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Rules for Performing Chinese Art Songs with Bel Canto Singing Techniques

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Abstract

Chinese art songs do not appear in international vocal competitions as frequently as European art songs, and they lack international influence. Chinese is considered one of the hardest languages to learn, especially in singing. The primary objective is to make the lyrics clearer when non-native Chinese-speaking singers perform Chinese art songs. Additionally, another purpose is to solve the problem of "olive in the mouth" of the current domestic singers. The researchers employed practice-led research and qualitative research designs. To begin, Italian and Chinese are the initial language of Bel canto and involved in this research have been sorted out the pronunciation rules. Through the comparison of Italian double consonants and Chinese intonation, with or without continuous reading, it is shown that the two languages have different ways of expressing with the same singing technique. Meanwhile, the words in the tables shown in the results of this research are all from the recital repertoire. Actually, the pronunciation of these lyrics includes all kinds of pronunciation of Chinese Pinyin. Make the theory more convincing through stage practice. The singer avoids the problem of unclear spelling when singing Chinese art songs with Bel canto singing techniques. We also choose to use the combination of yi zi xing qiang and yi qiang xing zi as the singing rules when singing Chinese. Although widely accepted, it suffers from some limitations due to the different singer has different sensitivity of language, it is even difficult for individual singers to pronounce a certain pronunciation in Chinese, but these few phenomena do not affect this research. The findings solved the problems of unclear pronunciation, swallowing, and rhythm when learning to perform Chinese art songs with Bel canto singing techniques, and helped non-native Chinese-speaking singers learn Chinese Pinyin to speed up the dissemination and to expend the influence of Chinese art songs.

Keywords: Bel Canto, Chinese Art Songs, Language, Chinese Pinyin, Singing Theories.

Introduction

Bel canto singing techniques originated in Italy and was introduced to China in the 1920s. In the beginning of the twentieth century, China has experienced nearly half a century of war, and its development of art songs started more than a hundred years later than European art songs. Many valuable repertoires circulated only in China without being documented during that time, and their composers have passed away. Even with modern technology and internet,

the first-hand information could not be obtained. Wang (2020) gave good suggestions to spread Chinese vocal music to the world. He said "Italy, Germany, France, and Russia all have rich resources of national folk music, but the main genre of their vocal works that is most widely circulated on the world stage are classic opera works and excellent art songs" (Wang, 2020, p. 19). Chinese art songs can be performed in China simultaneously by *Bel canto* and ethnic singing (Wu, 2015). The significance of this research is to present Chinese culture and art to the world, and to narrow the distance between Chinese vocal music and world vocal music through Chinese art songs. Non-native Chinese-speaking singers are more receptive to *Bel canto*. In 2018, Chinese art songs gained momentum to the world stage at the first Chinese Art Song International Vocal Competition (Ai, 2019). In 2020, this international vocal competition for Chinese art songs was successfully held for the second time. The competition has well promoted the development of Chinese art songs and provided a platform to non-native Chinese singers to learn Chinese repertoires. The importance of the competition for Chinese art songs to the world cannot be ignored.

Bel canto singing techniques have the characteristics of stable throat, unified timbre, and strong penetrating power, which is partly different from the early Chinese folk singing (Xu, 2022). Even if it has many advantages, not everyone can accept it. Therefore, in 1950, the sensational "土洋之争"ⁱ began. The root of the debate is that there are many problems with singing Chinese songs with *Bel canto*, such as "olive in mouth" (Guo & Zhao, 2004; Zhou, 1992). This term is mainly used to describe Chinese songs sung with *Bel canto* techniques and can't hear the lyrics clearly, and there is a problem of swallowing words. Actually, the singer cannot sing the lyrics and mislead the audience. When talking about *Bel canto*, the natural language of singing in singers' mind is Italian. French, German and English will also be compared with Italian at the same time (Hang, 2019).

Chinese art songs are sung in Mandarinⁱⁱ. Learning Chinese Pinyin is the primary task for non-native Chinese-speaking singers to perform Chinese art songs. *Bel canto* is derived from Italian opera, and the initial language is Italian. According to the spelling rules of Chinese Pinyin and the requirements of *Bel canto* singing techniques, this study combined several Italian art songs and Chinese art songs to analyze the similarities and differences in singing between the two languages. The songs used in this study allow singers to have specific references when singing. Two objectives are formed.

- To make the articulation of Chinese art songs more accurate and the lyrics clearer for non-Chinese native speakers.
- To solve the problem of "olive in the mouth" (inaccurate wording) and excessive wording of current domestic singers.

