



SONG CI AS LIVING HERITAGE IN CULTURAL CONTEXT SINGING TECHNIQUES AND TEACHING APPROACHES FOR ART SONG EDUCATION

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Abstract

Song Ci art songs represent a profound intersection of literature, music, and cultural heritage. Emerging during the Song Dynasty, their development was closely tied to the era's political stability, economic prosperity, and vibrant urban culture. With their flexible structures, refined language, and rich emotional depth, Song Ci became both a literary and musical treasure, influencing later art forms and maintaining relevance in modern culture. This article examines Song Ci from three dimensions: historical-cultural context, artistic characteristics, and vocal-pedagogical practice. Analysis highlights the integration of Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist philosophies, as well as the role of urban life in shaping the form's widespread dissemination. The artistic diversity of Song Ci is evident in its two major stylistic schools—delicate and bold—whose poetic structures and musical cadences enhanced expressive potential. In performance, Song Ci requires mastery of tonal clarity, breathing control, and timbre adjustment, aligning vocal delivery with poetic imagery. Teaching approaches emphasize breath training, multi-sensory feedback, emotional expression, and cross-disciplinary integration.

Challenges in singing education, including pitch accuracy, emotional depth, and the limitations of distance learning, can be addressed through systematic training, modern technological tools, and continuous feedback. By situating Song Ci as both a cultural legacy and a pedagogical resource, this research underscores its value in contemporary music education. The findings reaffirm the significance of Song Ci not only as historical literature but also as a living heritage that continues to shape vocal artistry and teaching practices.

Keywords: Song Ci; Living Heritage; Singing Techniques and Teaching Approaches; Art Song Education

Introduction

Song Ci, a poetic form that flourished during the Song Dynasty (960–1279), occupies a distinguished position in the history of Chinese literature and music. Unlike regulated Tang poetry, Song Ci developed into a highly expressive genre characterized by flexible structures, intricate rhythmic patterns, and profound emotional resonance. Originally composed for musical performance, it represents a fusion of poetic artistry and musical tradition, embodying the cultural sophistication of its era. The historical and cultural background of the Song Dynasty provided fertile ground for the development of Song Ci. Economic prosperity, political stability, and the rise of urban culture created an environment in which literature and the arts could thrive. Ci poetry not only reflected the aspirations and emotions of the literati but also permeated popular culture through performance in teahouses, taverns, and communal gatherings. Its wide dissemination ensured that Song Ci became both a literary treasure and a cultural phenomenon, integrating philosophical influences from Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism into its artistic expression.

Artistically, Song Ci achieved remarkable diversity through its two principal schools: the delicate style, noted for its subtle emotional portrayals, and the bold style, distinguished by grandeur and patriotic themes. These schools, though distinct, often overlapped, demonstrating the form's adaptability and depth. The musicality of Song Ci, with its attention to rhythm, tonal pattern, and melodic contour, further enhanced its expressive capacity, allowing it to transcend

written text and find enduring resonance in performance. In the realm of vocal performance and pedagogy, Song Ci art songs present unique opportunities and challenges. Effective interpretation requires mastery of breathing, diction, tonal control, and timbre adjustment to convey the poetic imagery with authenticity. Teaching approaches emphasize not only technical training but also the cultivation of emotional expression and cultural understanding. Incorporating cross-disciplinary perspectives and modern technology enriches the teaching process, enabling students to appreciate Song Ci as both an artistic practice and a cultural heritage (Ning, 2022).

Since the pre-Qin period, poetry and music have been closely linked. As the opening work of ancient Chinese poetry, the Book of Songs has more than 300 songs. The classification of wind, elegance and praise reflects the difference in the content and use of poetry, but also reflects the difference in musical style. The folk songs are simple, lively, reflecting the life style of people everywhere; the music of elegant song is often used in solemn occasions such as court sacrifice, solemn, slow and melodious, showing the majesty and order of the ceremonial state. To the Han Dynasty, lefu poetry rose. Yuefu collected folk ballads and literati poems, and arranged, processed and composed them. The music forms of Yuefu poetry are more-rich and diverse, including large-scale song and dance music used for court banquet and entertainment, and small rap music spread in the folk. Its content covers war corvee, love and marriage, labor production and many other aspects. The poetry of Tang Dynasty reached the peak of ancient Chinese poetry art. The musicality of Tang poetry is reflected in the rigorous rhythm and rhythm. The level and oblique tones, neat thesis and harmonious rhyme are the basis of music creation. For example, Yang Guan San Die, adapted from Wang Wei's "Song Yuan Er Shi An Xi" has become a classic farewell song spread through the ages with deep emotion and beautiful melody. It is developed on the basis of the fusion of music and literature. As the musical logo of the word, the tune, meter count, sentence number, level, rhyme and other elements of each word. Different ci cards have completely different musical styles, such as "Nianjiao Red Cliff" is suitable for expressing bold and unrestrained feelings; "Qingping Music" is mostly used to describe the quiet and beautiful artistic conception. On the other hand, Yuan qu integrates various musical forms such as palace tune and singing earning. The application of qu pai set makes the musical structure more complex and changeable, and the content is more closes to secular

life. In the performance, it combines elements to enhance the dramatic expression (Ying, 2022).

