



Applying Bel Canto Techniques in the Performance of Zhao

Jiping's Art Songs: A Practice-Based Study

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ABSTRACT

The cross-cultural application of Bel Canto in Chinese art song performance remains a key topic in vocal studies. Existing research largely depends on score analysis and theoretical discussion, with insufficient practice-based empirical research, and few studies specifically explore Bel Canto adaptation for Zhao Jiping's art songs, which combine northern folk melodies, opera inflexions and tonal poetic lyrics. This paper adopts Practice-Based Research and uses 13 representative works performed in two recitals as research materials. Drawing on annotated scores, rehearsal journals, tutor feedback and performance recordings, this study establishes a dual-dimensional framework of technical practice and artistic interpretation and identifies layers of conflicts between Bel Canto norms and Chinese linguistic aesthetics. Through repeated performance experimentation, the study identified four principal areas of adaptation: breath management and continuity, resonance adjustment and vocal unity, *runqiang* adaptation and linguistic expression, and tone-colour design for emotional communication. The findings suggest that Bel Canto may function as a flexible technical framework whose principles can be adapted to the linguistic, stylistic, and expressive requirements of Chinese art song performance.

Keywords: bel canto, Zhao Jiping's art songs, cross-cultural vocal performance, *runqiang*, practice-based research

INTRODUCTION

Chinese art songs occupy an important position in contemporary Chinese vocal repertoire, combining poetic texts, musical expression, and cultural aesthetics. Their performance requires singers to balance vocal technique, linguistic clarity, and artistic interpretation. Owing to the close relationship between text and melody, performers must coordinate breath management, diction, phrasing, and expressive communication while maintaining musical continuity and stylistic coherence.

Among contemporary Chinese composers, Zhao Jiping has made a significant contribution to the development of Chinese art songs. His vocal works integrate elements of classical poetry, folk traditions, and modern compositional techniques, creating distinctive musical and stylistic characteristics. As a result, Zhao Jiping's art songs have become an important component of contemporary Chinese vocal repertoire and present a range of technical and interpretative challenges for singers.

Bel Canto technique has been widely adopted in the performance of Chinese art songs because it emphasises breath management, resonance balance, vocal continuity, and tonal consistency. However, applying Bel Canto principles to Chinese art songs requires cross-cultural adaptation. Singers must negotiate the relationship between Western vocal techniques and the linguistic, stylistic, and aesthetic characteristics of Chinese vocal repertoire, particularly in relation to diction, *runqiang*, and poetic expression.

Against this background, the present study examines the application of Bel Canto techniques in performing Zhao Jiping's art songs, with particular attention to the technical, linguistic, and expressive challenges arising from the interaction between Western vocal principles and Chinese vocal aesthetics. This study adopts a practice-based approach to investigate how these challenges are negotiated through rehearsal, reflection, and performance.

Research gap and aim of the study

Existing scholarship has provided important discussion on Chinese art song aesthetics, *bel canto* pedagogy, cross-cultural vocal adaptation, and Zhao Jiping's musical language. However, current studies remain largely descriptive, stylistic, or pedagogical. Limited attention has been given to how singers negotiate the technical and aesthetic tensions between

bel canto vocal production and Chinese language-centred vocal expression through rehearsal, interpretative experimentation, and performance practice. Furthermore, although Zhao Jiping's musical language has been widely discussed in studies of film music and regional composition, relatively little research has examined the implications of his stylistic characteristics for vocal performance within contemporary Chinese art song repertoire.

Against this background, the present study investigates adapting Bel Canto techniques to Zhao Jiping's art songs through a practice-based research approach. It examines how Bel Canto principles may be adapted to accommodate the musical, linguistic, and expressive requirements of this repertoire, with particular attention to breath management and continuity, resonance adjustment and vocal unity, *runqiang* and linguistic expression, and tone-colour design for emotional communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocal performance and Chinese art song aesthetics

Contemporary studies of musical performance increasingly regard performance as an interpretative and embodied artistic practice rather than the mere reproduction of musical notation. Performance involves coordinating technical execution, emotional communication, bodily expression, and artistic understanding. Scholars such as Rink (2002) and Davidson (2001) emphasise performance's interpretative nature and the role of expressive decision-making in shaping musical meaning.

Within this interpretative context, Chinese art songs present distinctive aesthetic and performative characteristics shaped by tonal language, poetic expression, and indigenous vocal culture. Existing studies generally emphasise that Chinese art songs prioritise linguistic clarity, semantic expression, and the natural relationship between text and melodic contour (Wang, 2024). Unlike many Western vocal traditions that emphasise sustained resonance and tonal continuity, Chinese vocal aesthetics prioritise diction, speech-like phrasing, emotional subtlety, and culturally inflected vocal colour (Han & Yu, 2016). In addition, incorporating regional folk music and traditional opera elements further contributes to flexible rhythmic structures, declamatory melodic movement, and highly language-oriented vocal expression (Han & Yu, 2016; Wang, 2024).

As a result, performing Chinese art songs requires singers to coordinate vocal production with linguistic articulation, poetic interpretation, and stylistic sensitivity. Contemporary scholarship therefore increasingly regards Chinese art song performance not only as a technical vocal activity, but also as a culturally embedded interpretative practice shaped by language, aesthetics, and performance tradition.

Zhao Jiping's musical language characteristics

Existing studies on Zhao Jiping primarily focus on his film music, regional compositional language, and folk-derived musical aesthetics rather than vocal performance itself. Studies of works such as *Red Sorghum* and *Yellow Earth* consistently emphasise Zhao's integration of Shaanbei folk sonority, operatic declamation, narrative lyricism, and indigenous melodic contour within contemporary Chinese composition (Thompson, 2015). Although these studies do not directly address art song performance, they provide important insight into the stylistic foundations of Zhao's musical language and its relationship to vocal expression.

