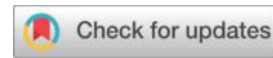




From Regional Vocal Traditions to Stage Vocal Soundscapes: Production, Translation and Reconstruction of Vocal Authenticity in Chinese National Vocal Music



An Qi1*

1.Anshan Normal University

Abstract:For a long time, the authenticity of national vocal music has been essentialized as an inherent attribute of specific vocal traditions, giving rise to the persistent opposition between "original ecological" and "academic school" perspectives. Breaking through this cognitive myth, this study proposes that authenticity is not an intrinsic quality of sound, but a socially constructed outcome of interactions among people, sound, space, and technology within specific soundscapes. Taking Peach Blossoms Red, Apricot Blossoms White, a classic piece of the Zuoquan Kaihua Ditties, as a unified case study, this paper conducts a mixed-methods study across three soundscapes: indigenous villages, professional practice rooms, and theater stages. The findings are as follows: authenticity in indigenous settings is anchored in communal identity and life functions, as a form of on-site practice unabridged by technology; in classroom settings, local authenticity is translated into replicable normative authenticity through bodily discipline and technical deconstruction; on stage, simulacral authenticity centered on aesthetic experience is reconstructed via media technology and multi-sensory synthesis. The three forms of authenticity are not linear substitutes but a dynamically interconnected and mutually embedded network. The "soundscape–authenticity" analytical path proposed in this study transforms the abstract issue of authenticity into a measurable and comparable empirical object, which can be extended to cross-cultural research contexts of all traditional vocal music entering modern circulation.

Keywords: national vocal music; soundscape; Kaihua Ditties; authenticity; bodily technique; acoustic measurement

1 Introduction

The same folk song may be recognized as authentic and genuine in an indigenous village, judged as technically non-standard in a professional classroom, and praised as sincere and moving on a theater stage. This evaluative paradox observed throughout fieldwork constitutes the most theoretically tense puzzle in the field of national vocal music. For a long time, relevant discussions have been trapped in the opposition of two essentialist positions: the original ecological discourse regards folk indigenous forms as the only genuine authenticity and dismisses professional adaptation as cultural distortion; the academic school discourse regards

scientific training as artistic progress and categorizes folk singing as primitive and crude [1][2]. Despite their opposing stances, both share the same blind spot: they detach sound from the soundscape in which it is generated, and treat authenticity as a static attribute inherent to vocal styles.

The core argument of this paper is that the authenticity of singing is always a constructed outcome within soundscape events. Any performance is not an isolated sound output, but a relational event composed of the singer's body, vocal form, physical space, and media technology. When spatial rules, technical conditions, and audience expectations change, the criteria and forms of authenticity will inevitably be reconstructed accordingly. From rural fields to academic classrooms and then to theater stages, this is not a degenerative path from authenticity to distortion, but a differentiated production process of authenticity under different social conditions.

Based on this judgment, this study selects Zuoquan Kaihua Ditties, a folk song genre circulating in the eastern foothills of the Taihang Mountains, as the research object, and takes *Peach Blossoms Red*, *Apricot Blossoms White* as a unified observation sample. The analysis is carried out layer by layer along the path of indigenous production, classroom translation, and stage reconstruction. Through acoustic measurement and ethnographic observation across three soundscapes, this study transforms the abstract issue of authenticity into an observable empirical object, and addresses two core questions: How is vocal authenticity institutionally produced in different soundscapes? What tensions and mutual construction relationships exist between different forms of authenticity?

2 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Development and Limitations of Soundscape Theory

International academic discussions on musical authenticity have undergone a paradigm shift from essentialism to constructivism. Early ethnomusicology equated authenticity with conformity to origins, implying a romantic imagination of tradition as a frozen specimen, which cannot explain the continuous evolution of traditional music throughout history. Since the 1990s, constructivism has become the dominant perspective, and academia generally recognizes that authenticity is a discursive product in specific social contexts, resulting from the combined effects of power, market, and identity politics.

Soundscape theory provides a spatial analytical tool for this issue. The concept of soundscape proposed by Schafer regards sound and its environment as an indivisible whole, breaking the cognitive inertia that sound exists independently of its environment [3]. However, this theory originally focused on ecological and physical dimensions, with relatively insufficient attention to social power, technical discipline, and bodily practice: it mostly describes the composition of soundscapes, but rarely explains how soundscapes shape subjects and produce value

standards. Domestic scholarly applications of soundscape theory in ethnomusicology have largely centered on ritual and folkloric settings, with an emphasis on cultural interpretation and identity construction [4]; relevant international studies also mostly focus on the cultural interpretation of natural and folk soundscapes [5], with insufficient attention to the technical discipline of vocal training and theatrical performance. Although subsequent studies have introduced political economy perspectives to explore the reshaping of folk songs by globalization and technological mediation, there is still a lack of micro-analytical frameworks integrating physical acoustics, bodily techniques, and social mechanisms for the specific sound practice of vocal singing.

