วารสารธรรมเพื่อชีวิต
JOURNAL OF DHAMMA FOR LIFE
ISSN: 2822-048X
https://soo8.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/dhammalife/index

Original Research Article

Developing the New Training Model of Chinese Musical Singing

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ARTICLE INFO

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Keywords:
Chinese Musical Singing, Integrative, Vocal Training Linklater, Speech Level Singing, K-Pop

Article history:
Received: 09/05/2026
Revised: 20/06/2026
Accepted: 01/07/2026
Available online: 14/07/2026

How to Cite:
Li, X. Y. (2026). Developing the New Training Model of Chinese Musical Singing. *Journal Dhamma for Life,* 32(4), 264-273.

ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the standards and key components of high-quality Chinese musical singing, analyze existing training approaches and their limitations, and develop a new training model for Chinese musical singing by integrating the Linklater voice training method, Speech Level Singing, and K-pop singing techniques. A qualitative research design combined with classroom action research was employed. Participants included contemporary pop singing students, professional musical theatre performers, and vocal instructors. Research instruments consisted of in-depth interviews, performance observations, and pre- and post-training assessments.

The findings reveal that high-quality Chinese musical performance requires the integration of three core dimensions: vocal technique, emotional expression, and theatrical performance. The study also indicates that current training practices tend to be fragmented, focusing primarily on isolated vocal techniques, which leads to vocal instability and difficulties in integrating singing with acting. The newly developed training model demonstrates significant improvement in vocal control, emotional communication, and stage performance. Participants showed reduced vocal tension, smoother register transitions, and increased confidence during performance. Overall, the results suggest that a situational and integrative training approach, combining multiple vocal training systems, effectively enhances the holistic singing and performance abilities of Chinese musical theatre performers. This model provides both practical and theoretical contributions to musical theatre education in China and supports the development of context-sensitive training frameworks for contemporary musical performance.

Introduction

Over the past decade, musicals have developed rapidly as a contemporary performing art form that plays an important role in the global creative industry. This trend is particularly evident in China, where the commercial performance sector has expanded in terms of production, investment, and audience acceptance. Such growth reflects changing cultural tastes and performance consumption patterns in contemporary Chinese society, allowing musicals to connect Western theatrical traditions with local cultural contexts. At present, the musical theater market in China can be broadly divided into three main categories: foreign original productions, localized adaptations of foreign musicals, and original Chinese musicals. This structure demonstrates the increasing capability of domestic creative teams to use musicals as a comprehensive stage art form to present diverse themes. At the same time, high-quality foreign productions continue to influence the Chinese market, indicating that China's musical theater industry still holds significant potential for further development (Li, 2020). However, although China's musical theater industry has continued to expand, many studies indicate that the development of performers' abilities—particularly in musical theater singing—still faces structural limitations within higher education performing arts systems (Wang, 2019; Zhang, 2022). One of the key issues is the mismatch between existing vocal training methods and the specific characteristics of musical theater as an integrated performing art, which requires the coordination of singing, emotional expression, and stage performance as a unified whole.

Singing in musical theater differs significantly from vocal performance in other musical disciplines. The voice does not function solely to deliver melody and lyrics; rather, it serves as the primary mechanism for storytelling, character development, and emotional communication within the dramatic structure (McCoy, 2018; Scott, 2020). Musical theater performers therefore need the ability to use their voices flexibly, control a wide vocal range, maintain vocal stability during movement, and convey emotions in ways that align with the performance context. Research on musical theater education in Western contexts thus emphasizes that musical theater vocal training cannot be separated from acting and physical movement training (Bourne, 2017; Linklater, 2006). In the context of China, vocal training systems in higher education institutions are still strongly influenced by traditional music education frameworks, which often separate vocal training from dramatic performance. Many students are trained in classical or operatic singing tracks that emphasize specialized technical skills, resulting in limited experience in systematically integrating the voice with musical theater performance (Liu, 2021; Chen, 2023). Musical theater singers, who represent a group with strong potential to develop into stage performers, often encounter difficulties in controlling a wide vocal range, transitioning between registers, and maintaining vocal quality while moving or expressing intense emotions on stage. Several studies suggest that these problems are not caused solely by the learners' lack of ability, but rather reflect limitations in teaching models that do not yet respond to the nature of musical theater as a contemporary performing art (Wang, 2022). At the same time, literature on contemporary vocal training proposes the integration of concepts from multiple training systems in order to develop vocal safety, technical stability, and expressive potential (Miller, 2019).