Existing scholarship further suggests that Zhao Jiping frequently transforms regional folk vocality and traditional Chinese expressive aesthetics into concert-oriented musical forms. His compositional style closely integrates vocal melody, poetic expression, and timbral design while reflecting an interaction between Chinese national musical characteristics and European compositional principles (Thompson, 2015; Wang, 2019). In addition, incorporating folk opera elements and language-oriented melodic shaping creates vocal works that require strong coordination among diction clarity, emotional pacing, and expressive continuity in performance practice (Wang et al., 2023).

From a performance perspective, these stylistic characteristics create interpretative conditions that do not always align directly with conventional *bel canto* aesthetics. While *bel canto* singing emphasises resonance continuity, tonal uniformity, and rounded vocal production, Zhao Jiping's musical language frequently demands declamatory articulation, flexible tonal inflexion, and culturally specific expressive nuance derived from Chinese folk and operatic traditions (Thompson, 2015; Han & Yu, 2016). Consequently, Zhao Jiping's repertoire provides an important context for examining the relationship between Western

vocal technique and Chinese aesthetic expression within contemporary cross-cultural vocal performance practice.

Zhao Jiping's art songs pose significant challenges for vocal performance because of their lyrical melodies, poetic language, and stylistic diversity. Regional folk traditions such as Xintianyou provide an important stylistic context for understanding these vocal characteristics. Gao (2023) identifies wide melodic spans, free movement between registers, syncopated rhythms, and high-pitched vocal qualities as characteristic features of Xintianyou. These characteristics provide a relevant cultural and musical context for understanding the demands of breath support, pitch stability, and vocal control in Zhao Jiping's works.

In addition, the lyrics often draw on classical Chinese poetry and culturally rich texts, requiring singers to convey linguistic meaning and emotional nuance while maintaining musical continuity (Wang et al., 2023). Consequently, performing Zhao Jiping's art songs depends not only on technical proficiency but also on the performer's ability to integrate language, expression, and artistic interpretation.

Bel Canto technique and cross-cultural vocal adaptation

With increasing interaction between Western vocal pedagogy and Chinese vocal performance practice, *bel canto* technique has gradually become an important approach to performing Chinese art songs. Existing scholarship generally acknowledges that *bel canto* provides systematic advantages in breath management, resonance balance, vocal continuity, and tonal stability, contributing to the technical development of singers performing Chinese repertoire (Uthup, 2016). Studies on vocal pedagogy further suggest that the scientific and physiological foundations of *bel canto* enable singers to achieve greater vocal consistency and projection within contemporary concert performance contexts (Uthup, 2016; Pan, 2023).

At the same time, applying *bel canto* technique to Chinese art songs has generated growing discussion about linguistic adaptation and cultural expression. Several scholars argue that the tonal structure of the Chinese language differs considerably from European vocal languages traditionally associated with *bel canto* singing. As a result, diction clarity, tonal inflexion, vowel modification, and speech-like phrasing become central concerns when applying Western vocal production to Chinese repertoire. Wang (2018) proposes that

International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) transcription may help singers coordinate Chinese pronunciation with *bel canto* vocal placement, while Chen (2019) emphasises that adjustments in resonance strategy and vowel production are necessary to accommodate the phonetic characteristics of Mandarin Chinese.

Beyond technical adaptation, existing studies increasingly discuss integrating Chinese vocal aesthetics and *bel canto* technique within cross-cultural performance practice. Some scholars suggest that *bel canto* breathing support and resonance organisation may strengthen vocal stability and melodic continuity in Chinese art songs, whereas indigenous Chinese singing traditions contribute greater flexibility in linguistic articulation, emotional nuance, and stylistic expression. Zhang (2018) therefore advocates an integrated vocal approach that combines elements of Chinese folk-style singing and Bel Canto technique. However, most existing discussions remain primarily pedagogical and descriptive, focusing largely on general technical integration rather than examining how singers negotiate the practical tensions between Western resonance-oriented vocal production and the language-centred aesthetics of Chinese art songs within actual performance practice.

Consequently, while current scholarship offers valuable discussion of technical adaptation and stylistic integration, a systematic, performance-based framework for addressing the interpretative and aesthetic complexities of Chinese art song performance remains insufficiently developed. This limitation further highlights the need to explore culturally adaptive approaches to applying *bel canto* within the Chinese vocal repertoire.

Technical and aesthetic tensions in applying *Bel Canto* to Chinese art songs

Although *bel canto* technique has increasingly been incorporated into the performance of Chinese art songs, existing studies suggest that applying Western vocal production to Chinese repertoire still involves significant technical challenges (C. Wang, 2018; Chen, 2019). *Bel canto* singing traditionally emphasises resonance uniformity, sustained breath flow, tonal continuity, and vertically organised vocal production (Uthup, 2016), whereas Chinese art songs are closely associated with tonal diction, syllabic articulation, and speech-oriented melodic movement (Han & Yu, 2016).

As a result, singers often struggle to balance vocal resonance with linguistic clarity, particularly when performing repertoire that requires precise tonal inflexion and natural textual delivery. Several studies therefore note that excessive reliance on resonance homogenisation and covered vocal production may weaken Mandarin diction clarity, distort syllabic stress, and reduce the natural relationship between language and melodic contour in Chinese vocal performance (Chen, 2019; Han & Yu, 2016).