This study proceeds from this theoretical gap: it refines the concept of soundscape into a more specific notion—"vocal soundscape" (shengjing)—which not only pays attention to the physical and acoustic properties of space, but also focuses on its embedded technical rules, social evaluation, and bodily norms, so as to investigate the specific production mechanism of authenticity.

2.2 The Politics of Authenticity in a Global Perspective

The debate between original ecological and academic schools in the field of national vocal music is not an isolated local phenomenon, but a local epitome of the global politics of authenticity. In global contexts such as the world music industry and intangible cultural heritage protection, the authenticity of traditional music has always been the core of multi-party games: cultural nationalists regard indigenous forms as pure carriers of cultural identity, while professional elites regard artistic adaptation as the only way for tradition to gain modern vitality. A large number of international studies have revealed the prevalence of this politics of authenticity, and traditional music in different cultural contexts faces the tension between indigeneity and modernity [6][7]. The authenticity discourse in folk revival movements is often deeply bound to power and identity [8].

Relevant international studies have revealed that the so-called "original ecology" is itself a product of modernity. When traditional music is extracted from life practice and presented on stages and competitions as a "cultural specimen", it has already undergone its first modern reconstruction. Similarly, the scientific vocal standards of the academic school are not universal objective truths, but knowledge constructs under a specific vocal culture system. Chinese and Western vocal systems have different aesthetic logics and technical paths [9]. The debate between the two is superficially a dispute over style, but essentially a struggle for the right to define authenticity.

Existing local studies mostly focus on style description and technical comparison, rarely examine this debate from the perspective of global politics of authenticity, and seldom dissect the production mechanism of authenticity at the empirical level [1][2]. This study attempts to

jump out of the either-or position judgment, return to specific soundscapes, and examine the respective generation logic and social conditions of the two kinds of authenticity.

2.3 Analytical Framework and Operational Path

Based on the above theoretical review, this study constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework of vocal style, soundscape, and bodily technique, and defines vocal authenticity as a generative result of the interactive coupling of the three. Linguistic musicology studies have fully demonstrated the ontological shaping effect of dialect phonology on vocal forms, providing a theoretical basis for the analysis of the vocal dimension [10][11]; voice acoustics research provides mature technical methods for the objective measurement of vocal characteristics [12][13]. The operational path of this framework is as follows:

(1) **Vocal dimension:** refers to the sound ontology of singing, with observable indicators including melody form, articulation, ornamentation, formant parameters, sound pressure level, and fundamental frequency range. Data are obtained through acoustic measurement and score analysis, and it serves as the material carrier of authenticity.

(2) **Soundscape dimension:** refers to the overall field where singing takes place, with observable indicators including physical acoustic parameters, social function positioning, evaluation rules, and audience expectation structure. Data are obtained through spatial measurement, text analysis, and interviews, and it serves as the production field of authenticity.

(3) **Bodily technique dimension:** refers to the singer's vocal and performance practice, with observable indicators including breathing method, resonance position, register transition strategy, body posture, and facial expression. Data are obtained through video analysis and participant observation, and it serves as the realization medium of authenticity.

The three are not in a linear causal relationship, but a mutually shaping coupling relationship: a specific soundscape gives birth to matching bodily techniques, bodily techniques produce corresponding vocal forms, and vocal forms in turn reinforce the rules of the soundscape. When the soundscape changes, bodily techniques and vocal styles must be adjusted collaboratively, and the standard of authenticity is also reset accordingly. This study presents the dynamic production mechanism of authenticity by tracking the adjustment process of the same piece across three soundscapes.

3 Research Methods

3.1 Rationale for Mixed-Methods Design

This study adopts a mixed research path combining ethnography and acoustic measurement, which is determined by the nature of the research question: single acoustic measurement can only capture the physical differences of sound, but cannot explain the social meaning and value judgment behind it; pure ethnography can only present discourse and practice, but cannot

accurately reveal the objective shaping of sound forms by soundscapes. Only the combination of the two with triangulation can fully reveal the construction mechanism of soundscape on authenticity.