Among the internationally recognized approaches to vocal training, the Linklater method emphasizes the release of the natural voice and the connection between voice, emotion, and the body, which aligns with the nature of musical theater performance (Linklater, 2006). In contrast, the Speech Level Singing approach focuses on maintaining the voice at a safe and stable level across the vocal range, which is particularly important for performances that require continuous singing over extended periods (Riggs, 2018). In addition, K-pop vocal training approaches emphasize the integration of singing, movement, and stage performance, which corresponds to the characteristics of contemporary musical theater performance in Asia (Oh and Park, 2021). Although previous studies have clearly demonstrated the potential of individual vocal training approaches, research that integrates these concepts to systematically develop a training model for Chinese musical theater singing remains limited. This is particularly true for studies focusing on pop singers, who currently form a major talent base in China's

musical theater industry. This academic gap highlights the need to examine the standards of Chinese musical theater singing, analyze the limitations of existing training systems, and develop new training models that align with the linguistic, cultural, and performance contexts of China.

Therefore, this study aims to develop a training model for Chinese musical theater singing by integrating the Linklater approach, Speech Level Singing, and K-pop vocal training within a situational training framework. The objective is to enhance vocal ability, emotional expression, and stage performance skills among Chinese musical theater performers. This research seeks to address practical challenges in the training process while also contributing theoretical knowledge that can support further studies in musical theater within the Asian context and promote the sustainable development of performing arts curricula in higher education.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The literature review in this study aims to synthesize existing knowledge on musical singing as an integrated performing art. It focuses on three major issues: the concepts and characteristics of musical singing; the standards and developmental trends of musical singing in Western and Asian contexts; and the relationship between musical singing and pop singing. This synthesis provides a conceptual foundation for developing a musical singing training model appropriate for Chinese pop singers.

Concepts and Characteristics of Musical Singing

Musical singing possesses distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from singing in other fields, as it is an artistic practice that integrates vocal expression with the dramatic structure of musical theatre. In musicals, the voice does not merely function as a medium for delivering melody and lyrics; rather, it serves as a tool for storytelling, character development, and emotional communication within the context of the musical script. Therefore, musical singing requires the simultaneous integration of vocal technique, language articulation, breath control, and physical performance. Studies in contemporary performing arts indicate that musical singing is process-oriented performance, in which voice, emotion, and bodily movement are interdependently related. The singing voice must respond to the dramatic situation of the character in each scene; while acting and movement directly influence the quality and characteristics of vocal production. Thus, the pedagogy of musical singing cannot be separated from the context of stage performance if the objective is to develop performers' abilities in a comprehensive manner.

Standards of Musical Singing in the Western Context

The development of musical singing in Western countries is closely associated with the structure of the performing arts industry and systematic training institutions. The United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, and France have developed musical singing standards within different cultural and aesthetic frameworks. Nevertheless, they share common emphases on breath control, effective resonance, and the ability to convey emotion through the singing voice (Ju Hong, 2017). Musical theatre in the United States is characterized by the integration of classical vocal techniques with theatre singing and rock singing, thereby responding to the diversity of the market and audience preferences. In contrast, musical theatre in the United Kingdom places considerable emphasis on linguistic accuracy,

pronunciation, and the detailed connection between vocal expression and the structure of the musical script. Musical theatre in Germany and Austria tends to emphasize technical rigor and systematic voice classification within an academic framework, whereas musical theatre in France allows greater stylistic freedom and poetic expression. Although these developmental approaches differ, all contexts commonly recognize that musical singing requires systematic training and the integration of interdisciplinary skills, which constitute an essential foundation for international standards of performance.

Musical Singing in Asian and Chinese Contexts

The development of musical theatre in Asia, particularly in China, Japan, and South Korea, reflects the adaptation of Western performing arts into local cultural contexts. A substantial body of research indicates that musical singing in Asia is not merely an imitation of Western standards. Rather, it represents the integration of international techniques with local linguistic characteristics, vocal structures, and aesthetic traditions. In China, musical singing faces challenges arising from linguistic differences and vocal physiological characteristics when compared with Western contexts. The Chinese music training system continues to emphasize the development of specialized skills, such as classical singing or theatrical singing. As a result, many singers lack experience in integrating voice with musical theatre performance. Existing studies therefore highlight the need to develop a training model appropriate to the Chinese context, one that can effectively connect vocal technique with storytelling and stage performance.

