

FRYDERYK CHOPIN

UNIVERSITY OF MUSIC

Field of art, artistic discipline: musical arts

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**Comparative analysis of British and Chinese folk songs based on
selected 20th century arrangements for middle voice by
Benjamin Britten, Healey Willian, Ding Shande and Li Yinghai in
the context of cultural differences and vocal techniques**

Doctoral thesis written under the supervision of

Prof. Ph.D. Artur Stefanowicz

Warsaw 2024

Artistic Work Description

Liu Yuezheng - Baritone

Tian Kun - Accompaniment

Emilian Rymarowicz - Sound Director

1. Ding Shande—"I Want to Kiss My Mother"(orig. "想亲娘")
2. Li Yinghai—"Flowing Stream"(orig. "小河淌水")
3. Ding Shande—"The Sun Rises Joyfully"(orig. "太阳出来喜洋洋")
4. Ding Shande—"A Lovely Rose"(orig. "可爱的一朵玫瑰花")
5. Ding Shande—"When the Pagoda Tree Blooms"(orig. "槐花几时开")
6. Li Yinghai—"Alamuhan"("阿拉木汗")
7. Li Yinghai—"Under the Silver Moonlight"("在银色的月光下")
8. Healey Willan—"Ae Fond Kiss"(orig. "Ae Fond Kiss")
9. Benjamin Britten—"The Ash Grove"(orig. "The Ash Grove")
10. Benjamin Britten—"The Salley Gardens"(orig. "The Salley Gardens")
11. Benjamin Britten—"O Waly, Waly"(orig. "O Waly, Waly")
12. Benjamin Britten—"Little Sir William"(orig. "Little Sir William")
13. Benjamin Britten—"The Foggy, Foggy Dew"(orig. "The Foggy, Foggy Dew")
14. Healey Willan—"Loch Lomond"(orig. "Loch Lomond")

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Abstract

The following diploma thesis, based on examples of selected pieces for low and middle voices by 20th century composers such as: Benjamin Britten, Healey Willan, Ding Shande, Li Yinghai, focuses on the comparative analysis of Chinese and British folk songs from the perspective of cultural differences and musical and vocal techniques.

The introduction presents the background of this study, the objectives of the research, its importance, the current state of research, methodology and innovation, as well as the need for implementing this type of dissertation. From the point of view of the background of the study, both China and Great Britain have different cultural characteristics, which translates into completely different styles in Chinese and British folk songs. The performance of British and Chinese folk songs, capturing the differences between them, is a condition for appropriate transmission and cultivation of the art of folk songs as musical forms created in various traditions and systems of musical style, and also improves the level of individual vocal skills and musical education. In terms of achieving the research goal, the comparison of cultural differences and musical-vocal techniques of Chinese and British folk songs reflects the synthesis of theory and practice and plays a very important role in the process of preparing a musical-vocal performance. From the point of view of the importance of research, the comparison of Chinese and British folk songs in terms of cultural differences plays a positive, stimulating role in the process of educating vocalists, enabling them to better recognize specific styles and gain a deeper understanding of the background of their creation and the process of music development.

By combining my individual experiences gained from vocal practice with mastered musical and vocal techniques, I can attempt to provide practical advice on performing Chinese and British folk songs.

The contemporary state of research still shows a clear paucity of works devoted to detailed considerations on this topic, especially based on the practice itself, but also in the exploration of the diversity of the tradition from which folk vocal art

originates. Existing research is still in the exploration phase and a unified theoretical synthesis has not yet been established. Knowledge in this field awaits enrichment and supplementation. The study's methodology focuses on literature analysis, observation, practice and theory study. The study of Chinese and English folk songs was conducted from two perspectives, firstly from the interregional and intercultural point of view, secondly from the point of view of the vocal techniques used.

The following dissertation consists of four chapters. The first chapter is an introduction. **The second chapter** includes a comparative analysis of Chinese and British folk songs in terms of four elements: musical form, text, message, and arrangement. From the perspective of musical form, Chinese folk songs are divided into three types: work hymns, xiaotiao, and mountain songs. British folk songs, on the other hand, are classified mainly in relation to the region and the following songs exist: English, Scottish and Irish.