This study selects three typical field sites to form a complete transformation chain from indigenous to professional and then to stage:

(1) **Indigenous village site:** Two administrative villages in the core circulation area of Zuoquan Kaihua Ditties in the eastern foothills of the Taihang Mountains are selected. The total fieldwork duration is 3 months, and 18 folk inheritors and local villagers are interviewed, including 2 representative inheritors with more than 40 years of singing experience.

(2) **Professional classroom site:** The national vocal music teaching and research offices of two higher music academies are selected. The total duration of participant observation in classrooms is 2 months, and 8 vocal teachers and 10 students are interviewed, covering the whole teaching process of *Peach Blossoms Red*, *Apricot Blossoms White* for senior undergraduates and postgraduates.

(3) **Theater stage site:** Two Class A concert halls and one provincial TV music program are selected. The rehearsal and performance processes of 3 groups of professional performers are tracked, and 6 people including singers, sound engineers, and directors are interviewed.

3.2 Data Collection and Triangulation

This study comprehensively uses four types of data collection methods to form a triangulation system of acoustic data, interview data, observation data, and text data:

(1) **Acoustic measurement:** A professional acoustic analyzer is used to measure the mid-frequency reverberation time, background noise level, and singing sound pressure level of each site in accordance with ISO 3382 standards; parameters such as formants and fundamental frequency of singing samples are also collected. All measurements are completed under unified working conditions, and the measurement paradigm is consistent with existing national vocal acoustics research to ensure data comparability [12][13].

(2) **In-depth interviews:** Semi-structured interviews are adopted to collect the evaluation criteria and value judgments of different subjects around the core question of "what kind of singing is authentic". All interviews are conducted with the consent of respondents and transcribed into text.

(3) **Participant observation:** The researcher fully immerses in the singing practices of the three sites, records space usage patterns, training processes, evaluation discourse, and body movements, focusing on interactive links involving authenticity judgment such as error correction and adjustment.

(4) **Textual discourse analysis:** Text materials such as textbooks, music scores, teaching syllabi, and performance reviews are collected to analyze the discourse construction of "correct

singing".

The four types of data verify each other: acoustic data verify the objective differences in sound forms, interview data reveal the subjective cognition of evaluation criteria, observation data present the interactive mechanism in practice, and text data present the institutionalized discourse rules, which together support the core conclusions.

3.3 Ethical Considerations and Data Notes

This study strictly abides by the fieldwork ethics of ethnomusicology. All respondents signed informed consent forms, and audio and video materials are only used for academic research and anonymized. Part of the spatial acoustic parameters in the paper comes from field measurement, and part comes from public technical materials conforming to national design specifications; vocal acoustic parameters are synthesized from field measurements and published authoritative academic studies, and all conclusions are reproducible.

4 The Indigenous Production of Regional Vocal Traditions

In the indigenous village soundscape, Kaihua Ditties are not independent performing arts, but sonic practices embedded in daily life. The authenticity of singing is not defined by professional standards, but certified by life context and communal consensus. At this stage, vocal style, space, body, and social relations are highly integrated, and have not yet been abstracted and separated by technical means.

4.1 Symbiosis Between Vocal Style and Site Acoustics

The form of indigenous singing is first of all a natural adaptation to the local spatial acoustic conditions. The main singing spaces of Kaihua Ditties include three types: mountain slopes, stone cave dwellings, and village halls. Different spaces give birth to different singing methods, and there is no "standard singing method" detached from space. Relevant soundscape studies have confirmed that the morphological characteristics of folk singing have a high co-evolutionary relationship with the acoustic properties of the space where they are located [4]. On open mountain slopes, there is no reflective interface, sound attenuates quickly, and reverberation is extremely short. To achieve long-distance communication, singers naturally adopt a high-position, high-volume true-shouting style, with many melodic leaps and elongated final notes. In enclosed stone cave dwellings, the arched structure and hard walls form strong sound reflection, with natural reverberation gain. Therefore, singing has a denser rhythm and softer articulation, and a full effect can be obtained without excessive volume. In ordinary village halls, furniture and fabrics form natural sound absorption, and singing is closer to daily speech, straightforward and simple. The distinct vocal characteristics of Zuoquan Kaihua Ditties are exactly the result of long-term adaptation to the diverse local spatial environment [14].