Beyond technical coordination, scholars increasingly acknowledge aesthetic and stylistic tensions between *bel canto* tradition and Chinese vocal expression (Han & Yu, 2016). Traditional *bel canto* aesthetics prioritise vocal continuity, tonal roundness, and dramatic projection, while Chinese vocal aesthetics emphasise semantic subtlety, poetic restraint, culturally inflected vocal colour, and language-centred expression (Han & Yu, 2016; Wang, 2024). Furthermore, incorporating folk music, regional opera traditions, and declamatory vocal gestures within Chinese art songs creates expressive conditions that do not always align directly with conventional Western vocal aesthetics (Zhang, 2018). Existing research therefore suggests that applying Bel Canto to Chinese repertoire extends beyond technical adaptation and involves coordinating Western vocal technique with Chinese linguistic and stylistic characteristics (Zhang, 2018; Liu et al., 2022).

Despite growing discussion of vocal integration and stylistic fusion, existing studies have often approached the integration of Chinese and Western vocal techniques from pedagogical and technical perspectives. Current studies often focus on general technical adjustment, stylistic comparison, or theoretical discussions of East–West integration (C. Wang, 2018; Chen, 2019), yet they have paid relatively little attention to how singers negotiate these tensions through rehearsal processes, interpretative experimentation, and performance practice. Consequently, a systematic practice-based framework that coordinates *bel canto* vocal production with the linguistic and aesthetic characteristics of Chinese art songs remains insufficiently developed. This limitation further highlights the need to explore culturally adaptive approaches to vocal interpretation in contemporary Chinese art song performance.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This study adopts a Practice-Based Research (PBR) approach, in which artistic practice functions as a primary mode of inquiry and knowledge generation. This approach is particularly appropriate to the present study because the adaptation of Bel Canto techniques in Zhao Jiping's art songs cannot be fully investigated through score analysis or theoretical discussion alone. Questions concerning breath management, resonance adjustment, linguistic articulation, *runqiang*, and tone colour emerge directly through the physical and interpretative processes of singing and therefore require investigation through performance practice.

Practice-Based Research recognises creative practice as a legitimate means of generating knowledge. As Barrett and Bolt (2014) argue, artistic practice constitutes a mode of inquiry through which new understandings may emerge. Accordingly, performance in this study was not treated merely as the final presentation of predetermined interpretative decisions, but as an active research process through which technical problems were identified, alternative strategies were tested, and performance solutions were progressively refined.

The research therefore involved a cyclical process of rehearsal experimentation, recital preparation, performance, and reflective evaluation. Vocal and interpretative strategies were repeatedly examined in response to the musical, linguistic, and stylistic demands of the selected repertoire. While the study is primarily practice-based, it also incorporated elements of practice-led inquiry, as insights generated through rehearsal and performance contributed to the ongoing refinement of technical approaches and interpretative decisions. In this way, practice functioned as the site of investigation, a source of research data, and a means of developing performance knowledge.

Research materials and data collection

The research materials consisted of thirteen selected art songs by Zhao Jiping, together with the practice-based materials generated during their preparation and performance. The selected repertoire represented a range of musical, linguistic, and expressive characteristics in Zhao Jiping's vocal writing, providing a practical basis for examining the adaptation of Bel Canto techniques across different performance contexts. The works were prepared and performed in

two recitals, which served not only as artistic presentations but also as key stages in the research process.

Data were collected throughout the rehearsal and performance process rather than at a single stage of the study. Four principal forms of practice-based material were used: annotated scores, practice journals, mentoring feedback, and recital recordings. Annotated scores documented technical and interpretative decisions made during rehearsal, including breathing points, phrasing, diction, resonance-related adjustments, and other performance markings. Practice journals recorded technical difficulties encountered during preparation, the strategies employed to address them, and subsequent changes observed through repeated experimentation.

Mentoring sessions provided additional professional feedback. Comments and suggestions from these sessions prompted reconsideration of specific aspects of vocal production and interpretation and, where appropriate, changes to the strategies tested in rehearsal. Video recordings of rehearsals and recital performances enabled the researcher to review the practical outcomes of these adjustments and to compare different stages of performance development.

Taken together, these materials provided multiple forms of evidence through which the adaptation of Bel Canto techniques could be examined in actual performance practice. Rather than relying exclusively on retrospective reflection, the study documented technical development across rehearsal, feedback, revision, and performance, thereby establishing a practice-based record of how particular vocal strategies were developed and refined.

Conceptual framework

This study's conceptual framework was adapted from Ross's (2022) discussion of Practice-Based Research in music performance. The framework integrates two interrelated dimensions: Technical Practical Aspects and Interpretative Aspects.