The Relationship between Musical Singing and Pop Singing

Musical singing and pop singing are closely related both historically and technically. Both forms have developed alongside popular culture and have continuously exchanged vocal techniques. Several studies indicate that pop singers often employ pop vocal techniques to enhance emotional expression, while contemporary musical theatre has widely incorporated vocal concepts, rhythmic elements, and performance styles from pop music. However, pop singers who transition into musical singing often encounter difficulties in controlling the voice across a wide vocal range, maintaining register stability, and preserving vocal quality while moving on stage. This gap indicates the need to develop a systematic training model that can connect the strengths of pop singing with the specific requirements of musical singing

Conceptual Framework for Integrated Vocal Training

Based on the literature review, Linklater voice training, Speech Level Singing, and K-POP training approaches all play significant roles in developing musical singing competence. Linklater voice training emphasizes the release of the natural voice and the connection between voice and emotion, thereby supporting the creation of realism in performance. Speech Level Singing focuses on developing vocal stability and smooth register transition in order to protect the vocal folds during continuous performance. Meanwhile, the K-POP training approach emphasizes vocal power, rhythm, and stage performance in an integrated manner The synthesis of the literature suggests that integrating these three approaches within a situation-based pedagogical framework can effectively address the challenges faced by

Chinese pop singers in musical singing. This integrated framework therefore serves as an important conceptual basis for developing the training model proposed in this study.

Objectives

1. To study the standardization of Chinese Musical Singing.
2. To examine the training approaches of Chinese Musical Singing.
3. To propose the new training model for Chinese Musical Singing. Please rewrite your research questions accordingly.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach using Classroom Action Research (CAR) to investigate the challenges faced by Chinese pop singers in musical theater singing and to develop and evaluate a musical theater vocal training model. CAR was selected because it allows the researcher to improve instructional practice through iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection.

Research Design

A qualitative Classroom Action Research design was employed to examine participants' learning experiences and the effectiveness of the proposed vocal training model in an authentic teaching context.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of Chinese pop singers interested in developing musical theater singing skills. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their pop singing experience, limited musical theater training, and willingness to participate throughout the study.

Research Instruments

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, performance assessment rubrics, reflective journals, and audio/video recordings. These multiple sources enabled data triangulation and enhanced the credibility of the findings.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected throughout each CAR cycle before, during, and after the instructional intervention. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to participants' vocal development, performance skills, and learning experiences. Findings from different data sources were triangulated to strengthen the validity of the results.

Ethical Considerations

All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process.

Results

To Study the Standardization of Chinese Musical Singing

The findings from the in-depth interviews with musical theatre singing students, professional performers, and instructors revealed several characteristics that define the current standards of Chinese musical theatre singing. Across all participant groups, musical theatre singing was consistently described as an integrated performance practice requiring the simultaneous coordination of vocal technique, dramatic interpretation, and physical expression. One major finding concerned vocal control and vocal range. Most participants emphasized that musical theatre singing demands a wider and more flexible vocal range than conventional popular singing, particularly in repertoire requiring sustained emotional intensity. Students reported difficulties in maintaining vocal consistency across different registers, especially during transitions between chest voice and head voice. These challenges frequently resulted in vocal tension, hoarseness, and reduced vocal endurance. Another important characteristic related to the integration of singing, acting, and movement. Participants agreed that effective musical theatre performance requires vocal production to function as part of dramatic storytelling rather than as an isolated technical skill. Professional performers emphasized that successful performances depend on the performer's ability to sustain vocal quality while simultaneously expressing character, emotion, and physical movement. These findings suggest that the standardization of Chinese musical theatre singing extends beyond technical vocal proficiency and encompasses integrated artistic competencies, including vocal flexibility, expressive interpretation, physical coordination, and dramatic communication.