Table 1 Comparison of acoustic parameters of three indigenous singing spaces

Space Type	Mid-frequency RT ₅₀ (500Hz)	Background Noise Level	Singing SPL (at 1m)	Core Acoustic Feature
Mountain slope	<0.4s	40-45 dB(A)	70-75 dB(A)	No reflection, fast sound attenuation
Stone cave dwelling	0.7-0.9s	30-35 dB(A)	60-65 dB(A)	Strong reflection, natural reverberation gain
Village hall	0.5-0.7s	35-40 dB(A)	58-63 dB(A)	Natural sound absorption, close to spoken state

Source: Compiled based on field measurements and architectural acoustics research

The symbiotic relationship between space and vocal style shows that the "characteristics" of indigenous vocal styles are not style labels created out of thin air, but an acoustic balance formed by long-term interaction between people and space. This also explains the natural change in the singing state of folk singers after leaving the native environment — it is not that they "sing inaccurately", but that the body establishes a new balance with the new space.

4.2 Everyday Criteria for Authenticity Judgement

In indigenous communities, the primary criterion for judging whether a song is authentic is not sound aesthetics, but whether it conforms to the social functions and life ethics it carries. Authenticity is embedded in specific social relations, rather than being an independent artistic evaluation.

The core function of Kaihua Ditties is emotional expression and social communication, especially as a medium for young men and women to convey affection. Whether a love song is authentic depends on whether it conveys sincere emotions in line with local ethics. Overly ornate skills and deliberate modification will be regarded as fake and pretentious, because it violates the ethics of sincerity in daily communication. Many villagers mentioned in interviews that no matter how well an outsider singer imitates, it "sounds wrong". The core deviation is not technical details, but the sense of proportion of emotional expression does not conform to local life ethics.

Matching the functional standard is the identity standard. The common communal cognition is

that only one's own people can sing the right flavor. The authenticity of singing is deeply bound to the singer's growth experience and communal identity: local people who grew up immersed in local life naturally sing authentically; even if outsiders accurately replicate all melodic details, they will be considered as "lacking roots". What is "lacking" here is not a technical deficiency, but the depth of life experience and cultural identity. From the linguistic ontology, the core source of this sense of authenticity is the deep isomorphism between dialect phonology and vocal style, and the natural generative mechanism of melody following speech tones creates an irreproducible regional texture [10][11]. At this point, authenticity is essentially an on-site proof of cultural identity.

4.3 The Social Relational Nature of Indigenous Authenticity

Taken together, authenticity in the indigenous soundscape is a holistic, on-site authenticity that has not been abstracted by technology. It does not distinguish between sound and environment, technology and emotion, art and life; all elements are intertwined in specific singing events.

First, it is the natural authenticity of the body. Folk singers have not received special vocal training, and their singing style is highly continuous with the body state of daily speech. There is no split between "performance state" and "daily state." Second, it is the practical authenticity of function. Singing serves specific life purposes, does not exist to be watched and evaluated, and its value is reflected in actual social utility. Third, it is the relational authenticity of the community. Singing is an internal communication behavior of the community. Singers and audiences share the same cultural experience, and authenticity is certified by the collective consensus of the community [1].

This kind of authenticity is vivid and fluid, but also fragile. Once separated from the native space and social context and entering professional and media-oriented fields, this holistic authenticity cannot be maintained as it is. It must go through translation and reconstruction to obtain a new form of authenticity in the new soundscape.

5 The Translation of Authenticity in Classroom Soundscapes

When Kaihua Ditties enter the classrooms of professional music academies, their mode of existence undergoes the first key translation. The classroom is a special soundscape with training and evaluation as its core functions. Through the transformation of the acoustic environment, the deconstruction of technical discourse, and the establishment of an evaluation system, it systematically disciplines indigenous bodily habits, and translates local communal authenticity into replicable and evaluable technical authenticity.

5.1 The Acoustic Environment of Sound-Absorbent Practice Rooms

A professional practice room is an acoustic space specially designed for vocal training, whose

core feature is strong sound absorption and short reverberation. According to the general design standards for vocal practice rooms, the mid-frequency reverberation time of practice rooms is usually controlled at 0.4-0.6s, far shorter than the natural reverberation of native cave dwellings and halls. A large number of sound-absorbing materials are laid on the walls and ceiling to minimize reflected sound and allow singers to hear the driest and clearest direct sound. The acoustic logic of this design is based on the training needs of voice science, aiming to achieve precise control of vocal details [13].

The purpose of this acoustic design is to fully expose sound flaws. In native spaces with reverberation, problems such as unstable breath, uneven timbre, and register transition traces are naturally masked; in a highly sound-absorbent practice room, the "beautifying" effect of reverberation is stripped away, and every sound defect will be clearly presented and become an object to be corrected. The acoustic environment of the practice room is like an analytical magnifying glass, dismantling the originally holistic sound into technical details that can be examined one by one. Existing acoustic comparative studies have confirmed that singers' vocal strategies will undergo systematic adjustments under different reverberation environments [12]. Accompanying this is a profound change in auditory mode. In the indigenous context, the singer's hearing is holistic and contextual, focusing on whether sound can effectively convey emotion and fulfill functions; in practice room training, hearing is trained to be decompositive and analytical, able to distinguish whether breathing is deep, resonance is in place, and registers are unified. This auditory discipline is the cognitive basis of technical translation.