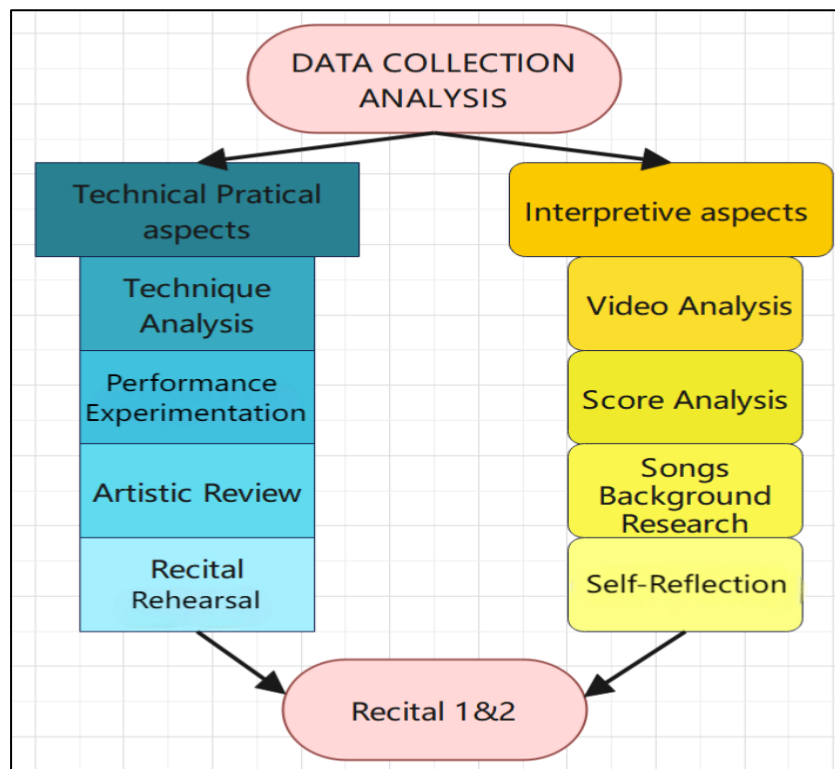


Figure1: Conceptual Framework (Developed by the researcher based on Ross, 2022)

The Technical Practical Aspects focus on developing and adapting vocal techniques through technique analysis, performance experimentation, artistic review, and recital rehearsal. These activities support the practical application of Bel Canto principles in Zhao Jiping's art songs.

The Interpretative Aspects encompass score analysis, video analysis, background research, and self-reflection. These activities deepen understanding of musical structure, poetic meaning, stylistic characteristics, and artistic expression.

The interaction between these two dimensions informs the development of performance strategies and contributes to achieving artistic outcomes. Recital 1 and Recital 2 ultimately evaluated the effectiveness of the resulting technical and interpretative approaches. Accordingly, the framework provides a systematic structure for integrating analysis, practice, reflection, and performance within the research process.

Rehearsal and reflective process

The rehearsal and reflective process constituted a central component of the practice-based investigation. Preparation of the selected art songs involved several interconnected stages,

including score study, individual vocal practice, collaborative rehearsal with piano accompaniment, stage rehearsal, and recital performance. Rather than following a strictly linear sequence, these stages formed a cyclical process in which technical problems identified during practice were repeatedly examined, adjusted, and reassessed.

During individual rehearsal, I paid particular attention to technical difficulties arising from the interaction between Bel Canto principles and the musical and linguistic characteristics of Zhao Jiping's art songs. These included maintaining breath continuity across extended phrases, adjusting resonance across registers, coordinating Chinese diction and runqiang with a continuous vocal line, and modifying tone colour in response to changing expressive demands. When a technical difficulty emerged, I tested alternative vocal strategies through repeated singing and compared them in terms of vocal stability, continuity, linguistic clarity, and expressive effectiveness.

Collaborative rehearsals with piano accompaniment provided a further context for refining these strategies. The relationship between vocal phrasing, accompaniment, tempo, dynamics, and textual expression was reconsidered within the complete musical texture, allowing technical decisions developed during individual practice to be evaluated under more realistic performance conditions. Stage rehearsals and recital preparation further tested whether these adjustments could be maintained consistently in performance.

Reflection occurred throughout this process, not only after performance. I reviewed practice journal entries, rehearsal recordings, mentoring feedback, and recital videos to identify changes in vocal production and evaluate the effectiveness of specific adjustments. Where a strategy did not produce the intended technical or expressive result, it was reconsidered and tested again in subsequent rehearsals. This iterative relationship between practice, reflection, and modification enabled technical strategies to develop progressively through the research process and provided the practical foundation for the findings presented in Section 4.

Data analysis and development of performance strategies

The practice-based materials collected throughout the study were analysed through an iterative process of review, comparison, and reflection. Rather than treating annotated scores, practice journals, mentoring feedback, and performance recordings as separate sources, the

analysis considered them in relation to one another to identify recurring technical challenges and the adjustments developed in response.

The analytical process began by identifying specific vocal problems encountered during rehearsal and performance. Journal entries and annotated scores were reviewed alongside rehearsal and recital recordings to examine how particular technical strategies affected vocal stability, phrase continuity, linguistic clarity, and expressive delivery. Mentoring feedback was also considered when evaluating the effectiveness of these adjustments. When similar technical issues appeared across different works, the relevant observations were compared to determine whether recurring patterns emerged.

Through this process, the technical observations were progressively organised into four principal areas: breath management and continuity, resonance adjustment and vocal unity, *runqiang* adaptation and linguistic expression, and tone-colour design and emotional communication. These categories were not established as predetermined analytical themes at the beginning of the study; rather, they emerged through repeated comparison of rehearsal experiences, reflective documentation, feedback, and performance outcomes across the selected repertoire.

The resulting categories provided the analytical structure for the findings presented in Section 4. They also enabled comparative consideration of individual performance experiences across different songs, allowing the study to move beyond isolated observations of particular works and identify broader strategies for adapting Bel Canto techniques in Zhao Jiping's art songs.

Application of Bel Canto techniques in Zhao Jiping's art songs

Breath management and continuity

Breath management emerged as one of the most significant areas of Bel Canto adaptation in performing Zhao Jiping's art songs. Although the selected repertoire differs considerably in musical style and expressive character, many works feature extended melodic lines, sustained phrases, and continuous emotional development. These musical features require singers to maintain stable breath support while preserving vocal continuity across changing registers and phrase structures. Consequently, breath management functions not only as a

physiological foundation for vocal production but also as an important mechanism for shaping musical expression and maintaining musical coherence.