In terms of themes, Chinese folk songs are divided into five categories: work hymns, songs about current affairs, love songs, songs about everyday life, and songs for celebrations. The subject matter of British folk songs is extremely rich and can be summarized in five categories: folk legends, family tragedies, love stories, historical events and stories about heroes, and comic songs. Considering the textual layer of Chinese folk art, the main features are improvisation, dialectization of language styles, metaphorical rhetoric and structural additions. In terms of arrangement and adaptation, Chinese folk songs are divided into three types: text arrangement, instrumental arrangement, and extended song adaptation. In the case of British folk songs, the main arrangement is to add accompaniment, i.e., on the basis of the traditional folk song melody and the original text, adding accompaniment written by a professional composer. In terms of the accompaniment itself, the piano accompaniment definitely dominates.

In the third chapter, a thorough comparison of cultural differences between Chinese and British folk songs was made in terms of five factors: humanistic background, musical style, shape of melody, use of language, and aesthetic aspirations. In terms of cultural differences, Chinese and British folk songs have some similarities,

but also distinct differences. Through comparative analysis, we notice the rich regional and ethnic diversity typical of Chinese folk songs. Individual ethnic groups have their own unique musical style and methods of stage expression. In this respect, British folk songs remain relatively homogeneous, not showing such clear geographical and ethnic diversity as in the case of Chinese works. Chinese folk songs are most often based on a five-note scale, with sublime melody, making full use of elements of folk music. British folk songs are characterized by smooth and melodious melodies, fast rhythms and direct forms of expression, based on the traditional European major-minor tonal system.

The lyrics of Chinese folk songs show the spirit and living conditions of the Chinese throughout different historical eras. Extremely diverse in content, they focus mainly on four areas: love, work, everyday life, historical events, and have deep cultural and social significance. In British folk songs, the content revolves around the presentation of historical events, the beauty of the natural landscape and the description of human emotions.

In chapter four, I discuss the differences in the use of musical and vocal techniques in Chinese and British folk songs in terms of five factors: mood, breathing technique, resonance, ornamentation, and language. In terms of expression, the mood in Chinese folk songs is influenced by many variables, and it is this variability that largely determines the variety of emotions contained in them. The mood in British folk songs has many similarities, such as subtlety, a desire for solace, and sometimes darker elements.

When considering breathing technique, the performance of both Chinese and British folk songs requires the use of specific breathing methods and consideration of its leading role in supporting singing. Nevertheless, after a closer look at this issue, it is easy to see that the vocal techniques used when performing Chinese folk songs are more complicated. When it comes to the use of resonance techniques in Chinese folk songs, the emphasis is on respecting two cardinal principles: rigorous diction and gentle vocalization with moving vocal expression. However, in British folk songs the main emphasis is placed on the uniformity of the voice in individual sound registers.

In terms of the use of ornamentation, Chinese folk songs are characterized by a high level of complexity, while in British folk songs the requirements in this matter are relatively simple, mainly focusing on maintaining a smooth legato melody. In terms of the linguistic techniques used when singing Chinese folk songs, the intonation of the voice should be based on the connotations and meaning of the text, while in the case of British folk songs, attention

I. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

As performers of vocal music, aware of great cultural diversity, we should recognize the artistic features and styles of vocal music originating from different countries and nationalities. This enables us to continually improve our vocal-musical competence and education. The United Kingdom and China are characterized by specific, distinct cultures, so it is no surprise that their folk songs fully manifest entirely different styles. By performing British and Chinese folk songs, it is possible to fully capture the differences between them, which not only allows for the successful transmission and promotion of folk musical art from these two distinct musical systems but also enhances one's own vocal skills. Vocalists striving for artistic success and audience recognition, while relying on their own abilities and vocal-musical skills, should present their acquired musical and cultural education. In conclusion, understanding the differences between British and Chinese folk songs from the perspective of cultural distinctions and vocal techniques, and capturing the singing style of folk songs from different countries, demonstrates the overall value of a vocalist.