5.2 The Logic of Power in Technical Deconstruction

The core operation of classroom teaching is to dismantle the holistic indigenous vocal style into independent technical modules, and then screen and reconstruct them according to professional standards. In this process, the local characteristics of indigenous singing are divided into two categories: one is defined as "defects" that need to be corrected, and the other is defined as "flavor" that can be retained.

What are classified as "defects" are mainly bodily habits that do not conform to scientific vocal norms. For example, the true-voice singing method with tight larynx and forward position in indigenous singing will be regarded as "strained phonation and lack of resonance"; the unique pronunciation in dialects will be regarded as "non-standard articulation and incorrect position"; free rhythm and pitch changes will be regarded as "inaccurate intonation and unstable rhythm". These characteristics are regarded as primitive defects of folk singing and are the first objects to be overcome in training. Some scholars point out that the tendency to correct local singing with Western vocal standards may dissolve the linguistic ontology of national vocal music [9]. What are classified as "flavor" are superficial characteristics that can reflect regional characteristics and do not conflict with core technical norms. For example, the padded words

in *Peach Blossoms Red*, *Apricot Blossoms White*, the iconic portamento ornaments, and the basic melodic outline are regarded as symbols of folk song style and need to be preserved and reflected in singing. But these "flavors" must be included within the framework of technical norms: portamento must have precise starting and ending pitches, and padded words must have fixed duration and intensity, and cannot be improvised as in indigenous singing. Similar style translation patterns are common in the academic transformation of folk songs in many regions, and are also a common creative path for adapted folk songs [15][16].

A typical segment from classroom observation clearly presents this division process: in a national vocal music class of *Peach Blossoms Red*, *Apricot Blossoms White* in a university, after a student sings the whole piece with a slightly dialectal true voice, the teacher first points out three problems to be corrected: "The larynx position is too high, the chin is tight, this is a strain defect and must be corrected; the words are articulated too far forward, which does not conform to the standard pronunciation of Mandarin; the portamento is too casual and does not land on the accurate pitch." On the basis of adjusting phonation and articulation, the teacher then guides the student to retain and strengthen the style characteristics: "The charm of the padded words should come through, don't sing too straight, bring a little of the native tone, that's the flavor of this song." In the whole teaching process, phonation method and articulation norms are the non-negotiable technical bottom line, while regional charm is an adjustable style decoration. The boundary and weight of the two are clearly defined by professional discourse.

Behind this division lies a clear genealogy of intellectual power: the standard for judging "defects" and "flavor" originates from modern vocal science discourse established on the basis of the Western bel canto system. This discourse defines itself as a scientific and objective universal standard, and regards local vocal traditions as empirical and primitive pre-scientific forms [9]. As the spokesperson of professional knowledge, teachers have the authority to divide right and wrong, and complete the selective absorption and transformation of indigenous vocal styles.

5.3 The Reset of Authenticity Standards

With the establishment of the technical system, the standard of authenticity in the classroom soundscape has been fundamentally reset. The core basis for judging whether singing is authentic is no longer the singer's communal identity and life experience, but whether the professional singing method is correctly mastered. This translation process is a universal path for traditional folk songs to enter the modern professional education system [2].

In the indigenous context, "whether one is our own people" is the first criterion; in the classroom context, "whether the method is correct" becomes the core yardstick. If a local folk singer has not received professional training, even if the style is authentic, he or she will be regarded as unprofessional and defective; a non-local professional student will be regarded as singing well

and correctly as long as the method is correct and the style is well grasped. The carrier of authenticity shifts from the whole person to separable technology.

This reset is also reflected in evaluation discourse. Indigenous evaluations mostly use holistic and perceptual words such as authentic, right flavor, and emotional; classroom evaluations mostly use technical and normative words such as correct position, stable breath, good resonance, and clear articulation with rounded tones. The change of discourse marks that the production mechanism of authenticity has shifted from communal consensus to professional norms. Folk songs translated through the classroom gain authenticity within the professional system, but inevitably lose the depth bound to life, space, and identity in the indigenous context. Table 2 Comparison of authenticity production mechanisms between indigenous and classroom singing