In 幽兰操 (Youlan Song), breath management plays a crucial role in maintaining tonal stability across wide melodic leaps and extended lyrical phrases. The opening section includes phrases that gradually move through different vocal registers while requiring a continuous, unified vocal line. Performance practice showed that insufficient breath support often led to tonal instability, loss of resonance, and disrupted phrase continuity. Through the adaptation of Bel Canto breathing principles, particularly coordinated diaphragmatic support and controlled airflow, a more consistent tone quality could be maintained throughout the phrase, facilitating smoother register transitions and greater vocal stability.

Figure 2: 幽兰操 (Youlan Song) , mm. 19-26

As shown in Figure 2, the sustained melodic movement and register changes require breath support to remain continuous throughout the phrase, allowing the vocal line to stay stable despite shifts in pitch and resonance.

Similarly, 《峨眉山月歌》 (The Moon over the Eyebrow Mountains) presents challenges associated with long melodic lines and flowing musical movement. The song's lyrical character requires sustained breath energy to support legato singing and preserve the natural

continuity of the melodic contour. Rather than treating individual phrases as isolated units, breath management enables the singer to shape larger musical structures and sustain expressive direction across extended passages. Performance practice indicated that breath support directly influenced both phrase continuity and the overall sense of musical flow within the work.



Figure 3: 峨眉山月歌 (The Moon over the Eyebrow Mountains), mm. 14-15

Breath continuity is particularly important in songs such as 《唐多令·惜别》 (Song of Tangduo: Parting Sorrow), where musical expression frequently extends across rests and phrase boundaries. In these contexts, Bel Canto technique emphasises maintaining breath energy even when phonation momentarily ceases. This approach reflects the principle that “the voice stops, but the breath continues,” allowing emotional expression to remain active beyond the sounding phrase. During performance, preserving internal breath energy contributed to smoother phrase connections and helped sustain the expressive continuity required by the poetic and lyrical nature of these works.



Figure 4: 《唐多令·惜别》 (Song of Tangduo: Parting Sorrow), mm.23-24

The findings suggest that breath management in Zhao Jiping’s art songs extends beyond physiological support for singing. By adapting Bel Canto breathing principles, singers can

sustain long phrases, negotiate register transitions, preserve tonal consistency, and maintain expressive continuity across diverse musical contexts. The findings further indicate that breath management serves as a crucial link between technical control and artistic communication, supporting both vocal efficiency and the expressive demands of Zhao Jiping's art-song repertoire.

The findings further suggest that breath management serves not only a physiological function but also an interpretative one. In Zhao Jiping's art songs, sustained breath energy contributes directly to phrase architecture and emotional continuity, allowing singers to project long-range musical intentions beyond individual notes or words.

Resonance adjustment and vocal unity

Resonance adjustment emerged as another significant area of Bel Canto adaptation in performing Zhao Jiping's art songs. Performance practice showed that resonance strategies must adapt to changes in tessitura, expressive intention, and stylistic character. Rather than maintaining a fixed resonance configuration, singers must employ a flexible, responsive resonance system while preserving overall vocal unity. This process contributes not only to tonal consistency but also to the effective communication of musical expression.

In 《幽兰操》 (Youlan Song), resonance adjustment is closely associated with register coordination. The melodic writing contains wide intervallic movements that require the singer to maintain tonal unity across different vocal registers. Performance practice demonstrated that inadequate resonance balance often resulted in noticeable changes in vocal colour during register transitions. By adapting Bel Canto resonance principles, particularly coordinating resonance space and vocal focus, singers can achieve smoother transitions between registers, contributing to a more homogeneous vocal sound.

Figure 5 shows a musical score for 'Youlan Song' (幽兰操), measures 9-14. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has two red boxes highlighting specific phrases: '兰之猗猗,' and '不采而'. The piano accompaniment includes arpeggiated chords and a descending scale in the right hand, and a steady bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include mp and mf.

Figure 5: 幽兰操 (Youlan Song) , mm. 9-14

Through careful resonance adjustment, the singer is able to maintain tonal consistency across ascending and descending melodic movement while preserving the continuity of the musical phrase.

A different resonance strategy appears in 《终南别业》 (On His South Mountain Villa). The work's contemplative character requires a warm, balanced resonance quality that supports its restrained poetic atmosphere. Rather than relying on dramatic projection, the singer must cultivate stable resonance and tonal refinement, particularly in the middle register.

Figure 6 shows a musical score for 'On His South Mountain Villa' (终南别业), measures 15-18. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has a red box highlighting the phrase '中岁颇好道,'. The piano accompaniment consists of a steady bass line in the left hand and a series of chords in the right hand. Dynamics include pp.

Figure 6: 《终南别业》 (On His South Mountain Villa), mm.15-18

Performance practice indicated that subtle adjustments of resonance placement contribute to a more focused and controlled tone, allowing the vocal sound to reflect the introspective and meditative qualities of the text.

In contrast, 《断桥遗梦》 (Dream of the Broken Bridge) presents a more dramatic expressive context. As the emotional intensity of the work gradually increases, greater flexibility in resonance adjustment becomes necessary. Performance practice demonstrated that the balance between chest-dominant and head-dominant resonance requires continual modification in response to changing expressive demands.