Literature Review

Language

Because *Bel canto* originated from Italian opera, people often associate it with Italian when they mention *Bel canto*. With the development of *Bel canto*, songs in French, German, Spanish, English and many other languages have gradually matured. Stark (1999) once mentioned the variety of singing languages had created a variety of vocal schools, such as the Italian school, the German school, the French school and the Russian school. Apart from the different

musical styles, the differences also depend on the different languages. Zhou (1981 & 1984 & 1992) had repeatedly suggested that the key to performing Chinese songs with *Bel canto* singing techniques is language. Language is a type of style (Kang & Hovy, 2021), and the two complement each other (Olabimtan, 2020). The singers can grasp the main clue to grasp the language of the song. After all, singing language is an important part of vocal work (Wang, 2019). Graber (2020) said *Bel canto* represents more of a singing technique, and the performance of different emotions and styles with this singing technique mostly relies on different languages. Therefore, the influence of language on singing techniques cannot be ignored, and it can also be used as an important perspective to study the same singing techniques to perform songs from different countries.

Chinese Pinyin

Chinese is fundamentally different from other Western languages because it is derived from hieroglyphs. In order to make its language more accessible for the non-native speakers, the Chinese government uses the international alphabets to develop the Chinese Pinyin. It is an auxiliary tool for recognizing Chinese characters and learning to read and sing, whether they are native or non-native Chinese speakers.

Chinese Pinyin is tailor-made for Chinese Mandarin. After the joint efforts of Chinese and foreign language workers, it was officially promulgated by the State Council in 1958 as an important tool for reading Chinese characters (Shi, 2018; Wei & Wei, 2019). Carl T. Limsico has researched the pronunciation rules of Mandarin Chinese (2003). From Wikibooks, the open-content textbooks collection *Chinese Mandarin* can also be used as a reference for singers to learn Chinese. The first part of *Chinese Romanization: Pronunciation & Orthography* is a more detailed introduction to the pronunciation of Chinese Pinyin which include simple vowels and tones, consonants, double vowels, etc (1990).

In order to study the *Bel canto* singing of Chinese art songs, Chinese Pinyin will be compared with Italian to show the similarities and differences between the two languages in singing.

Differences between Italian and Chinese in Singing

To the best of our knowledge, Chinese is considered to be a difficult language to learn, and there are some special pronunciations in addition to writing. The same pronunciation as Italian is the “a”, “i” and “u” in the vowels of Chinese Pinyin and the difference in pronunciation is “e”, “o”, “u”. The consonant “c” in Chinese Pinyin is pronounced differently from the Italian consonant “c”. The pronunciations ending in “n” (front nasal) and “ng” (post nasal) in Chinese Pinyin are also absent in Italian.

It is worth noting that different languages have some prominent features when it comes to singing. That is to say the Italian double consonants and the five tones of Chinese pinyin. Leigh (2019) said that the double consonants in Italian are not accented or prolonged, but read separately. Chinese Pinyin has tones and corresponding symbols. Li et al (2021) said that the tones of Chinese Pinyin have the function of expressing meaning. Yao and Liu (2012) analyzed the difficulties of Central Asian students in learning Chinese tones. Fortunately, the role of tone in singing is weakened by music. Deng (2002) analyzed Qing Zhu’s creative concept that words are in a secondary position compared to music. Therefore, tones can be learned at the end for reading lyrics and communicating in Mandarin.

Moreover, Qin (2019) said Italian is a multi-syllable text with relatively simple tonal changes and it can better reflect the emotional tone of the song. It emphasizes rhythm and stress. Di Benedetto et al (2021) believed that in order to strengthen the sense of coherence between phrases, many singers sometimes consciously shorten the duration of consonants to make the vowels more coherent.

Singing Theories of *以字行腔* *Yi Zi Xing Qiang* and *以腔行字* *Yi Qiang Xing Zi*

Wu (2009) said that no matter what language of songs we sing, we must pay attention to *字正腔圆* *zi zheng qiang quan*, which is the word is representing the standard of articulation, and the cavity circle is not difficult to understand from the literal meaning, that is, the sound adjusted by the singing and participating resonance cavity is uniform and soft. A language is different from its living language (Liu & Xia, 2000) when it is sung by some factors such as melody and rhythm (Dai, 2018). Jonathan Retzlaf (2012) further studied the pronunciation rules of Italian, German and French from the perspective of the lyrics of art songs, which provides a strong basis for this research in terms of Italian rules. Chinese also has unique pronunciation rules when singing. Ying Shangneng (1902-1973) once proposed the use of word-line accents, which is an important singing theory for “language is the soul of singing” (Han, 2019). Some researchers have focused on the training of vocal skills using *Bel canto* to sing Chinese art songs (Li, 2017; Zhang, 2018; Peng, 2019). All of them support the important theory of singing Chinese characters with *yi zi xing qiang*. The core idea of *yi zi xing qiang* is to extend the word belly when singingⁱⁱⁱ. First of all, we should know which part of Chinese Pinyin corresponds to the belly of the word. Looking back at several tables of Chinese Pinyin, the consonants correspond to prefixes, the vowels and compound vowels correspond to the belly and “the suffix is ‘n’ and ‘ng’ ”^{iv}. The whole process of explaining a Chinese character clearly needs to be passed the clear prefixes, the extend belly and the suffix rhymes into the nasal cavity.