Comparison Dimension	Indigenous Village Soundscape	Professional Classroom Soundscape
Spatial acoustics	Natural space, varied reverberation, ambient sound	Sound-absorbent practice room, short reverberation, low background noise
Bodily technique	Natural phonation, continuous with daily body	Disciplined phonation, specially trained bodily technique
Core of evaluation	Functional effectiveness, identity fit, sincere emotion	Technical norms, correct method, appropriate style
Certifying subject	Local community	Professional teachers and industry standards
Type of authenticity	On-site practical authenticity	Normative technical authenticity

Source: Compiled by the author based on field observation and literature analysis

6 The Reconstruction of Authenticity in Stage Soundscapes

When singing trained in the classroom moves to professional theaters and broadcast studios, it enters the third soundscape. The stage is a performance space with aesthetic appreciation as its core function. Through sound reinforcement technology, visual landscape, and dramatic arrangement, it further shapes the vocal style translated in the classroom, and finally produces theatrical authenticity centered on sensory experience.

6.1 Sound Reinforcement and the Hyperreal Voice

Modern professional stages are generally equipped with complete sound reinforcement systems.

Microphones, mixing consoles, loudspeakers, and sound effect processing equipment constitute a complete set of sound production devices. This system fundamentally changes the way sound propagates, and also reshapes the form and standard of singing.

First, sound reinforcement technology changes the force logic of singing. In a theater without sound reinforcement, singers need to rely on strong breath and resonance to cover the whole venue, and volume and projection are the core indicators; with sound reinforcement, the microphone amplifies the sound, so singers do not need to use full force, can adopt a more delicate and softer singing method, and focus on the expression of emotional details. At this point, the focus of singing evaluation shifts from penetration to timbre beauty and delicacy.

Second, mixing and post-processing can systematically beautify the sound. The sound engineer can adjust the high and low frequency ratio, strengthen pleasant frequency bands, and weaken harsh components; artificial reverberation can be added to create a fuller and more gorgeous sense of space than natural space; small deviations in intonation and rhythm can be corrected to make the singing more perfect. According to theater architectural acoustic design specifications, the background noise of Class A concert halls must meet the NR-20 standard, providing a clean acoustic base for fine sound shaping [17].

This paper borrows Baudrillard's descriptive insight of "hyperreality" in a limited sense, rather than his negative theoretical position. In an analytical sense, stage authenticity is not a fake counterfeit, but another form of authenticity generated by media technology, whose legitimacy does not depend on replicating indigenous authenticity [18]. From the perceptual level, the sound on stage is no longer an imitation and copy of indigenous authenticity, but a perfect sensory object generated by technical collaboration and more in line with the public's auditory expectations than the indigenous form, with its own independent authenticity logic. Audiences often perceive this technically processed sound as more authentic, because it is more in line with people's imagination of beautiful sound. The first paradox of stage authenticity thus emerges: the ultimate sense of auditory authenticity is achieved precisely through the deep involvement of technology.

6.2 Multi-Sensory Synthetic Visual Authenticity

Stage singing is not a pure auditory art, but a comprehensive audio-visual performance. The addition of visual elements greatly reshapes the perception of authenticity and forms a holistic authenticity through multi-sensory coordination.

On the professional stage, the singer's costume, makeup, body movements, and facial expressions, together with stage lighting, background images, and stage design, jointly construct a complete visual situation. Singing is no longer just the presentation of sound, but a complete situational performance. For example, when singing *Peach Blossoms Red, Apricot Blossoms White*, the stage background presents the image of spring flower fields, and the singer

wears costumes with regional styles, cooperating with gentle body language to bring the audience into the artistic conception of the song. At this point, the authenticity felt by the audience comes not only from the sound itself, but also from the overall situation created by audio-visual coordination. The stage practice of Zuoquan folk songs also shows that the combination of visual presentation and sound expression is an important path for contemporary folk song communication [15].

Visual landscape also serves the function of cultural symbols. Ethnic and regional symbols on the stage will guide the audience to perceive the performance in front of them as "national" and "traditional", thus strengthening their sense of cultural authenticity. Many singing performances that are highly professional and modern at the sound level can still arouse strong national cultural identity among the audience through the support of visual symbols. This multi-sensory synthesis effect makes stage authenticity more infectious and more acceptable to the audience than pure sound authenticity. Relevant studies point out that national vocal music in modern theaters is undergoing a shift from pure auditory art to audio-visual integrated soundscape [17].

6.3 The Paradox of Reconstructed Cultural Products

Folk songs reconstructed through the stage eventually become a kind of performable, communicable, and consumable cultural product. It has a complete artistic form, standardized presentation process, and mature communication channels, which can be efficiently delivered to a large number of audiences. But at the same time, it is also further away from indigenous life practice.