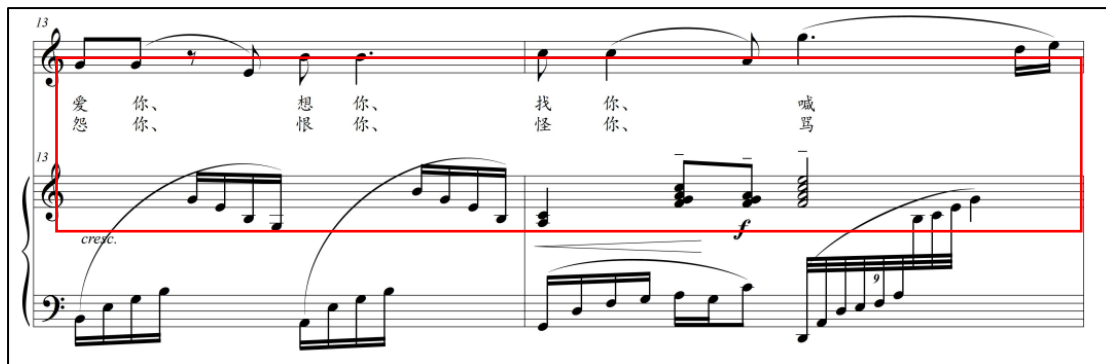


Figure 7: 《断桥遗梦》 (Dream of the Broken Bridge), mm.13-14

Such resonance adjustments not only support vocal efficiency but also contribute to the portrayal of emotional progression and dramatic characterisation throughout the work.

The findings suggest that resonance adjustment in Zhao Jiping's art songs extends beyond technical considerations of vocal production. By adapting Bel Canto resonance principles, singers can maintain tonal unity, negotiate register transitions, and respond effectively to diverse expressive and stylistic requirements. More importantly, the findings indicate that resonance is not employed as a fixed technical mechanism but as a flexible interpretative resource that supports the interaction between vocal technique and musical expression. Consequently, resonance adjustment functions as a key means through which technical control and artistic interpretation are integrated in performance.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that resonance adjustment in Zhao Jiping's art songs is closely shaped by tessitura, dynamic intensity, and expressive character. Within the

Bel Canto framework, resonance therefore functions not merely as a means of maintaining vocal unity across registers, but also as a flexible interpretative resource through which contrasting musical and emotional qualities can be realised.

Runqiang adaptation and linguistic expression

The adaptation of *runqiang* represents an important aspect of applying Bel Canto techniques to Zhao Jiping's art songs. Unlike Western vocal repertoire, Chinese art songs frequently incorporate ornamented melodic inflections that are closely associated with linguistic expression and traditional vocal aesthetics. As a characteristic feature of Chinese vocal performance, *runqiang* contributes to the shaping of textual nuance, emotional expression, and stylistic identity. Performance practice demonstrated that the effective integration of *runqiang* requires singers to balance the clarity of Chinese diction with the vocal continuity and legato principles associated with Bel Canto singing.

An example can be observed in Zhao Jiping's 《唐多令·惜别》 (Song of Tangduo: Parting Sorrow), where short slurs and melismatic figures are employed to realise *runqiang* on individual syllables. These embellishments appear in words such as “何,” “离,” and “伤”, enriching the melodic contour while preserving textual intelligibility.

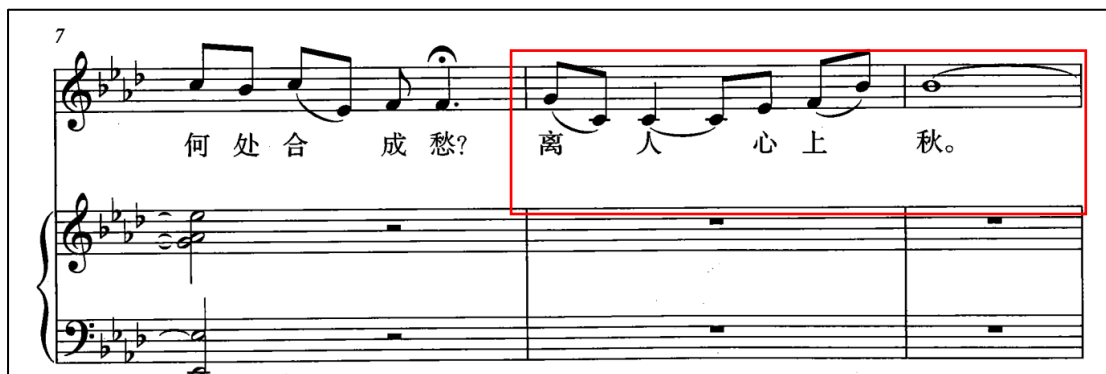


Figure 8: 《唐多令·惜别》 (Song of Tangduo: Parting Sorrow), mm.7-9

In the phrase “离人心上秋” (Li Ren Xin Shang Qiu), the ornamented treatment extends beyond decorative function. Subtle pitch inflexions and syllabic extensions reinforce the emotional atmosphere of longing and separation conveyed by the poetry. Performance practice indicates that successfully realising these expressive details depends on stable breath support and controlled vocal continuity. By adapting Bel Canto principles, singers can

execute ornamentation with flexibility while maintaining tonal stability and phrase coherence.

A similar interaction between Bel Canto technique and the aesthetics of *runqiang* appears in 《知己红颜》 (Intimate Friend and Young Beauties). The climactic passage “想也难，梦也难，见也难，爱也难” (Xiang Ye Nan, Meng Ye Nan, Jian Ye Nan, Ai Ye Nan) shows how emotional expression intensifies through repeated textual material.

Figure 9: 知己红颜 (Intimate friend and young beauties), mm. 14-18

Rather than functioning as simple repetition, each statement introduces subtle variations in vocal inflexion, ornamentation, and tone colour, allowing the emotional content of the phrase to develop gradually throughout the musical passage. Performance practice revealed that this process relies on integrating traditional *runqiang* aesthetics with the technical resources of Bel Canto singing. Stable breath support, resonance balance, and vocal continuity provide the technical foundation through which expressive nuances can emerge without disrupting the integrity of the vocal line.