If Ying focuses on words, it expounds the theory that Chinese songs should be sung in *Bel canto*, then Xiao (1997) focuses on arian in order to more accurately achieve the style of *legato* in *Bel canto*. In his article, he said singing Chinese works should “establish the accent first and then establish the character” (Xiao, 1997, p. 79) and he called this theory *以腔行字*, *yi qiang xing zi*.

Wu (2004) strongly agrees with Xiao and also emphasizes use the vowels of Italian to train Chinese words. It’s hard to say whose theory is absolutely correct, because they each have their own priorities. Wang (2005); Cheng (2005) put forward the positive impact of the combination of the two theories on singing from a dialectical perspective. Chen and Chen (2021) proposed that singing songs of different genres and languages in different regions with the theory of accent lines is to establish a transparent arain, and took Chinese art songs based on its classical poetry *关雎* to expand the description as an example. All of these indicate that researchers have combined these two theories to make very detailed analyses on specific works. In the same way, from the perspective of the combination of the two, this research discusses the rules of *Bel canto* singing techniques on performing Chinese art songs based on its classical poetry.

Methods

This research adopts practice-led research combined with some qualitative research. The lyrics in the tables are all from the art songs selected in the recital. Practice-led research is distinct from traditional qualitative and quantitative research (Haseman, 2006). Because recitals are the presentation of theory, and theory is used to transform practice in rehearsal. Such research methodologies may be cross-cultural (Penny, 2014), including the integration of language and music.

The recital program includes six Italian art songs and eight Chinese art songs. Art songs in these two languages were chosen because Italian is the most suitable language to sing, as well as the starting language of the Bel canto singing style. Therefore, comparing Italian and Chinese is more convincing in singing. Six Italian art songs from composers (Bellini, 1801-1835; Donizetti, 1797-1848; Rossini, 1792-1868). they are *Il fervido desiderio* (Arietta), *Almen se non poss'io* (Arietta), *Malianconia, ninfa gentile* (Arietta), *Me voglio fa'na casa* (Canzone napoletana), *Amore e morte* (Arietta) and *La promessa* (Artitta). The works of these three composers are unanimously recognized by the music industry as representatives of the Bel canto style (Staricova, 2017), especially Bellini and he could closely linked music and poetry. "He composed songs notable for their beautiful Bel canto melodies, which emphasize the beauty of the voice, but still set the text precisely with respect for correct prosody" (Kimball, 2006, p745).

The eight Chinese art songs are also from notable Chinese composers in the field of art songs. These composers include not only Qingzhu (1893-1959); Huang Zi (1904-1938); Tan Xiaolin (1912-1948) in the first half of the 20th century, Zhongrong (1924-2021); Yinghai (1927-2007) in the second half of the 20th century, but also Zhao Jiping (1945) and Zhou Yi (1943) in the early 21st century. In terms of lyrics, there are not only classical poetry based on Tang poems *花非花*, the vocal music sets *秋之歌*, *枫桥夜泊*, *自君之出矣*, *幽兰操*, and classical poetry based on Song lyrics *我住长江头*, *青玉案元夕* and *钗头凤*.

The research analyzes the characteristics of Chinese and Italian, and lists the lyrics of these songs in tables, which can more intuitively tell readers the pronunciation rules of Chinese Pinyin and Italian. Combined with the singing theories proposed in this study, it is specific to the lyrics in each group of Chinese Pinyin corresponding songs. In addition, in order to be more easily accepted by non-native Chinese-speaking singers, the researchers use the same or very similar English pronunciation to explain Chinese Pinyin and Italian.

Result

The Composition of Chinese Pinyin

Chinese Pinyin has unique pronunciation rules although it is composed of 26 English letters. First of all, the same as Italian, Chinese Pinyin is composed of vowels and consonants. But different from Italian, there are 6 simple vowels and 13 compound vowels (See Table 1 and Table 2).

The English sound examples only as an approximation of the Chinese sound.

Table 1

The simple vowels in Chinese Pinyin

Simple Vowels	English Sound Example	Chinese Sound Example
a	a as in mama, papa	马 mǎ (horse) 他 tā (he) 那 nà (that)
e	e as in earn	车 chē (carriage) 客 kè (guest) 何 hé (where) 色 sè (color) 恶 è (evil) 阁 gé (pavilion)
	e as in yeah only after the letter y	夜 yè (evening) 叶 yè (leaf)
i	i as in sit	觅 mì (seek) 意 yì (affection) 矣 yǐ (final particle) 理 lǐ (manage) 机 jī (machine) 一 yī (one) 里 lǐ (inside) 啼 tí (cry) 猗猗 yī yī (splendid and flourishing) 其 qí (its) 以 yǐ (by) 奕奕 yì yì (vigorous) 离 lí (leave)
	i as ir in fir only after zh, ch, sh, r	只 zhǐ (only) 之 zhī (of) 池 chí (pool) 时 shí (time) 十 shí (ten)