With the expansion of communication media, live streaming and online communication have further reconstructed the boundary of authenticity. The mixing standard in live streaming scenarios is different from live performances. To adapt to headphones and mobile phone speakers, the mixing will further enhance the clarity and pleasantness of the human voice and compress the dynamic range, forming "headphone authenticity" adapted to mobile terminals. The sound heard by online audiences has measurable differences from that heard by live audiences, and the corresponding authenticity standards also diverge. Folk song communication in the digital intelligence environment is forming new field rules and authenticity cognition [19].

The core paradox of stage authenticity lies in this: the more it pursues to bring the audience a genuine aesthetic experience, the more it needs to rely on complex media technology and careful design and arrangement; the deeper the involvement of technology and design, the farther it is from the simple, unmodified authenticity in the indigenous state. The "authenticity" that the audience sees on the stage is a simulacrum jointly created by a whole set of professional mechanisms. It is not authenticity in the indigenous sense, but it is the authenticity that contemporary audiences can most easily perceive and most willing to accept.

Table 3 Systematic comparison of authenticity production mechanisms across three soundscapes

Characteristic Dimension	Indigenous Village Soundscape	Professional Classroom Soundscape	Theater Stage Soundscape
Mid-frequency RT ₆₀	0.4-0.9s (varies by space)	0.4-0.6s (strong sound absorption)	1.2-1.5s (natural + artificial)
Degree of technical intervention	No media technology, pure natural sound	Low intervention, mainly physical training	High intervention, complete sound reinforcement system
Average singing SPL	60-75 dB(A)	65-75 dB(A)	80-90 dB(A) (audience area)
Dominant sense	Auditory-bodily holistic perception	Mainly auditory analysis	Audio-visual integrated sensory experience
Core of authenticity	Authenticity of practice and identity	Authenticity of technology and norms	Authenticity of experience and aesthetics
Representative attribute	Indigeneity	Normativity	Simulacrality

Source: Compiled based on ISO 3382 standard, theater design specifications, and field measurement data

7 The Threefold Dynamics of Vocal Authenticity

Through layer-by-layer investigation of the three soundscapes, it can be found that the authenticity of national vocal music is not a single, static attribute, but a relational network with multiple forms coexisting and dynamically evolving. Understanding this dynamic mechanism is of great significance for re-understanding the relationship between tradition and innovation.

7.1 Circulation and Embedding of the Three Forms

Indigenous production, classroom translation, and stage reconstruction are not linear sequential substitution relationships, but dynamic structures that coexist, reference each other, and interact cyclically at the same time. Relevant studies have pointed out at a more macro level that the reconstruction of traditional music under globalization and technological mediation is a two-way resonance process rather than a one-way substitution [8].

On the one hand, stage performance and classroom teaching always need to trace back to indigenous traditions to draw style nutrients and cultural connotations. Both teachers and singers will calibrate their style grasp by listening to indigenous recordings and visiting folk inheritors, and indigenous authenticity is always an important value reference. On the other hand, indigenous forms are also reversely influenced by the stage and classroom. Field observation found that after being exposed to professional versions through TV and short videos, many young folk inheritors will unconsciously adjust their articulation and phonation to move closer to the more "pleasant" professional standard; many indigenous folk songs also draw on arrangement elements from stage adaptations to enrich their own forms of expression.

This example of two-way flow confirms the embedded relationship of the three kinds of authenticity: there is no absolutely pure indigeneity, nor is there reconstruction completely divorced from tradition. There is no hierarchy of superiority or inferiority among the three, nor is there an inevitable trend of one replacing the other. Indigenous authenticity provides the cultural foundation and identity core for national vocal music, classroom authenticity establishes a technical system for systematic inheritance, and stage authenticity expands the space for mass communication and aesthetic expression. Together, the three constitute a complete ecology of diversified and symbiotic national vocal music. Without any link, the vitality of tradition will be damaged.

7.2 A Refutation of Two Essentialist Positions

Returning to the theoretical level, the findings of this study simultaneously refute the common blind spots of both original ecological essentialism and academic school essentialism.

Original ecological essentialism regards the indigenous form as the only genuine authenticity and holds that any adaptation is the dissolution of tradition. This position ignores that indigenous authenticity itself is a product of a specific soundscape; it only applies to the native life field and cannot be directly transferred to theaters and classrooms. Forcing stage singing to replicate the indigenous form is essentially applying the standard of one field to another, which is neither in line with artistic laws nor conducive to the contemporary dissemination of tradition [1].