This article explores Song Ci from multiple perspectives, including historical-cultural foundations, artistic features, vocal techniques, and pedagogical applications. By framing Song Ci as a living heritage, the discussion highlights its enduring relevance in contemporary music education. The aim is to demonstrate how the integration of tradition and pedagogy can preserve the cultural significance of Song Ci while equipping students with skills and insights applicable to modern vocal performance.

Historical and Cultural Background of Song Ci

Song Ci, as a representative literary form of the Song Dynasty, emerged in close connection with the political, economic, and cultural developments of the era. The Song Dynasty was marked by remarkable prosperity in both economy and culture. Urban expansion and the rise of the urban class created a strong social foundation for the flourishing of ci poetry. The cultural atmosphere of the time was relatively open and relaxed, allowing literati and scholars to actively engage in creative expression. Within this environment, Song Ci reflected not only the realities of social life but also the thoughts, aspirations, and emotions of the literati class. Its elegant language, refined imagery, and use of rhetorical devices such as metaphors and symbolism provided a medium for the delicate expression of complex sentiments.

The evolution of Song Ci was closely tied to music. Originally composed for performance, its form and content were deeply influenced by musical traditions. The metrical structures and rhythmic patterns aligned naturally with musical cadences, enhancing its aesthetic and expressive qualities (Zhu, 2021).

Song Ci was widely disseminated, extending beyond the literati and entering folk culture, thereby influencing broader aspects of social and cultural life in the Song Dynasty. It became a central component of cultural activities in both elite and popular contexts. Today, Song Ci is regarded not only as a literary treasure of the past but also as a continuing source of inspiration in modern literary creation and cultural preservation. Its enduring influence highlights the richness of traditional Chinese culture and its capacity to inform contemporary artistic and cultural practice.

Cultural Context of Song Ci

Song Ci occupies a prominent position in the history of Chinese literature, rooted in a cultural tapestry that integrates historical origins, social conditions, and literary values. Its origins can be traced back to Tang Dynasty poetry, but the form reached its peak during the Song period. The political stability, economic vitality, and vibrant urban life of the dynasty created favorable conditions for its development. The rise of scholar-officials and a flourishing urban culture encouraged both personal and public expression through ci lyrics. Literati composed with refined aesthetic sensibilities, while the general public enjoyed and shared these works in social spaces such as teahouses and taverns. This combination of elite creativity and popular participation ensured widespread circulation and cultural significance (Chen, 2023).

Artistically, Song Ci achieved lasting value through concise language, evocative imagery, and emotional depth. Its stylistic qualities elevated poetic expression, transforming abstract feelings into vivid, tangible experiences. At the same time, Song Ci absorbed philosophical dimensions from Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, mirroring the religious and intellectual landscape of its time. Localized linguistic variations and cultural influences also shaped the lyrics, reflecting the diversity of regional traditions and the psychological expressions of different communities. The emotional tones within Song Ci reveal a profound connection between culture and expression. Metaphors and symbolic language carried culturally embedded meanings that resonate across historical and social contexts. Taken together, the cultural background of Song Ci represents a rich system that embodies both the distinct character of the Song Dynasty and the deeper heritage of Chinese civilization. Understanding this context allows for a fuller appreciation of the literary and cultural value of Song Ci, as well as its continued relevance to modern society (Liang, 2021).

Artistic Characteristics of Song Ci

The artistic characteristics of Song Ci are defined by flexibility of form, musicality, and emotional depth. Unlike traditional regulated verse, Song Ci adopted variable line lengths, creating a fluid structure that allowed poets to express subtle emotions with rhythmic elegance. Each ci tune, such as Shuidiao Getou or Huanxi Sha, carried specific rhythmic patterns, which when paired with rhyme and tonal schemes, enhanced both literary and musical expressiveness.

Emotionally, Song Ci is renowned for its delicate portrayal of human sentiment. The “delicate school,” represented by poets such as Li Qingzhao and Liu Yong, conveyed themes of sorrow, longing, and introspection through refined imagery and symbolic expression. In contrast, the “bold school,” represented by Su Shi and Xin Qiji, expanded the scope of ci to themes of patriotism, history, and philosophy, often using vigorous language and majestic imagery. Some poets, such as Jiang Kui, integrated qualities of both schools, producing works of balance and versatility.