The task of this doctoral thesis is to conduct a comparative analysis of British and Chinese folk songs from two perspectives: cultural differences and vocal-musical techniques. Folk songs are an established distinct vocal-musical form, but above all, they constitute lyrical expressions arising from labor and daily social life. Folk songs record people's attitudes toward life, their aspirations, and aesthetic desires. They are one of the most direct forms of human emotional expression, widespread in the development of world music and transmitted across many regions as an immensely important part of cultural heritage. The folk songs of individual countries and regions serve as constant inspiration, transforming into fundamental musical material in the process of professional music composition, playing a significant role in stimulating the development of global musical art. In the realm of vocal music practice, composers, viewing their task through the lens of inheriting and promoting culture,

adapt traditional folk songs through arrangements, giving them the style of art songs. The main topic of this work is the arrangements of traditional folk songs by Chinese and British composers. To deepen the comparison of Chinese and British folk songs in terms of specific works, I focused on 20th-century arrangements of British and Chinese folk songs. Additionally, to thoroughly analyze the artistic features of folk songs from these two countries, I examined them from two perspectives: cultural differences and vocal techniques.

To present scientifically grounded conclusions on the subject of this thesis, I selected 20th-century arrangements by renowned composers. The Chinese composers whose works are discussed include Ding Shande and Li Yinghai.

Ding Shande (1911-1995) was born in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province. As an active composer and theorist, he left an immensely rich legacy for contemporary Chinese music. In his youth, he studied at the Paris Conservatory under teachers such as Nadia Boulanger and Arthur Honegger. Later, he became a professor and head of the composition department, as well as vice-president of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. He was also vice-chairman of the Chinese Musicians Association. As a composer with deep and comprehensive education, Ding Shande primarily wrote should be paid to the precise pronunciation of the English language, demonstrating the rich content value of the text.

symphonies, concertos, choral works, chamber music, solo instrumental pieces, art songs, and film scores. His most important folk song arrangements include popular piano works such as *The Sun Rises Joyfully*, *When the Pagoda Tree Blooms*, *Mayila*, *I Want to Kiss My Mother*, and *A Lovely Rose*.

Li Yinghai (1927-January 5, 2007) was born in Fushun, Sichuan Province. He is recognized as one of the most outstanding composers of contemporary Chinese music, as well as a music theorist and activist. He worked as a professor at the China Conservatory of Music. His most famous works include *Gelitai*, *Flowing Stream*, and dozens of other compositions. Li Yinghai published a collection of songs titled *Solo Folk Songs*.

Among British composers, the works of Benjamin Britten and the

Canadian-based Healey Willan were selected for this study.

Edward Benjamin Britten (November 22, 1913-April 12, 1976) was born in the United Kingdom, where he worked as a composer, conductor, and pianist. He was an immensely important figure in 20th-century classical music. His oeuvre includes operas, chamber music, songs, and orchestral works. Britten was distinguished not only by his versatility but also by his exceptional talent for blending tradition with modern expressive means, allowing him to create works with original emotional impact while remaining accessible to listeners. He left behind a rich legacy but is particularly celebrated for his operas, including *Peter Grimes* (1945), *The Turn of the Screw* (1954), and *Billy Budd* (1951). He also wrote numerous religious and choral works. Inspired by folklore, he produced several collections of songs, such as *Folk Song Arrangements* and *British Isles Folk Songs*.

Healey Willan (1880-1968) was born in the UK and later moved to Canada, where he worked as an organist and composer. He gained renown primarily for his choral and organ music. His works intersect influences from Richard Wagner, Gregorian chant, and Renaissance music. He composed over 800 pieces, including operas, orchestral works, choral compositions, and numerous organ and piano pieces. His greatest fame came from religious music.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The objectives of this dissertation revolve around three main themes:

1. Folk songs as a vital form of cultural heritage.
2. Cultural differences shaping their stylistic and thematic content.
3. Vocal techniques employed in their performance.