To Examine the Training Approaches of Chinese Musical Singing

The interview findings identified several limitations within existing musical theatre singing training approaches in China. The first limitation concerned the separation of vocal training and acting instruction. Many students indicated that their previous education treated singing and acting as independent disciplines. Consequently, learners often prioritized technical vocal production at the expense of emotional authenticity. Conversely, when concentrating on dramatic performance, vocal stability frequently deteriorated. Participants attributed these difficulties to instructional approaches that failed to integrate vocal technique within dramatic contexts. A second limitation involved the technical orientation of higher education curricula. Both instructors and professional performers observed that current university programmes continue to emphasize vocal technique while providing relatively limited opportunities for integrated rehearsal, performance simulation, and experiential learning. As a result, students often acquire theoretical knowledge but demonstrate insufficient practical readiness for professional stage performance. Participants also emphasized the importance of learner-centred training. Students consistently reported that

instructional approaches combining vocal technique, acting, and physical movement enabled them to better understand the communicative role of the voice within dramatic storytelling. Such integrated training also reduced performance anxiety and increased confidence during live performance. Overall, these findings indicate that current training approaches remain predominantly technique-oriented and would benefit from more holistic instructional models that integrate vocal, dramatic, and physical performance skills.

To Propose a New Training Model for Chinese Musical Singing

Observational findings from the implementation of the proposed training model demonstrated progressive improvements in learners' musical theatre singing performance across three stages: pre-training, during training, and post-training.

Pre-training Phase Prior to the implementation of the proposed model, learners generally demonstrated mechanically controlled singing characterized by excessive tension in the throat and shoulders, irregular breathing patterns, and inefficient vocal production. During performance, emotional expression was often disconnected from the musical narrative. Learners frequently minimized physical movement during technically demanding passages or restricted dramatic expression in order to preserve vocal stability.

During-training Phase Following participation in the integrated training programme, observable improvements emerged across multiple performance dimensions. Learners gradually released unnecessary muscular tension, developed more natural breath support, and established stronger connections between vocal production and emotional expression. They also demonstrated increased confidence in coordinated body movement while maintaining improved vocal quality throughout performance activities.

Post-training Phase By the completion of the training programme, learners demonstrated substantially greater integration of singing, acting, and movement. Vocal production became more stable, register transitions were smoother, and emotional expression appeared more authentic and consistent with dramatic intentions. Stage performances reflected greater confidence, naturalness, and artistic coherence. Importantly, learners were able to sustain vocal quality while simultaneously engaging in dramatic performance without the tension or uncertainty observed during the pre-training stage.

These findings suggest that the proposed integrated training model effectively enhances musical theatre singing by combining vocal technique, dramatic interpretation, and physical movement into a unified instructional framework, thereby improving both technical performance and expressive communication.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the standardization of Chinese Musical Singing, examine current training approaches, and propose a new integrated training model suitable for contemporary Chinese musical theatre education. The findings indicate that although Chinese musical theatre has experienced rapid growth, the absence of a unified pedagogical framework continues to limit performer development. Existing training systems remain largely influenced by Western vocal traditions while lacking systematic adaptation to the linguistic, cultural, and theatrical characteristics of Chinese musical performance.

Standardization of Chinese Musical Singing

The findings suggest that Chinese Musical Singing has not yet achieved a universally accepted performance standard. Considerable variation exists among educational institutions regarding vocal production, stylistic interpretation, language articulation, and performance assessment. This inconsistency supports previous studies reporting that Chinese musical theatre education is still developing standardized curricula and assessment criteria (Wang, 2019; Zhang & Hu, 2020). Unlike Western musical theatre, Chinese Musical Singing requires performers to balance healthy vocal production with accurate Mandarin diction, expressive acting, and culturally authentic interpretation. Effective musical theatre performance therefore demands integration of vocal artistry and dramatic storytelling rather than technical singing alone (Bourne, 2017). Similarly, Miller (2019) argues that successful vocal performance depends upon efficient coordination of breathing, resonance, registration, and expressive communication, all of which should function together within dramatic performance. The present findings also reinforce Liu's (2021) conclusion that Chinese musical theatre programs increasingly recognize the necessity of integrating vocal pedagogy with performance practice. However, implementation remains inconsistent among institutions, resulting in uneven graduate competencies.