		石 shí (stone) 日 rì (day)
	i as a buzzing z only after z, c, s	子 zǐ (son) 自 zì (since) 此 cǐ (here) 四 sì (four) 似 sì (like) 思 sī (miss) 寺 sì (temple)
o	o as in drop	我 wǒ (I) 蓦 mò (suddenly) 薄 bó (thin) 莫 mǒ (do not)
u	u as "oo" in look	雾 wù (fog) 如 rú (like) 无 wú (none) 处 chù (place) 不 bù (no) 孤 gū (loneliness) 住 zhù (live) 负 fù (betray) 出 chū (out) 复 fù (again) 如 rú (like) 树 shù (tree) 路 lù (road) 壶 hú (pot) 舞 wǔ (dance) 度 dù (degree) 乌 wū (crow) 姑苏 gū sū (Suzhou) 酥 sū (crisp) 书 shū (book)

ü	ü as in French rue	绿 lǜ (green) 缕 lǚ (thread)
	ü are written as “u” after j, q, x, y	去 qù (go) 于 yú (in) 欲 yù (want) 玉 yù (jade) 雨 yǔ (rain) 鱼 yú (fish) 语 yǔ (language) 渔 yú (fish) 绪 xù (mood)

The 6 simple vowels are a, e, i, o, u and ü. These Chinese characters consisting of simple vowels are in the right column of Tables and derived from eight Chinese art songs based on its classical poetry of recital repertoire. In the song 花非花, there are 雾, 夜, 去, 如, 不, 时, 似, 无, 觅 and 处. In the song 山行 of vocal suite 秋之歌, there are 石, 处, 车, 叶 and 于. In the song 南陵道中 of vocal suite 秋之歌, there are 欲, 客, 孤 and 处. In the song 寄扬州韩绰判官 of vocal suite 秋之歌, there are 十, 四, 夜, 玉, 何 and 处. In the song 我住长江头, there are 我, 住, 日, 思, 此, 只, 似, 负 and 意. In the song 枫桥夜泊, there are 夜, 乌, 啼, 渔, 姑苏, 寺 and 客. In the song 青玉案元夕, there are 夜, 树, 如, 雨, 马, 车, 路, 玉, 壶, 一, 鱼, 舞, 缕, 语, 去, 里, 他, 暮, 那 and 处. In the song 幽兰操, there are 之, 猗猗, 其, 不, 于, 何, 以, 日, 四, 奕, 于 and 子. In the song 自君之出矣, there are 自, 之, 出, 矣, 不, 复, 理, 机, 思, 如 and 夜. In the song 钗头凤, there are 酥, 色, 其, 不, 于, 何, 以, 日, 四, 奕, 于 and 子.

Table 2

The compound vowels in Chinese Pinyin

Compound Vowels	English Sound Example	Chinese Sound Example
ai	a as “uy” in buy	来 lái (come) 白 bái (white) 爱 ài (love) 外 wài (outside) 百 bǎi (hundred) 采 cǎi (pick)

		在 zài (exist)
ao	ao as "ow" in how	朝 zhāo (morning) 草 cǎo (grass) 到 dào (arrive) 桃 táo (peach) 茂 mào (dense) 宝 bǎo (precious)
ei	ei as "ey" in hey	非 fēi (not) 未 wèi (not) 尾 wěi (end) 佩 pèi (wear) 渭 wèi (wei) 蕾 lěi (nurture bud)
ia	ia is a combination of i and a	家 jiā (home) 下 xià (down)
ie	ie sounds like yeah	斜 xié (askew) 借 jiè (borrow) 鞋 xié (shoes)
iu	iu sounds like ill	秋 qiū (autumn) 袖 xiù (sleeve) 休 xiū (stop) 柳 liǔ (willow) 六 liú (six) 酒 jiǔ (wine) 旧 jiù (old)
iao	iao as "eow" in meow	迢 tiáo (far) 凋 diāo (withered) 桥 qiáo (bridge) 教 jiāo (teach) 箫 xiāo (Xiao) 雕 diāo (carve) 笑 xiào (laugh) 鲛绡 jiāo xiāo (chiffon)

		消 xiāo (disappear) 料 liào (to expect)
ou	ou as "ow" in low	悠 yōu (leisurely) 楼 lóu (building) 头 tóu (head) 有 yǒu (have) 手 shǒu (hand) 愁 chóu (worry) 首 shǒu (head) 幽幽 yōu yōu (distant) 守 shǒu (conduct) 愁 chóu (worry) 瘦 shòu (thin) 透 tòu (transparent)
ua	ua is a combination of u and a	花 huā (flower) 瓜 guā (melon)
ui	ui sounds like "way"	谁 shuí (who) 水 shuǐ (water) 吹 shuī (to blow) 对 duì (opposite) 回 huí (time) 辉 huī (brilliance) 虽 suī (although)
uo	uo is a combination of u and o	坐 zuò (sit) 落 luò (fall) 火 huǒ (fire) 多 duō (many) 索 suǒ (discrete) 错 cuò (wrong) 托 tuō (entrust)
uai	uai sounds like "why"	怀 huái (bosom) 快 kuài (fast) 拐 guǎi (abduct)