Folk songs encapsulate not only textual and oral traditions but also express the authentic musical styles of their regions through vivid melodic constructions. While professional arrangements of folk songs retain their original essence, they adapt them into art songs by adding piano accompaniment to meet the standards of professional vocal music.

From the perspective of cultural differences, folk songs are rooted in national

identities, dialects, lifestyles, customs, and aesthetic aspirations. A comparative analysis must first consider these cultural distinctions.

In terms of vocal techniques, common elements include breath control, resonance, diction, and stage presence. However, individual techniques vary based on the song's style, mood, and expressive demands. This thesis examines:

1. A comparative analysis of Chinese and British folk songs and their arrangements.
2. Cultural differences in themes, musical styles, melodic structures, language use, and aesthetic goals.
3. Vocal technique comparisons, including timbre, breath management, resonance, ornamentation, and linguistic specificity.
4. The role of vocalists' musical education in interpreting these songs.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Theoretical Significance: This work provides a detailed methodology for comparing Chinese and British folk songs from performance-oriented perspectives. While existing studies focus on historical, ethnic, or musical analyses, this thesis bridges gaps by integrating cultural and vocal-technical approaches.

Practical Significance: The study offers vocalists insights into stylistic nuances, origins, and composer adaptations of folk songs. It also addresses how cultural differences necessitate individualized vocal techniques, providing practical advice for performers.

1.4 Literature review with an assessment of the current state of research

1.4.1 Studies on singing and the application of vocal techniques in Chinese folk songs

Xiao Xuan emphasizes understanding one's vocal capabilities and selecting repertoire that aligns with them.

Qiao Bangli highlights the organic fusion of language and music in folk singing, stressing precise diction.

Liu Yuan explores parallels between bel canto and traditional Chinese vocal

methods, noting shared emotional expressiveness.

1.4.2 Studies on British Folk Singing Techniques

Ding Jing analyzes Britten's folk song collections, emphasizing subtle melodies and text-music unity.

Anne Marie Forbes discusses the narrative simplicity of British folk songs.

Paul Cowdell traces influences from French and Italian cultures on British folk traditions.

1.4.3 Studies comparing Chinese and British folk songs

Wu Li's work *Comparison of British Folk Songs and Yuefu Poetic Songs* analyzes Chinese and British folk songs from a cultural-historical perspective. The author argues that early oral transmission led to similarities between Chinese Yuefu poetry and British folk traditions. However, fundamental differences arise from distinct cultural and historical contexts, including divergent philosophies, religions, customs, and aesthetic standards. Both traditions evolved through oral dissemination, undergoing continuous refinement and loss over time.

Jiangsheng Yan's *Comparison of Love Metaphors Between British Folk Songs and Yao's Folk Songs* contrasts the Yao ethnic group's songs with British folk ballads. Yao songs emphasize historical context and everyday emotions, while British songs focus on chivalric heroes and romantic legends. The Yao style is subtle and metaphorical, whereas British folk songs exhibit passionate, direct storytelling.

Research Gaps: Existing studies lack systematic comparisons of vocal techniques and cultural frameworks. This thesis addresses this gap by synthesizing theory and practice.

1.5 Methodology of the study

1. **Source Analysis:** Collection and synthesis of academic literature, scores, and recordings.

2. **Observational Method:** Critical review of performances to assess vocal expression and emotional delivery.

3. **Practical Method:** Application of personal performance experience to analyze

interpretative challenges.

Innovations:

Cross-cultural lens for analyzing Chinese and British folk traditions.

Focus on vocal techniques shaped by linguistic and aesthetic differences.

Chapter II. Studies on Chinese and British folk songs and arrangements by composers

2.1 Comparative Study of Chinese and British Folk Songs

2.1.1 Types of Folk Songs

Analysis of classification criteria. Chinese folk songs include labor chants (work songs), minor tunes (xiaodiao), and mountain songs (shange). British folk songs originate from Celtic dances (e.g., jigs) and feature forms such as quatrains and refrains.