More broadly, the adaptation of *runqiang* illustrates the challenges of cross-cultural vocal performance. While Bel Canto prioritises vocal continuity and tonal uniformity, traditional Chinese vocal aesthetics often emphasise linguistic flexibility and expressive inflexion. The performance practice examined in this study suggests that these approaches are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they may work complementarily when technical control adapts to stylistic requirements.

The findings suggest that adapting *runqiang* in Zhao Jiping's art songs involves more than accurately reproducing ornamented melodic figures. Rather, it requires integrating traditional Chinese vocal aesthetics with the technical principles of Bel Canto singing. The findings further indicate that Bel Canto technique does not replace the traditional concept of *runqiang*; instead, it provides a stable vocal framework that supports its expressive function. By maintaining tonal unity, vocal continuity, and technical flexibility, singers can preserve the stylistic characteristics of Chinese vocal traditions while achieving the vocal efficiency and expressive coherence associated with Bel Canto performance practice. Consequently, *runqiang* may be understood not as a challenge to Bel Canto technique, but as a stylistic feature that requires adapting Bel Canto principles within the context of Chinese vocal aesthetics.

Tone-Colour design and emotional communication

Tone-colour design represents an important dimension of *Bel Canto* adaptation in Zhao Jiping's art songs. Beyond the technical production of vocal sound, variations in tone colour shape emotional development and reinforce musical expression. Performance practice demonstrated that the flexibility of *Bel Canto* tone production enables singers to respond to changing emotional contexts while maintaining vocal consistency and technical efficiency. Consequently, tone colour operates not only as an acoustic attribute of the voice but also as an important interpretative resource in performance.

A representative example appears in 《枫叶飘落的声音》 (The Sound of Falling Maple Leaves), where repeated textual material intensifies emotional expression. Rather than reproducing identical vocal effects each time, the performer must create distinct emotional

layers through carefully controlled changes in vocal colour. This approach lets the music's emotional trajectory unfold progressively throughout the performance.



Figure 10: 枫叶飘落的声音 (The Sound of Falling Maple Leaves), mm. 28-29



Figure 11: 枫叶飘落的声音 (The Sound of Falling Maple Leaves), mm. 20

Particularly significant is the ascending sustained vowel “A,” in which vocal intensity and tonal brightness gradually increase while maintaining register consistency. The development of tone colour mirrors the emotional growth of the musical phrase, transforming a purely technical vocal gesture into a vehicle for expressive communication. Performance practice indicated that the effectiveness of this process depends upon the singer’s ability to coordinate breath energy, resonance balance, and vowel modification without compromising tonal unity. From a *Bel Canto* perspective, tone-colour variation is not achieved through excessive muscular effort or artificial manipulation of vocal production. Instead, it emerges through subtle adjustments in resonance, breath support, and expressive intention. Such flexibility

enables the performer to preserve vocal beauty while responding effectively to the emotional and stylistic demands of the repertoire. In this respect, tone-colour design serves not merely as a technical adjustment but as a means of communicating emotional nuance and interpretative intention.

The findings therefore indicate that tone-colour design operates as an interpretative strategy rather than as an isolated vocal effect. Through coordinated adjustments of breath energy, resonance balance, and vowel formation, singers can differentiate emotional layers while preserving tonal unity. In Zhao Jiping's art songs, tone colour thus provides an important means of connecting *Bel Canto* vocal control with the repertoire's changing expressive and dramatic demands.

DISCUSSION

***Bel Canto* as an adaptive technical framework**

The findings of this study indicate that the application of *Bel Canto* techniques to Zhao Jiping's art songs should not be understood as the direct transfer of a fixed Western vocal model into Chinese repertoire. Rather, the four areas identified through performance practice—breath management, resonance adjustment, *runqiang* adaptation, and tone-colour design—suggest that *Bel Canto* serves as a technical foundation whose principles can be adjusted to the linguistic, stylistic, and expressive requirements of individual works.

This interpretation is grounded in the technical flexibility already embedded within *Bel Canto* vocal pedagogy. Miller (1996), for example, discusses breath management, resonance balancing, register unification, vowel modification, dynamic control, and vocal timbre as interrelated components of vocal production, while also considering the relationship between technique and musical communication. Similarly, Stark (2003) approaches *Bel Canto* through both historical vocal pedagogy and the physiological and acoustic principles underlying breath control, registration, resonance, and tone production. These perspectives provide an important technical basis for understanding *Bel Canto* not simply as a characteristic vocal sound, but as a coordinated system of vocal resources that can respond to different performance demands.

The present findings extend this technical perspective to Chinese art song performance. In Zhao Jiping's works, the same technical principle does not necessarily produce the same performance solution in every musical context. Breath management, for instance, may support long legato phrases in one work while maintaining expressive continuity across rests and phrase boundaries in another. Resonance similarly requires adjustment according to tessitura, dynamic intensity, and expressive character. The contrast between the restrained tonal quality required in *Zhong Nan Bie Ye* and the progressively intensified resonance of *Duan Qiao Yi Meng* demonstrates that vocal unity is achieved not through an unchanging resonance configuration but through controlled technical flexibility.

The relationship between *Bel Canto* and *runqiang* provides an even clearer example of this adaptive process. Previous research on Chinese art song performance has shown that applying *Bel Canto* requires attention to the phonetic and linguistic characteristics of Chinese rather than directly adopting approaches developed for Western-language repertoire (Liu et al., 2022). More recent practice-based research has also explored integrating *runqiang* techniques with *Bel Canto* principles, demonstrating the possibility of maintaining Chinese stylistic characteristics within a Western-derived vocal framework (Yu & Yap, 2025). The findings of the present study support this direction while extending it specifically to Zhao Jiping's art songs. In works such as *Tang Duo Ling: Xi Bie* and *Zhiji Hongyan*, stable breath support and vocal continuity do not replace *runqiang*; instead, they provide the technical conditions through which melodic inflexion, ornamentation, and linguistic nuance can be realised without disrupting the vocal line's integrity.