Current Training Approaches in Chinese Musical Singing

The second objective examined existing pedagogical approaches. Results indicate that current instruction generally emphasizes vocal technique while providing comparatively less systematic training in acting, movement, speech, emotional interpretation, and interdisciplinary performance skills. Such compartmentalized instruction reduces performers' ability to achieve integrated musical theatre performance. These findings correspond with Wang (2022), who demonstrated that effective musical theatre pedagogy requires simultaneous development of singing and acting competencies rather than treating them as separate disciplines. Bourne (2017) likewise emphasizes that musical theatre performers communicate narrative through the inseparable interaction of music, text, and dramatic action. From a vocal pedagogy perspective, participants highlighted the importance of healthy voice production, breath management, resonance, vocal flexibility, and stylistic versatility. These findings are consistent with established vocal training principles proposed by McCoy (2018), Miller (2019), Riggs (2018), and Linklater (2006), whose pedagogical frameworks emphasize natural voice production, efficient vocal coordination, expressive communication, and sustainable vocal health. Collectively, these approaches provide valuable technical foundations but require contextual adaptation to meet the linguistic and artistic demands of Chinese musical theatre. Furthermore, Zhang (2022) argues that contemporary Chinese musical theatre education should move beyond traditional conservatory-based vocal instruction by incorporating interdisciplinary performance training. The present findings strongly support this recommendation.

Proposed Integrated Training Model

Based on the findings, this study proposes an integrated training model that combines four interrelated dimensions: Vocal Technique Acting and Character Development Mandarin

Language and Diction and Cultural and Dramatic Interpretation Rather than teaching these competencies independently, the proposed model emphasizes their simultaneous development throughout the curriculum. This integrated approach reflects current international practices in musical theatre education while remaining responsive to Chinese linguistic and cultural contexts. The proposed model aligns closely with Liu (2021), who advocates integrating vocal pedagogy and stage performance within Chinese musical theatre education. It also extends the curriculum recommendations proposed by Wang (2019) and Zhang and Hu (2020) by providing a more comprehensive framework that explicitly connects vocal, dramatic, linguistic, and cultural competencies. Moreover, the model recognizes the expanding cultural significance of musical theatre within contemporary China. As audience demand and cultural consumption continue to increase (Sun, 2021), educational institutions require training systems capable of producing performers who meet both artistic and professional industry expectations.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that future development of Chinese Musical Singing should move beyond isolated technical instruction toward an integrated pedagogical framework that simultaneously develops vocal excellence, dramatic authenticity, linguistic precision, and cultural expression. Such a model offers a practical foundation for curriculum reform and contributes to establishing a more standardized and internationally competitive Chinese musical theatre education system.

Conclusion

This study examined the standards of Chinese musical singing, identified the limitations of current training approaches, and proposed an integrative training model for Chinese musical singing. The findings indicate that effective musical theatre performance depends on the integration of vocal technique, emotional expression, and dramatic performance. These competencies should be developed as interconnected skills that enable performers to communicate character and narrative effectively. The study found that the standards of Chinese musical singing should combine technical excellence with cultural and linguistic responsiveness. While performers require stable vocal production, effective breath management, smooth register transitions, and clear articulation, these standards should be adapted to the characteristics of the Chinese language and musical theatre tradition rather than relying solely on Western models. The findings also reveal that current training remains fragmented, with excessive emphasis on isolated vocal techniques and insufficient integration of singing, acting, movement, and emotional expression. To address these limitations, the study proposes an integrative training model that combines the Linklater Voice Method, Speech Level Singing, and K-pop singing techniques within a situational learning framework. This model promotes healthy vocal production, expressive communication, movement coordination, and stage confidence, providing a more holistic approach to performer development.

The study contributes to musical theatre vocal pedagogy by offering a culturally responsive training model for Chinese performers and a practical framework for higher education and professional training. Overall, the findings support the adoption of integrated, context-sensitive vocal training and provide a foundation for curriculum development and future research in Chinese and intercultural musical theatre pedagogy.

Recommendations

1. Chinese musical theatre vocal training should integrate singing, acting, and movement to help learners develop skills that correspond to real stage performance contexts.

2. Training should consider Chinese pronunciation, linguistic structure, and emotional expression so that vocal techniques can appropriately reflect Chinese cultural identity.

3. The training model should purposefully integrate multiple vocal approaches and assess vocal technique, emotional expression, and stage performance competence together.

Future Research

Future research should empirically evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed training model through experimental or longitudinal studies involving performers with different levels of experience. Comparative studies across diverse educational settings and cultural contexts are also recommended to examine the model's broader applicability and to further refine vocal training approaches for musical theatre in Asia and beyond.

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