üe	üe are written as “üe” after l and n, the others are “ue”	掠 luè (to plunder) 月 yuè (moon) 雪 xuě (snow) 却 què (but)
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The 13 compound vowels are ai, ao, ei, ia, ie, iu, iao, ou, ua, ui, uo, uai, and ue. As the name suggests, a compound vowel is a combination of two or three vowels. In the song 花非花, there are 花, 非, 来, 多 and 朝. In the song 山行 of vocal suite 秋之歌, there are 斜, 白, 有, 家, 坐, 爱, 月 and 花. In the song 南陵道中 of vocal suite 秋之歌, there are 水, 悠, 秋, 谁, 袖 and 楼. In the song 寄扬州韩绰判官 of vocal suite 秋之歌, there are 水, 迢, 秋, 草, 未, 凋, 桥, 月, 教, 吹 and 箫. In the song 我住长江头, there are 头, 尾, 水 and 休. In the song 枫桥夜泊, there are 月, 落, 火, 对, 愁, 外 and 到. In the song 青玉案元夕, there are 花, 吹, 落, 宝, 雕, 箫, 雪, 柳, 笑, 百, 回, 首, 却 and 火. In the song 幽兰操, there are 幽, 采, 佩, 渭, 雪, 茂, 蕾 and 守. In the song 自君之出矣, there are 月 and 辉. In the song 钗头凤, there are 手, 酒, 柳, 怀, 愁, 索, 错, 旧, 瘦, 蛟, 绡, 透, 桃, 花, 落, 虽, 在 and 托.

Except for vowels and compound vowels, there are also 14 combinations of vowels and consonants. Among them, 13 are the classification of add alveolar nasal and velar nasal to the root (See Table 3).

Table 3
The root with alveolar nasal and velar nasal

Root (vowels or the combination of two vowels)	Consonants (Alveolar Nasal and Velar Nasal)	English Sound Example	Chinese Sound Example
a	n	an as “un” in fun	半 bàn (half) 寒 hán (cold) 山 shān (mountain) 晚 wǎn (evening) 南 nán (south) 慢 màn (slow) 满 mǎn (full) 暗 àn (dark) 然 rán (moment)

			阑珊 lán shān (recession) 兰 lán (orchid) 残 cán (disabled) 难 nán (difficult)
	ng	ang as “ongue” in tongue	上 shàng (up) 长 cháng (long) 放 fàng (open) 扬 yáng (up) 芳 fāng (fragrant) 伤 shāng (hurt) 方 fāng (square) 泱泱 yāng yāng (magnificent) 昌 chāng (prosperous)
e	n	en as “en” in ten	恨 hèn (hate) 文 wén (article) 人 rén (people) 痕 hén (mark)
	ng	eng as “en” in english	梦 mèng (dream) 生 shēng (grow) 枫 fēng (friend) 风 fēng (wind) 正 zhèng (sharp) 城 chéng (city) 声 shēng (sound) 更 gèng (more) 灯 dēng (light) 滕 téng (wine) 盟 méng (union)
i	n	in as “een” in sixteen	紧 jǐn (tight) 金 jīn (gold) 林 lín (forest) 心 xīn (heart)

			隐 yǐn (hidden) 尽 jìn (over) 饮 yǐn (drink) 金 jīn (gold) 锦 jǐn (brocade)
	ng	ing as “ing” in thing	明 míng (tomorrow) 径 jìng (path) 停 tíng (stop) 陵 líng (place name) 行 xíng (walk) 轻 qīng (light) 凭 píng (rely) 青 qīng (green) 定 dìng (must) 星 xīng (star) 盈 yíng (full) 清 qīng (clear) 情 qíng (love)
i	--	--	--
	ng	ong as in song	红 hóng (red) 共 gòng (common) 钟 zhōng (bell) 东 dōng (east) 动 dòng (move) 拱 gǒng (surround) 众 zhòng (massed) 龙 lóng (dragon) 冬 dōng (winter) 宫 gōng (palace) 空 kōng (empty)
u	n	un sounds like “when”	云 yún (cloud) 春 chūn (spring) 君 jūn (gentlemen)

			问 wèn (ask) 寻 xún (find) 孙 sūn (grandson)
	---	---	---
ü	---	---	---
	---	---	---
ia	n	ian is a combination of i and an	面 miàn (surface) 眠 mián (sleep) 天 tiān (day) 变 biàn (change) 见 jiàn (see) 千 qiān (thousand) 年 nián (year) 闲 xián (idle)
ia	ng	iang as in young	江 jiāng (river) 相 xiāng (each other) 香 xiāng (fragrant) 墙 qiáng (wall)
io	---	---	---
	ng	iong sounds like "yong"	迥 jiǒng (distant) 熊 xióng (bear) 穷 qióng (poverty) 胸 xiōng (chest)
ua	n	uan sounds like "one"	远 yuǎn (far) 愿 yuàn (wish) 乱 luàn (confuse) 船 chuán (boat) 转 zhuǎn (turn) 欢 huān (happy)
	ng	uang is a combination of u and ang	霜 shuāng (frost) 光 guāng (shine) 黄 huáng (yellow)

Tips: “—” indicates that it does not exist.