Taken together, these findings suggest that technical adaptation is not a compromise between *Bel Canto* and Chinese vocal aesthetics. Rather, it is a process of negotiation in which fundamental principles of vocal production are retained while their practical application is modified to meet repertoire-specific requirements. The concept of *Bel Canto* as an adaptive technical framework therefore emerges from this study's performance findings: technical stability provides the foundation, while flexibility in breath, resonance, linguistic treatment, and tone colour enables that foundation to respond to the particular musical and cultural characteristics of Zhao Jiping's art songs.

Implications for Chinese art song performance

The findings have broader implications for Chinese art song performance because they show that effective vocal interpretation depends on the interaction between technical coordination and the repertoire's linguistic and stylistic characteristics. Chinese art songs combine musical structures influenced by Western compositional practices with Chinese poetic texts, linguistic inflexion, and culturally specific modes of expression. Consequently, vocal technique cannot be separated from the performer's understanding of language and musical style.

This relationship is particularly evident in the treatment of Chinese diction. Ye (2026), in a performance-centred study of the art songs of Huang Zi and Gao Ping, examines the interaction between Mandarin lexical tones and Western-derived melodic writing, emphasising the practical challenge of preserving textual intelligibility while maintaining vocal line, resonance, and expressive continuity. The findings of the present study reveal a comparable negotiation in Zhao Jiping's works, but also indicate that linguistic adaptation extends beyond accurate pronunciation. In passages involving *runqiang*, the shaping of individual syllables becomes part of the musical expression itself, requiring singers to coordinate diction with breath flow, melodic continuity, ornamentation, and changes in vocal colour.

This observation is particularly relevant to performance training. Yao's (2022) pedagogical study of Ding Shande's art songs demonstrates that Chinese art song instruction involves interconnected consideration of lyrics, melodic and rhythmic features, breathing, vocal range, accompaniment, and accessibility rather than pronunciation alone. Yao further positions these elements as practical considerations for teachers when assigning and preparing Chinese art songs in the voice studio. These findings support an integrated pedagogical perspective and suggest that *Bel Canto* training for Chinese art song repertoire should similarly move beyond the isolated development of vocal technique.

From a pedagogical perspective, this means that breath support, resonance, diction, and tone colour need not be taught as independent technical categories when preparing Chinese art songs. Instead, they may be approached as interconnected resources that respond to specific musical and textual situations. For example, resonance adjustment may simultaneously

facilitate register transition and shape emotional character, while breath continuity may support both legato production and the projection of poetic meaning across rests. Likewise, *runqiang* requires linguistic clarity but also depends on stable breath and vocal continuity if ornamentation is to remain integrated within the musical phrase. Such an approach may encourage singers to understand technique as part of interpretative decision-making rather than as a preliminary stage completed before interpretation begins.

More broadly, the findings contribute to discussions of cross-cultural vocal performance by demonstrating that the interaction between Western vocal technique and Chinese musical aesthetics need not result in the dominance of one tradition over the other. Instead, the performance process may involve selective adaptation in which technical principles are retained, modified, or redirected according to the repertoire's characteristics. In Zhao Jiping's art songs, *Bel Canto* provides key resources for vocal stability and continuity, while Chinese linguistic and aesthetic characteristics shape how performers use them. This reciprocal relationship offers a practical model for approaching Chinese art song as a repertoire in which technical proficiency, cultural understanding, and artistic interpretation operate together.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the adaptation of *Bel Canto* techniques in Zhao Jiping's art songs through a practice-based research approach. Drawing upon performance practice, reflective inquiry, and recital-based experimentation, the study examined how *Bel Canto* principles may be adapted to accommodate the linguistic, stylistic, and expressive characteristics of contemporary Chinese art songs.

The findings identified four principal areas of adaptation: breath management and continuity, resonance adjustment and vocal unity, *runqiang* adaptation and linguistic expression, and tone-colour design for emotional communication. The study demonstrated that *Bel Canto* techniques can provide an effective technical framework for addressing the performance demands of Zhao Jiping's art songs while supporting their distinctive artistic and cultural characteristics. Rather than functioning as a fixed system of vocal production, *Bel Canto* technique was shown to operate as a flexible, adaptive resource that responds to the specific requirements of the Chinese vocal repertoire.

Among the findings, the relationship between *Bel Canto* technique and *runqiang* emerged as a particularly significant aspect of cross-cultural vocal adaptation. The study suggests that *Bel Canto* does not replace traditional Chinese vocal aesthetics; instead, it provides a stable vocal foundation through which stylistic features such as *runqiang*, linguistic expression, and poetic nuance can be realised more effectively in performance. This interaction highlights the importance of adapting vocal technique to cultural and stylistic contexts rather than applying technical principles uniformly.

The study contributes to existing scholarship by offering a practice-based perspective on applying *Bel Canto* techniques in Chinese art song performance. By integrating technical analysis, performance experimentation, and reflective practice, it offers a framework for understanding how vocal technique and artistic interpretation interact within the contemporary Chinese vocal repertoire.

Future research may extend this investigation to other Chinese composers and vocal genres, or further explore the relationship between *Bel Canto* technique and traditional Chinese vocal aesthetics in different performance contexts. Such studies may contribute to a broader understanding of cross-cultural vocal adaptation and the continuing development of Chinese art song performance practice.

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