culture has been characterized since ancient times by the social predetermination of creativity»<sup>[3]</sup>. The theater of China has traditional folklore ethnic «roots». Today, dozens of its regional variants, often historically oriented, coexist simultaneously. The Chinese theater is a product of Chinese culture of the pre-imperial (3rd millennium BC–3rd century BC) and imperial (3rd century BC–1911) periods. This type of theater is diversely represented in the Russian-language studies of art critics <sup>[4]</sup>.

#### **3.2 Confucian Philosophy and the Educational Role of "Shijing"**

The first written fixations of Chinese songs did not go unnoticed by prominent thinkers, statesmen and public figures. These figures were often the educators of the future elite of the country. Confucius (09.28.551 BC–04.11.479 BC) is the most famous example of a personality of this magnitude, along with Sima Qian and his students. Confucius edited and actively recommended for study to his students and friends the book of songs «Shijing» (the most ancient part of Chinese song poetry known from the 11th–7th centuries BC). Confucius (Fig. 1) with his activities and scientific research for many centuries ahead determined the laws of development of the national art of China, including the musical and aesthetic education of the Chinese by means of folk songs and musical theater.

Chinese folk songs develop creative imagination <sup>[5]</sup> and evoke the taste <sup>[6]</sup> of singers, although they have few direct references to the theme of art. The «collective author» of Chinese traditional songs (the people can be considered as this author) demonstrates examples of hidden appeals to the following arts: a) performing arts (intangible in nature); b) plastic arts (whose artifacts are made in certain materials and, therefore, do not change over time – material). This aesthetic is characteristic of the traditional theater of China (Peking Opera), where intangible and material art are combined hidden, but firmly.

#### **3.3 Peking Opera: A Model of Intangible Cultural Heritage**

The professional musical theater of China and the schools for the professional training of actors-singers in China are associated with the heyday of Peking Opera in the 18th–20th centuries. Peking Opera (Fig. 2) is still an example of the aesthetics of folk singing, the protection of folk musical modes and the traditional worldview of China (the mythology, literature, fine arts and traditional music of China are integrated in the Peking Opera). In the 21st century, the world community recognized the great importance of the Peking Opera, including it in the List of Cultural Heritage of Humanity after being compared with all the parameters of this heritage <sup>[7]</sup>.



Figure 1. Confucius.



Figure 2. Peking Opera Characters.

Researchers of Chinese folk songs have always talked about the organization of a phased, unforced and motivated acquaintance of a novice singer or instrumentalist with these songs, about working out fluency in vocalization with the modal foundations of traditional Chinese pentatonic scale and the tonalities formed on its basis, about understanding by students (especially children and youth) of the most important significance of these songs as an element of the cultural memory of the people.

#### 4. Implementation of Aesthetic Education in Modern Chinese Schools

New China (starting from 1911 inheriting pre-imperial and imperial China), under the influence of the challenges of the polyartistic environment at the turn of the 20th-21st centuries, may have found in its system of musical and aesthetic education the optimal balance of interests of the state and society, the state and the individual, society and the individual in preserving the musical aesthetics of the people. This experience is of exceptional importance for those who today want to build a beautiful and comfortable perspective for the life of the people of their country in harmony with its root aesthetics, and the experience of the attitude of the people of China to their heritage may be of interest not only to the Chinese.

##### 4.1 The Structure of the 12-Year Schooling System

Today, the musical and aesthetic education of China begins at school (Fig. 3): «Children study at school for 12 years. In China, the school has three levels: primary, secondary and senior. Each of the steps is a separate institution. ...Children in China start going to school at the age of seven. They spend six years in elementary school, then three years each in middle and high school»<sup>[8]</sup>. As a result, the Chinese from the age of 7 to 19 are regularly introduced to the song culture of their country at school music lessons and in the weekly life of the school, which is firmly associated with singing songs based on Chinese folk melos and folk aesthetics (Fig. 4).



Figure 3. The Building of a Modern School. China. 2021.



Figure 4. Schoolchildren Sing the National Anthem Every Monday. China. 2021.

#### 4.2 Ritual and Practice: The National Anthem in Daily School Life

Singing is firmly embedded in the education system of modern China: «On Monday mornings, all schoolchildren line up for the solemn flag-raising ceremony. Everything looks serious. Watching the flag go up, the students unanimously sing the national anthem»<sup>[9]</sup>. The anthem «March of the Volunteers» (Jiāngnán) is directly related to folk melos, since its music was written by the famous composer, violinist and performer of Chinese folk instruments Nie Er (1912–1935) in China. This tradition is mandatory for all schools in China, being an introduction to the practice of singing and instrumental performance based on Chinese folk modes in regular singing and music lessons. Many schoolchildren improve their school skills in the so-called «post-folklore», described by representatives of the Belarusian scientific school of anthropology of traditional culture and arts<sup>[10]</sup>.

#### 5. Conclusion

In the conclusion of the article «Singing in musical and aesthetic education: the experience of China», we draw the following conclusions.

First, as evidenced by the history of more than 3 000 years of musical and aesthetic education and musical education in China, the first educators and teachers (Confucius, Sima Qian and their students), appealing to the book of songs «Shijing» (XI–VII centuries BC. ) studied the ideological and philosophical aspect of the use of folk songs, but over time, Chinese teachers paid more and more attention to the pitch-modal system and regional features of songs, as well as to the protection of singing as an element of the cultural heritage of mankind, the use of singing in the ideological and ethno-cultural education of children and youth at the national school.

Second, in the 21st century, singing in the Chinese school simultaneously achieves a number of goals: educational, educational and developmental goals of musical art. This level in the conditions of the polyartistic environment of China in the 21st century is provided by the thoughtful training of teachers of singing and music in the higher school of China.

Third, achievements of teachers of singing and music in a school in China (in relation to the organization of a) a phased, not forced and motivated acquaintance of a novice singer or composer with these songs; b) practicing fluency in vocalization with the modal roots of the traditional Chinese pentatonic scale and the tonalities formed on its basis; c) students' understanding of the essential meaning of these songs as an element of the cultural memory of the people) are in direct synergy with the aesthetic heritage of Chinese folk songs.

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