This part is more important because the pronunciation is special. There are many Chinese characters with these pronunciations, and it is easy to be confused by singers. First of all, in this form of combination there are an, ang, en, eng, in, ing, ong, un, ian, iang, iong, uan and uang. These sounds are widely distributed in many songs, such as 半, 明, 春, 梦, 云 in the song 花非花. 远, 上, 寒, 山, 径, 云, 生, 人, 停, 枫, 林, 晚, 霜 and 红 in the song 山行 of vocal suite 秋之歌. There are 南, 陵, 面, 慢, 风, 紧, 云, 轻, 变, 正, 心, 迥, 红, 凭 and 江 in the song 南陵道中 of vocal suite 秋之歌. In the song 寄扬州韩绰判官 of vocal suite 秋之歌, there are 青, 山, 隐, 尽, 江, 南, 明 and 人. In the song 我住长江头, there are 长, 江, 君, 见, 共, 饮, 恨, 愿, 心, 定 and 相. In the song 枫桥夜泊, there are 霜, 满, 天, 江, 枫, 眠, 城, 寒, 山, 半, 钟, 声 and 船. In the song 青玉案元夕, there are 东, 风, 放, 干, 更, 星, 香, 满, 声, 动, 光, 转, 龙, 黄, 金, 盈, 暗, 香, 众, 寻, 干, 然, 人, 灯, 阑 and 珊. In the song 幽兰操, there are 君, 兰, 香, 众, 拱, 芳, 伤, 年, 行, 方, 文, 梦, 熊, 泱, 清, 霜, 冬, 孙 and 昌. In the song 钗头凤, there are 红, 黄, 滕, 满, 城, 春, 宫, 墙, 东, 风, 欢, 情, 年, 人, 空, 痕, 红, 闲, 山, 盟, 锦 and 难.

In addition, there is also a special combination of vowels and consonants, which is er (See Table 4).

Table 4
The combination of vowels and consonants

Root (vowel)	Consonants	English Example	Sound	Chinese Example	Sound
e	r	er as “ir” in sir		而 ér (but) 娥儿 é ér (e er)	

The pronunciation of er only appears in the song 青玉案元夕 and it is 儿.

Finally, there are 23 consonants in Chinese Pinyin (See Table 5).

Table 5
The consonants in Chinese Pinyin

Consonants	English Sound Example	Chinese Sound Example
b	b as in bag	白 bái (white) 不 bù (no)
p	p as in pay	盘 pán (plate)

		怕 pà (afraid)
m	m as in moon	明 míng (tomorrow) 慢 màn (slow)
f	f as in fine	非 fēi (no) 枫 fēng (maple)
d	d as in dark	凋 diāo (withered) 多 duō (many)
t	t as in teach	迢 tiāo (remote) 天 tiān (sky)
n	n as in nurse	鸟 niǎo (bird) 年 nián (year)
l	l as in learn	来 lái (come) 落 luò (fall)
g	g as in goose	高 gāo (tall) 共 gòng (together)
k	k as in king	客 kè (guest) 开 kāi (open)
h	h as in has	回 huí (back) 何 hé (what)
j	j sounds like “G”, but the tongue is flat	尽 jìn (end) 教 jiāo (teach)
q	q as “chea” in the cheat, but the tongue is flat	青 qīng (green) 秋 qiū (autumn)
x	x sounds like “C”, but the tip of the tongue does not touch the front teeth	相 xiāng (mutually) 晓 xiǎo (dawn)
zh	zh as “j” in jeans	正 zhèng (just) 朝 zhāo (morning)
ch	ch as in children	吹 chuī (blow) 处 chù (place)
sh	sh as in she	水 shuǐ (water) 时 shí (hour)
r	r as in rain	如 rú (as)

		日 rì (day)
z	z as in zoo	自 zì (self) 醉 zuì (drunk)
c	c as “ts” in sits	草 cǎo (grass) 此 cǐ (here)
s	s as in soft	似 sì (same) 酥 sū (crumbly)
y	y as in yellow	悠 yōu (slow) 云 yún (cloud)
w	w as in we	未 wèi (no) 雾 wù (fog)

Most Chinese Pinyin is guided by consonants, and these examples are found throughout each song.

The Composition of Italian

The research is in standard Italian, excluding local dialects. Italian is made up of 21 letters, which 5 vowels and 16 consonants (see Table 6 and Table 7). The English sound examples only as an approximation of the Italian sound.