Song Ci also reflected diverse cultural realities, depicting urban life, natural landscapes, and social transformations. Its concise yet layered language employed devices such as metaphor, personification, and allusion, enabling works to embody profound philosophical reflections while maintaining lyrical beauty. The influence of Song Ci extended to later art forms, including opera and fiction, with works such as *The Peony Pavilion* bearing traces of its stylistic impact.

The performance of ancient poetry art songs uses multiple means to convey emotions and use the change of sound, such as the light and shade of timbre, the strength of the volume, and the ups and downs of tone, to accurately show the emotional levels in ancient poetry. For example, Li Bai's "Jiang Jin Jiu" begins with a magnificent, loud and full sound voice singing "you can't see the water of the Yellow River", depicting the surging momentum of the Yellow River, conveying the heroic and unrestrained feelings; in "with the eternal sorrow", can slow down the rhythm, reduce the volume, slightly vicissitudes and deep tone, showing the poet's inner melancholy and emotion. Performers also need to show the emotions, anger and emotions according to the emotional context of the poem (Zhang, 2021). For example, when singing Li Qingzhao's "Yi Jian Mei Hong Ou Xiang Can Yu Dian Qiu", the eyebrows and the faint sadness and yearning in the eyes, which let the audience intuitively feel the loneliness of the poet and the lover. When singing Shi Jin Guan Ju, the performer can simulate the posture of Jujiu cage bird, raise his hands and turn his head lightly, showing a vivid picture of "living in the river". When expressing the emotion of "beg, may mei thinking", he lowers his head slightly and shows the love and melancholy of the hero in the poem.

Through its fusion of form and content, music and literature, Song Ci established itself as a pinnacle of Chinese literary achievement. Its expressive richness and aesthetic sophistication continue to resonate with modern readers, offering both cultural insight and timeless emotional connection.

Singing Techniques and Musical Teaching Method of Song Ci Art Songs

Song Ci art songs emphasize the unity of poetic meaning and musical expression. Singing techniques are tailored to the emotional tone of each piece. Delicate lyrical works, such as Li Qingzhao's *Ru Meng Ling*, employ light timbre, controlled dynamics, and soft articulation to capture subtle emotions, while bold compositions, such as Xin Qiji's *Qin Yu An Yuan Xi*, require strong projection, dramatic intensity, and powerful vocal color.

Performers must pay careful attention to diction and tonal clarity, particularly within the four-tone system of Chinese phonetics (ping, shang, qu, ru). Pronunciation should maintain fluidity between syllables to preserve poetic rhythm. Vocal phrasing often resembles recitative patterns, as in Chai Tou Feng, aligning delivery with poetic structure.

Traditional performance practices also contribute to Song Ci art songs. Ornamentations such as vibrato (shou yin, yi yin) and glissando are used to highlight emotional depth and connect with Chinese operatic traditions. Timbre adjustments further align with thematic content: tender tones for boudoir laments and robust tones for frontier ballads. Accompaniment textures, such as piano arpeggios, often simulate traditional instruments like guzheng, reinforcing cultural identity (Hao, 2019).

In teaching contexts, Song Ci art songs benefit from integrating historical and cultural knowledge. Exposure to Song Dynasty calligraphy, painting, and music provides students with a deeper understanding of the cultural environment in which these works were created, thereby enhancing interpretive performance.

Experiences and Concepts in Singing Teaching

Singing education in relation to Song Ci emphasizes the integration of technique, expression, and cultural understanding. Breath control serves as the foundation for vocal stability and expression. Systematic training in abdominal breathing enables singers to sustain phrases, maintain tonal stability, and enhance expressive delivery.

Teaching methods often incorporate multi-sensory learning approaches. Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic feedback help students become aware of their vocal production and refine technical control. Emotional expression is considered equally essential; singing is regarded not only as a technical skill but as a medium of communication. Students are encouraged to connect with the emotional connotations of the lyrics, allowing performances to carry depth and resonance.

The combination of music theory with practical singing strengthens interpretive accuracy. Analysis of tonal structure, prosody, and rhythm supports a more precise vocal realization of the poetic text. The integration of modern technology, such as online learning platforms and multimedia demonstrations, further enriches teaching practices by providing accessible models and interactive learning tools. Continuous practice, accompanied by constructive feedback, remains vital to skill development. The process of repetition and refinement ensures technical mastery while deepening interpretive insight into the Song Ci repertoire.