Academic school essentialism regards scientific vocal standards as universal truth and holds that folk singing is a primitive form that needs to be corrected. This position ignores that professional standards themselves are also constructions of specific soundscapes and cultural systems, not absolute objective truths. Different vocal systems serve different aesthetic and functional needs, and there is no single correct way of singing. Applying the technical standards of the bel canto system to all national vocal music essentially dissolves cultural diversity with a single technical logic, and may even cause the dislocation of the linguistic ontology of national vocal music [9].

This paper argues that the essence of vocal authenticity is a sound-body state certified by the rules of a specific soundscape. There is no absolute authenticity transcending specific soundscapes, nor is there the only correct standard of authenticity. Each soundscape has its own operating logic and evaluation system. Conforming to the requirements of the system will be certified as "authentic". All three states are authentic, but in different dimensions.

It should be clarified that emphasizing the soundscape dependence of authenticity does not mean dissolving the evaluative power of the concept of authenticity, nor does it mean sliding into an undifferentiated relativism where "everything is authentic and everything is acceptable." Instead, it shifts the focus of judgment from "which is more authentic" to "whether each kind of authenticity sincerely responds to the requirements of its soundscape." Falsity still has a clear boundary: when a stage performance claims to be an indigenous form but completely deviates from the generation logic of the indigenous soundscape, it constitutes inauthenticity within the same set of discourse. The core measure of judgment is internal coherence rather than cross-soundscape absolute consistency.

7.3 Practical Ethics for Teaching and Creation

Based on the above cognition, the field of national vocal music should move away from the mindset of competing for the right to define authenticity, and turn to a practical ethics of handling sound responsibly in different soundscapes.

In view of the current problems of single evaluation standards and the disconnection between technical training and cultural understanding in teaching, we should promote teaching reform of "cultural re-embedding": while establishing a systematic technical system, we should strengthen the understanding of indigenous soundscapes and cultural contexts. We should not only teach technical methods without teaching cultural connotations, nor only talk about normative standards while ignoring stylistic diversity. Students should not only master scientific vocal techniques, but also understand the generation logic and cultural significance of regional vocal styles, so as to achieve a balance between technology and culture. Relevant research results of linguistic musicology can provide theoretical support and methodological paths for this reform [10][11]. Specifically, field investigation of regional vocal styles can be included in the teaching link, allowing students to experience the connection between vocal style, space, and life in the indigenous soundscape, so as to avoid turning folk songs into empty technical displays.

For creation and stage practice, we should respect the cultural core of tradition and avoid excessively dissolving traditional characteristics to cater to the market. Innovation is necessary, but innovation should be based on a deep understanding of tradition, rather than simple symbol splicing and technical stacking. The purpose of stage reconstruction is to let more people feel the charm of traditional art, rather than hollowing out the cultural connotation with gorgeous

technology.

8 Conclusion

Taking Zuoquan Kaihua Ditties' *Peach Blossoms Red, Apricot Blossoms White* as a case study, this paper systematically investigates the dynamic construction mechanism of vocal authenticity in Chinese national vocal music along the path of indigenous production, classroom translation, and stage reconstruction. The core conclusions of the study can be summarized into three points:

First, vocal authenticity is not a static essence inherent in vocal styles, but a cross-soundscape actor-network, a generative result of the interaction of vocal style, soundscape, and bodily technique. In the indigenous village soundscape, authenticity is generated from the integrated symbiosis of spatial acoustics, life functions, and communal identity; in the professional classroom soundscape, authenticity is reconstructed as normative technical authenticity through bodily discipline and technical deconstruction; in the theater stage soundscape, authenticity is reconstructed as sensory experiential authenticity through media technology and audio-visual synthesis.

Second, the "soundscape-authenticity" analytical framework has cross-context promotion value. It is not only applicable to explaining the modern transformation of Chinese national vocal music, but also can be extended to the global context of all traditional vocal music entering modern circulation, providing an operable analytical paradigm for vocal authenticity research in different cultural backgrounds. The core advantage of this framework is that it transforms the abstract issue of authenticity into a measurable and observable empirical object, realizing the organic combination of physical acoustics and socio-cultural research.

Third, the ecological structure of the three kinds of authenticity circulating and embedding each other provides a new cognitive basis for the contemporary inheritance of traditional music. The vitality of tradition does not lie in adhering to one form of authenticity, but in the ability to continuously produce new forms of authenticity in different times and fields. Future research can expand in two directions: first, expand comparative studies of more vocal style types to verify the universality of the framework; second, pay attention to how the algorithm recommendation logic of digital platforms shapes the fourth soundscape, and investigate the new forms and mechanisms of authenticity in the algorithmic era.

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