2.1.2 Themes

Chinese themes: labor, love, daily life, rituals. British themes: folklore, domestic tragedies, tragic love, historical heroes, comedy.

2.1.3 Characteristics of lyrics

Chinese: improvisation, dialectal features, metaphorical rhetoric, structural auxiliary words. British: dialectal narratives, fixed stanzas, direct emotional expression.

2.1.4 Methods of dissemination

Chinese: natural inheritance, migration, artistic integration (e.g., opera), stage performances, educational dissemination. British: poetic composition, musical adaptation (e.g., Renaissance composers), folk revival movements (20th-century collectors).

2.1.5 Arrangement and Adaptations

Chinese: textual modifications, expanded instrumental accompaniment. British: piano-centric arrangements emphasizing melody-text fusion (e.g., Benjamin Britten's practices).

2.2 Chinese folk songs arranged by composers: Ding Shande and Li Yinghai

2.2.1-2.2.7 Case Studies

Analyses of Ding Xiande and Li Yinghai's adaptation techniques:

1. Ding Xiande

Thinking of My Mother (Yunnan folk song): Preserves original melody; adds piano prelude/interlude; expands to ternary form.

The Sun Rises Joyfully (Sichuan folk song): Integrates minor tune features; enhances liveliness through dynamic rhythms and orchestration.

A Lovely Rose (Kazakh folk song): Combines improvisation with polyphonic dialogue and asymmetrical meters.

2. Li Yinghai

Flowing Stream (Yunnan folk song): Maintains mountain song's free rhythm; enhances lyricism via piano accompaniment.

Alamuhan (Xinjiang folk song): Retains Uyghur dance rhythms; adds piano prelude and variation structure.

Under the Silver Moonlight (Tatar folk song): Uses modal shifts (major to minor) for emotional contrast.

2.3 Folk songs in arrangements by British composers Benjamin Britten and Healey Willan

2.3.1 Healey Willan - Scottish Folk Song Ae Fond Kiss

Poetic Context: Robert Burns' poem on parting sorrow and patriotism.

Musical Analysis:

Structure: Binary form (A-A) with prelude/postlude evoking melancholy.

Harmony: C major with minor inflections for tension.

Accompaniment: Arpeggiated chords and sustained bass, emulating Romantic lieder (e.g., Schubert).

2.3.2 Benjamin Britten - Welsh Folk Song The Ash Grove

Historical Context: 18th-century Welsh song linked to Saint David's resistance against Saxon invasions.

Adaptation Features:

Structure: Ternary form (A-B-A1) with pastoral melodies and nature imagery.

Harmony: F major with contrapuntal textures and dynamic subtlety.

Piano Accompaniment: Two-voice polyphony and dispersed chords for ethereal

atmosphere.

2.3.3 Benjamin Britten - Irish Folk Song The Salley Gardens

Poetic Source: W.B. Yeats' adaptation of an Irish ballad on youthful love's regrets.

Musical Treatment:

Structure: Strophic form (A-A1) in B-flat major with flowing rhythms symbolizing transience.

Melody: Stepwise motion and leaps; piano uses repeated thirds to intensify pathos.

2.3.4 Benjamin Britten - English folk song O Waly, Waly

Theme: Heartbreak and betrayal, metaphorizing human fragility (e.g., "broken oak").

Adaptation Techniques:

Structure: Strophic form in F major with 3/2 meter evoking water imagery.

Harmony: Functional chords blended with chromaticism for drama.

2.3.5 Benjamin Britten - English ballad Little Sir William

Historical Context: Medieval anti-Semitic legend reflecting the 12th-century Norwich William case.

Musical Narrative:

Structure: Contrasting binary form (A-A1) in C major; 2/2 meter juxtaposes innocence and tragedy.

Piano Accompaniment: Shifts from sprightly rhythms to heavy chords for fatalism.

2.3.6 Benjamin Britten - English Folk Song The Foggy, Foggy Dew

Theme: Weaver's tragic love, implicating sexual metaphors and social taboos.