Teaching Techniques for Singing

Effective teaching techniques for Song Ci art songs focus on a holistic combination of breathing, vocal control, emotional engagement, and applied music theory. Mastery of breath management, particularly abdominal breathing, provides the foundation for stable phrasing and tonal clarity. Multi-sensory feedback is incorporated to strengthen self-awareness. Through auditory monitoring, visual aids, and physical feedback, students develop greater control over resonance, diction, and projection. The integration of music theory into practical exercises reinforces accuracy, ensuring alignment between musical structure and poetic expression (Li, 2023).

Emotional engagement is treated as a central teaching goal. Students are guided to interpret the lyrical and symbolic meanings of Song Ci and to embody

these through tone color and phrasing. At the same time, teachers emphasize the importance of sustained practice, reflection, and responsive feedback as part of the learning process. Modern technological tools, including biofeedback devices and multimedia teaching platforms, enhance instruction by providing measurable and demonstrable insights into vocal production. Such tools allow learners to adjust their technique with greater precision, complementing traditional pedagogical methods.

Vocal Techniques and Style Development

The development of vocal technique and personal style in Song Ci performance relies on a balance of fundamental training and expressive exploration. Proper breathing, resonance control, and vocal technique form the basis of technical proficiency, providing stability and flexibility in performance. Training in diverse vocal methods and stylistic approaches enhances adaptability. Exposure to both delicate and bold traditions within Song Ci enables singers to apply different tonal qualities and interpretive strategies. This diversity fosters both versatility and the emergence of individual artistic style (Ying, 2022). Emotional expression is central to style formation. By infusing performances with sincerity and depth of feeling, singers transform technical accuracy into compelling artistry. The integration of music theory with practice further refines this process, supporting interpretive decisions with structural understanding. Modern technology contributes to vocal development by providing tools for pitch analysis, resonance monitoring, and feedback. These resources allow students to monitor progress and make precise adjustments to technique.

Finally, sustained practice and iterative feedback ensure gradual but consistent improvement. Through this process, performers develop not only technical mastery but also the personal interpretive style that defines their artistic identity.

New Knowledges

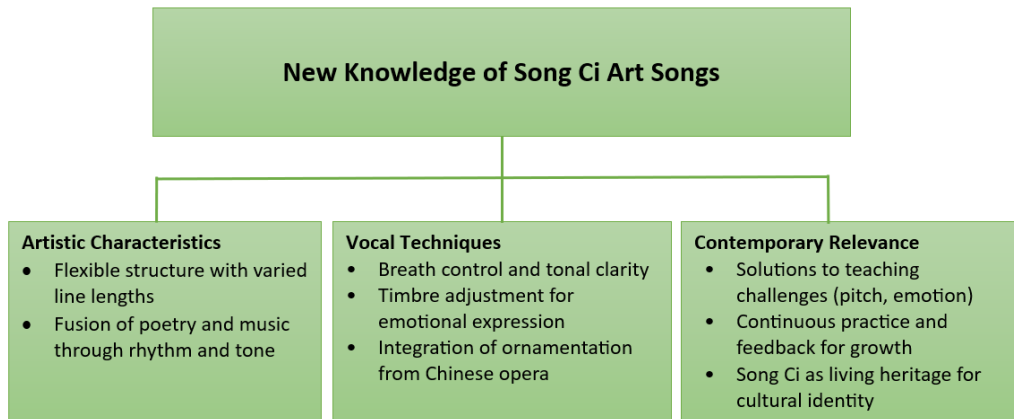


Figure 1: New Knowledges Diagram of Song Ci as Living Heritage in Cultural Context
Singing Techniques and Teaching Approaches for Art Song Education

Conclusions

Song Ci art songs embody a synthesis of cultural tradition, literary refinement, and musical expression. Rooted in the prosperous cultural environment of the Song Dynasty, they reflect the social realities, intellectual philosophies, and emotional aspirations of their time. Their flexible structures, rich imagery, and musical integration establish them as a pinnacle of Chinese literary achievement with lasting artistic and cultural impact.

In the context of vocal performance, Song Ci requires a balance of technical precision and emotional depth. Mastery of breathing, diction, tonal control, and expressive interpretation ensures that the poetic and musical dimensions are conveyed with integrity. The pedagogical application of Song Ci highlights the importance of combining technical training with cultural understanding, cross-disciplinary approaches, and modern technology to enrich teaching effectiveness. Despite challenges in areas such as pitch accuracy, emotional engagement, and distance learning, solutions grounded in systematic practice and responsive feedback enhance both skill development and interpretive artistry. Ultimately, Song Ci remains a living heritage, offering invaluable

insights into Chinese culture while serving as an effective pedagogical resource for vocal education. Its enduring relevance demonstrates the capacity of traditional art forms to inspire creativity, preserve cultural identity, and contribute to modern educational practices.

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