Table 6

The vowels in Italian

Vowels	English Sound Example	Italian Sound Example
a	a as in mama, papa	anima mia
e	e as in decor	piaceri vivere
	e as in friend	cielo ahime
i	ee as in greet	malinconia tuoi
o	o as in obey	muore fiore
u	oo as in moon	pavune barcune

There are 16 consonants (b, c, d, f, g, h, k, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, z) in Italian (See Table 7).

Table 7

The consonants in Italian

Consonants	English Sound Example	Italian Sound Example
b	b as in bag	bella barcune
c	c as in cup	cammino perche (h is silent)
	ch as in chair	pace cielo (i is silent)
d	d as in dark	damor mudilo
f	f as in fine	fiamma fonte
g	g as in goose	vingannero pago
	dr as in draw	gentile gioco
h	h is silent, and there is no [h] sound in Italian	perche (h is silent) Ch'io (h is silent)
l	l as in learn	Lento seguitelo
m	m as in moon	malinconia mai
n	n as in nurse	torna penne
	n as in explain	sin dargiento
p	p as in pay	piaceri pavune
q	q as in queen	quando quel
r	r as in rain	desir elvira
	rolled	riveder raccolti
s	s as in soft	desia seguir
	z as in zoo	chiesi casa
t	t as in teach	Tanto tiene
v	v as in view	vicino involai
z	ts as in sits	miezo preziuse
	dz ai in hands	tesoro

		mese
--	--	------

Italian is relatively simple than Chinese Pinyin. The pronunciation of compound vowels is to read each vowel once, such as “ai” read “a-i”, “au” read “a-u”. Except for vowels and compound vowels, there are also 3 combinations of vowels and consonants (See Table 8).

Table 8

The combinations of vowels and consonants in Italian

Combinations of Vowels and Consonants	English Sound Example	Italian Sound Example
gli	y as in yellow	foglio (i is silent)
		togliami
gn	n as in new	ognuno pegno
sc	sh as in she	lascio lasciar
	sk in skill	scaline scolpito

Differences Between Italian and Chinese in Combination with Specific Songs

Italian double consonants and Chinese tones

The double consonants in Italian are not accented or prolonged, but read separately. For example, in the art song *La promessa* (G. Rossini), the first sentence is “ch’io mai vi possa, lasciar d’amare”, “possa” is double consonants and it pronounced “pos-sa”, and the two “s” are read separately. In sentence “nemmen per gioco”, the “nemme” is also double consonants, and it pronounced “nem-me”, and the two “m” are pronounced separately.

The five tones of Chinese Pinyin are the first tone, second tone, third tone, fourth tone and neutral tone. The Chinese art song *Expecting You Along the Yangtze* (Qing Zhu), the first sentence “我住长江头” “我” is the third tone ˇ, “住” is the fourth tone ˋ, “长” is the second tone ˊ, and “江” is the first tone ˊ. It needs attention that if the tone is wrong, the meaning of the words may be different when we read. On the contrary, composers would not completely follow the tones of Chinese characters because they have to consider the aesthetic effects of music.

Consecutive reading in Italian and non-consecutive reading in Chinese

There is another difference is that Italian can be read continuously, but Chinese cannot be used in singing. In *Il fervido desiderio* composed by Vincenzo Bellini (see Figure 1). In the measure 9, the lyrics “Quel chel amante”, “l” in “chel” and “a” in “aman” must be read together.

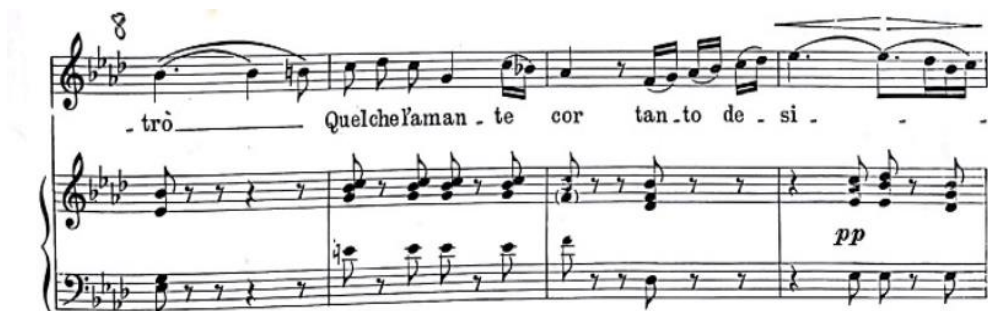


Figure 1: Vincenzo Bellini, *Il fervido desiderio*, measures 8-11

The difference between the two languages in singing is that Italian can be read together, but Chinese cannot. In 青玉案·元夕 composed by Ao Changqun, the “蛾儿” (e er) maybe read together in the language of life but it must be separated in singing (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Ao Changqun, 青玉案·元夕, measures 21-25