Adaptation Features:

Melody: Colloquial narration; piano mimics loom rhythms.

Harmony: Traditional tonality with dissonant intervals for emotional ambiguity.

2.3.7 Healey Willan - Scottish Folk Song Loch Lomond

(Loch imagery and Scottish national identity.)

Research Methodology and Conclusions

Analytical Methods:

1. Text-music correlation: Melodic contours aligned with lyrical prosody.
2. Structural contrast: Fusion of traditional forms (e.g., strophic) with modern extensions.
3. Harmonic innovation: Functional harmony enriched with modal mixture and chromaticism.

Key Conclusions:

Britten and Willan's arrangements preserve folk essence while endowing new aesthetic value through modern techniques.

Musical narratives balance "contrast-fluidity" to bridge cultural heritage and innovation

Chapter III. Comparative analysis of Chinese and British folk songs from the perspective of cultural differences

3.1 Comparison of the humanistic background

3.1.1 Humanistic background of Chinese Folk Songs

Historical Context: Traced to primitive society (e.g., The Song of Striking the Soil), reflecting the aspirations of working people.

Social Context: Broad themes tied to daily life (e.g., family bonds, love).

Literary Context: Use of metaphors and euphemisms (e.g., "flowing water" symbolizing love).

3.1.2 Humanistic background of British Folk Songs

Historical Context: Originated in the medieval period, revived under Classicism and Romanticism.

Social Context: War and turmoil inspired creation (e.g., The Three Ravens depicting war's brutality).

Literary Context: Narrative focus and direct emotional expression (e.g., O Waly, Waly).

3.1.3 Similarities and Differences

Similarities: Rooted in historical, social, and literary contexts.

Differences: Chinese emphasis on lyrical metaphors vs. British narrative directness.

3.2 Musical Style Comparison

3.2.1 Musical style of Chinese folk songs

Structure: Asymmetrical multi-sectional forms (e.g., Yunnan folk song Xiao He Tang Shui).

Scale: Predominant pentatonic scale, heptatonic in Xinjiang.

Rhythm: Free-flowing and improvisational (e.g., Sichuan folk song When Will the Locust Trees Bloom).

3.2.2 Musical style of British folk songs

Structure: Symmetrical strophic forms (e.g., The Salley Gardens).

Scale: Major-minor tonal system with functional harmony.

Rhythm: Steady triple meter (e.g., The Ash Grove).

3.2.3 Similarities and Differences

Similarities: Integration of accompaniment and emotion.

Differences: Chinese pentatonic freedom vs. British tonal regularity.

3.3 Comparison of the formation of melodic material

3.3.1 Formation of melodic material in Chinese folk songs

Openness: Improvisational transmission, small intervals, ornamentation (e.g., glissando, vibrato).

Compactness: Minimal leaps, legato phrasing (e.g., Xiao He Tang Shui).

3.3.2 Formation of melodic material in British folk songs

Symmetry: Arch-shaped melodic lines, triadic arpeggios (e.g., Loch Lomond).

Narrativity: Repetition and leaps (e.g., Ae Fond Kiss).

3.3.3 Comparison of forms of melody formation in Chinese and British folk songs

China: Pentatonic spontaneity vs. Britain: Structured major-minor frameworks.

3.4 Linguistic Features

3.4.1 Chinese Linguistic Influence

Tones shape melodic contour, rhyming, and natural imagery (e.g., The Sun Rises Joyfully).

3.4.2 British Linguistic Influence

Stress and rhyme dictate rhythm, dialectal narratives (e.g., Scarborough Fair).

3.4.3 Comparison in language use in Chinese and British folk songs

China: Tonal metaphor vs. Britain: Stressed directness.

3.5 Aesthetic Ideals

3.5.1 Chinese Aesthetics

Daoist harmony and Confucian restraint (e.g., Longing for My Mother symbolizing maternal bonds).

Regional diversity (e.g., Sichuan vs. Xinjiang styles).

3.5.2 British Aesthetics

Historical narratives and pastoral lyricism (e.g., The Ash Grove symbolism).

Simplicity and oral tradition (e.g., Little Sir William narrative structure).

3.5.3 Aesthetic Contrast

China: Subtle naturalism vs. Britain: Historical clarity.

3.6 Chapter Summary

Emphasizes respect for cultural differences and proposes four principles for cross-cultural dialogue:

1. Non-judgmental acceptance of differences.
2. Understanding historical and social contexts.
3. Facilitating cross-cultural communication.
4. Promoting development through cultural mutual learning.

Summary: This chapter systematically compares Chinese and British folk songs across five dimensions (humanistic, musical, melodic, linguistic, aesthetic), highlighting shared traits and distinctions. It advocates open-minded engagement with cultural diversity to advance artistic exchange.

Chapter IV. Comparison of Chinese and British Folk Songs from the Perspective of Vocal Music Techniques

4.1 Emotional Expression

4.1.1 Creating Mood in Chinese Folk Songs

Fundamental Principles:

Understanding the emotional tone of the piece and identifying with its characters.

Adapting vocal techniques (timbre, dynamics, phrasing) to reflect shifting emotions.

Examples:

In Ding Shande's *I Long to Kiss My Mother* (measures 10–12), controlled dynamics and timbre convey longing.

In *The Beautiful Rose Flower*, mood shifts from contemplation to excitement require dynamic transitions between soft and bright tones.

4.1.2 Creating Mood in British Folk Songs

Characteristics:

Clearly defined mood from the opening bars (e.g., melancholy in H. Willan's *Ae Fond Kiss*).

Dynamic shifts in narratives (e.g., joy to tragedy in B. Britten's *Little Sir William*).

Techniques:

Use of dialogue (e.g., Britten's *The Foggy, Foggy Dew*) and timbral shifts to distinguish characters.

4.1.3 Comparison of mood building in Chinese and British folk songs

Chinese Songs: Emotions evolve fluidly, reflecting a philosophy of natural change.

British Songs: Macrostructure maintains mood consistency, but microstructure embeds narrative complexity.

4.2 Breathing Techniques

4.2.1 Chinese Folk Songs

Flexibility:

Sustained breaths in slow pieces (e.g., Li Yinghai's *Flowing Stream*).

Short, dynamic breaths in fast songs (e.g., *Alamuhan*).

Control: Intentional airflow management for seamless phrasing.

4.2.2 British Folk Songs

Symmetry:

Natural breathing supported by regular phrasing (e.g., Britten's *O Waly Waly*).

Precise breath placement in pauses (e.g., *The Salley Gardens*).

4.2.3 Comparison

Chinese: Requires structural analysis and advanced breath control.

British: Intuitive, relying on symmetrical phrasing and moderate tempos.

4.3 Resonance Techniques

4.3.1 Chinese Folk Songs

Precision:

Oral and head resonance for clarity (e.g., *I Long to Kiss My Mother*).

Emotional integration through resonance (e.g., *Joyful Sunrise*).

4.3.2 British Folk Songs

Naturalism:

Chest resonance for warmth (e.g., *Loch Lomond*).

Blended resonance across registers (e.g., *Ae Fond Kiss*).

4.3.3 Comparison

Chinese: Focus on diction precision and subtlety.

British: Emphasis on tonal richness and narrative expression.

4.4 Saturated Singing Technique – Runqiang

4.4.1 Characteristics

Definition: Melodic ornamentation through resonance (e.g., vibrato, glissandi).

Regional Variations:

Northern China: Full-bodied tone with legato.

Southern China: Subtle staccato and intervallic leaps.

4.4.2 Application

Examples:

Vibrato in Li Yinghai's *Flowing Stream*.

Glissandi in *Alamuhan* to mimic Xinjiang dialect inflections.

4.5. Language Techniques

4.5.1 Chinese Folk Songs

Tonal Precision: Strict control of linguistic tones (e.g., *The Beautiful Rose Flower*).

Dialects: Pronunciation adaptations (e.g., Sichuanese dialect in *When the Shupin Flowers Bloom*).