Alveolar Nasal and Velar Nasal

Alveolar nasal (-n) and velar nasal (-ng) are two common pronunciations in Chinese. In the song 幽兰操, the first sentence of “兰之猗猗，扬扬其香”，the Chinese pinyin of 兰 is *lan*, which belongs to the alveolar nasal sound. The pronunciation rule for the alveolar nasal is the middle nasal sound on the tip of the tongue, the tip of the tongue is pressed against the upper gums to form a blockage, the mouth is closed, and the airflow is completely penetrated from the nasal cavity as well as the vocal cords vibrate to produce a nasal sound when pronouncing^v. 扬 in the same sentence, the Chinese pinyin is *yang*, and it belongs to the velar nasal sound. The pronunciation rules for velar nasal is the nasal sound behind the tip of the tongue (the base of the tongue), and the pronunciation position is the same as that of “g”, “k”, and “h”. We can use the back of the tongue against the soft palate to let the air flow out of the nasal cavity, and at the same time the vocal cords vibrate, making a nasal sound when pronouncing^{vi}. There are a lot of -n and -ng in the song, and the corresponding pronunciation rules must be followed. Combining the theories of using the words to line the cavity and the words to the cavity line, first “keep the cavity resonance of the finals”, and then divide the pinyin into the prefix, belly and suffix, as well as extend the belly of the character.

Discussion and Conclusion

Tables 1 to 5 analyzed all the composition methods of Chinese Pinyin by taking the repertoire of recital performance as an example. Tables 6 to 8 analyzed all the compositional modes of Italian. The purpose of these tables are to show that the composition of the two languages is

embodied in the repertoire of the stage practice. On the other hand, the study also analyzed the differences between the two languages, and found that Chinese tones, post-nasal sounds and Italian linking are all features that are not shared by each other. This directly formed the problem that singers need to solve when singing, and also explained that different rules must be followed when performing different languages with the same singing technique.

Italian is the original language of the *Bel canto*. Singers will always link the two together. Nowadays, it has already become a reality to perform art songs in different languages with *Bel canto* singing techniques, and more songs in different languages are performed with *bel canto* skills. Therefore, language becomes a key research object. It is easier to learn by mapping the lyrics of the songs to be performed in the Chinese Pinyin and Italian tables, and this method has been verified by the success of the recital. The results also show that *Bel canto* singing techniques on performing Chinese art songs using language as a cut-in has achieved good results, which is confirmed (Lei, 2015; Li, 2016; Liu & Wang, 2018; Chen, 2019; Olabimtan, 2020; Kang & Hovy, 2021). Simultaneously, it is easier for non-native Chinese-speaking singers to use English as examples.

This study found that language plays an irreplaceable role in performing different styles of songs with the same singing technique. After careful study of the similarities and differences between Italian and Chinese, with the theory of *yi zi xing qiang*, the problem of unclear articulation (Olive in the Mouth) was solved by using *Bel canto* singing techniques to perform Chinese art songs. On the other hand, Chinese characters do not have the function of continuous reading when singing, and cannot achieve *legato* which is the requirements belong to *Bel canto* sing techniques. The study used the theory of *yi qiang xing zi* to narrow the distance between Chinese and Italian under the premise of unifying the accents and try to meet the requirements of the Chinese *legato* in *Bel canto* singing techniques. Unfortunately, the sensitivity to language varies from person to person. For example, some Chinese singers cannot pronounce the reflex “r” in Italian. Likewise, this research also has the problem that non-native Chinese-speaking singers will encounter sounds that are not easy or even impossible to pronounce when learning Chinese Pinyin. Although the study’s shortcomings were noted, they did not significantly impact the study’s conclusions.

However, it would be ideal if further researchers were interested in these questions. Overall, this research is important, Chinese art songs have frequently appeared in various vocal music competitions as a vocal genre. Especially from the first and second China Art Song International Vocal Competition in 2018 and 2020, we can know that more and more international singers learn and sing well. It had an important impact on performing Chinese art songs. Undoubtedly, researchers may combine current theories with reference to linguistic features and incorporate them into subsequent performances.

Finally, other researchers could make the singing works be replaced with songs of other genres such as opera, folk songs, etc. instead of just art songs. They could do more detailed tracking from these perspectives in the future to expand future directions.

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ⁱ 土洋之争, it refers to the debate between *Bel canto* singing techniques and native national singing method.

ⁱⁱ The singing language of Chinese art songs studied in this research is mainly Mandarin Chinese. There are more than 80 variations of Chinese language, including folk languages

and dialects. Italian also does not include dialects in this research. In order to avoid adding incalculable difficulty to this research, the singing language needs to be defined.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ying divides the pronunciation of Chinese characters into “prefix, belly and suffix” in his book.

^{iv} Ying Shangneng, *Yi Zi Xing Qing*, Beijing: People’s Music Press, 1981 edition, p. 7.

^v The information comes from

<https://zhidao.baidu.com/question/987067438835373779.html>.

^{vi} The same to v.