4.5.2 British Folk Songs

Diction: Syllable stress emphasis (e.g., *Ae Fond Kiss*).

Regional Accents: Scottish hard consonants vs. Welsh softness.

4.5.3 Comparison

Chinese: Melodic alignment with tonal language.

British: Rhythm and stress as narrative foundations.

4.6 Chapter Summary

Key Differences:

Chinese Songs: Dynamic emotional shifts, linguistic precision, complex breath control.

British Songs: Narrative coherence, tonal naturalism, rhythmic articulation.

Shared Elements:

Intentional resonance and breath management.

Emotional authenticity as a performative goal.

Conclusions: Both Chinese and British folk songs demand profound cultural

understanding and technical mastery. Their interpretation synthesizes theoretical knowledge, artistic sensitivity, and stylistic adaptability, bridging heritage and artistry.

Chapter V. Conclusion

Nations inhabiting various regions of the world have, through centuries of cultural development, shaped unique forms of art, including folk music. Chinese and British folk songs, originating from distinct cultural spheres, have preserved their exceptional identities, with their diversity reflecting both national specificity and universal musical values. This dissertation aimed to reveal both the similarities and significant differences in aesthetics, style, vocal techniques, and the historical and social contexts of these two musical traditions.

A comparative analysis of these two distant heritages demonstrated the immense role played by professional arrangements by eminent composers such as Li Yinghai, Ding Shande, Benjamin Britten, and Healey Willan in shaping and promoting folk traditions. Their work confirmed that folk songs can function not only as simple musical forms but also as valuable elements of artistic repertoire. Adapting folk material for concert stages enriched vocal art, allowing this music to enter professional repertoires and evolve further within the context of contemporary performance.

The comparison of Chinese and British folk songs also broadened the research perspective in cultural studies, aesthetics, musicology, and compositional techniques. The analysis revealed the influence of diverse social and historical conditions that significantly shaped their form and function. Studying the working methods of composers arranging folk songs provided valuable insights into the adaptation and stylization of folklore in professional vocal music.

From the perspective of vocal practice, studying Chinese and British folk songs significantly expanded a singer's experience in performance techniques. Performing these songs requires diverse approaches to vocal emission, breath control, resonance, diction, and emotional expression, which often diverge markedly from traditional demands associated with classical operatic and art song repertoires. Awareness of these differences is invaluable for vocalists, enabling them to enrich their craft and adapt their technique to various musical styles.

In the 18th century, French art theorist Denis Diderot (1713–1784) stated:

“Creating art requires imagination and fantasy, yet this psychological state is a product of life experiences; they are the decisive factor.”

These words perfectly capture the essence of interpreting folk songs—the fusion of artistic imagination and accumulated experiences allows for authentic and moving performances. In this context, studying Chinese and British folk songs opens new horizons in vocal technique and deeper understanding of music as a form of artistic expression.

The cultural specificity and differences in vocal techniques between Chinese and British folk songs have profound historical and social roots. While Chinese songs retain dialectal richness and tonality, demanding precise diction and specific vocal techniques, British songs emphasize uniform timbre, phrasing fluidity, and narrative expression. Despite these differences, both traditions share a vital trait—their expressive power and ability to convey emotions, ensuring their place as essential elements of global musical heritage.

The folk songs analyzed in this work, despite their folk origins, have become vocal art classics. However, there remains vast potential for further research into their cultural significance and practical performance aspects. Studying these songs from diverse perspectives contributes not only to theoretical knowledge but also advances interpretive artistry. Engaging with this repertoire provides singers with new experiences, enabling a fuller understanding of music as a living, dynamic form of artistic expression.

In summary, this dissertation demonstrates that a comparative analysis of Chinese and British folk songs not only offers valuable insights into distinct musical cultures but also inspires a deeper understanding of singing as a universal art. Studying vocal techniques in this context allows us to better appreciate tradition’s role in shaping contemporary performance and opens new interpretative possibilities for vocal artists worldwide.

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