

# An Analysis Of Chinese Song Singing Techniques In The Perspective Of Narratology

Qingying Li<sup>1</sup>, Chutima Maneewattana<sup>2</sup>, Liu lingling<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Performing Arts of Doctor of Philosophy program, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand, Email: [s62584947025@ssru.ac.th](mailto:s62584947025@ssru.ac.th)*

<sup>2</sup>*Asst.Prof.Dr. Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Email: [chutima.ma@ssru.ac.th](mailto:chutima.ma@ssru.ac.th)*

<sup>3</sup>*Prof.Dr. Music college of GuangXi Arts University, Email: [927629451@qq.com](mailto:927629451@qq.com)  
Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand*

**ABSTRACT:** The structuralist narratology that emerged in the 1960s has been going through a theoretical process for half a century, and the number of scholars engaged in its theoretical study in China has been increasing year by year since the 1980s, with closer exchanges and dialogues between the Chinese narratology community and its foreign counterparts. Among the artistic disciplines, however, there are still few scholars who have studied the discipline of Chinese vocal singing from the perspective of its integration with narrative theory. This paper will, for the first time, use Chinese national art songs as an example, combining valuable practical insights gained from the author's interviews with Chinese singers, and plumbing the ways in which narrative theory can be used to combine theory and practice in their singing techniques.

**KEYWORDS:** narratology, singing technique, interdisciplinary, Chinese national art songs.

## Introduction

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY OF NARRATIVE THEORY

Narratology, which emerged in France in the 1960s, has been a theoretical process for half a century and has attracted the attention and interest of scholars from all over the world. Narratology as a theory for the micro-study of narrative works embodies the principle that textual criticism focuses on the study of the work. The study of narrative in China has begun in the 1980s to the present, and the number of scholars working on its theory is increasing year by year, as the Chinese narrative community engages in closer exchange and dialogue with its foreign

counterparts. Some scholars in China have used this theory in conjunction with other critical theories, including social and historical criticism, often with unexpectedly successful results (Barr 2015).

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH ON THE INTEGRATION OF CHINESE NATIONAL ART SONGS AND NARRATOLOGY

As of 7 February 2022, the search terms “narratology” and “narrative theory” on the authoritative Chinese academic website “Zhiwang” were 4,256. The number of journals and papers related to “art” is 4256. The search term “narratology” and the keywords “singing” were 33 articles, of which 4 were doctoral

dissertations, 28 were master's theses, and 10 articles studied Chinese vocal repertoire from narratological theory. Among them, the third chapter of Song (2017) "A Study of the Voice Morphology of Narrative Songs" provides a more comprehensive analysis of narrative songs with examples of changes in perspective, storyline transitions and character conflicts, but does not analyse the singing techniques of the fragments. It is thus clear that Chinese scholars are at an exploratory stage in their research on the intersection of these two disciplines.

#### RATIONALE FOR THIS PAPER

Based on this situation, this paper focuses on Mick Barr's (2015) *Narratology - An Introduction to Narrative Theory* (3rd edition), an internationally renowned narratologist and literary theorist at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, as the basis for narratological theory and uses different fragments of Chinese national art songs as examples for comparative analysis. The clips are: - "Mulan enlisted".- "Meng Jiang Niang Nü".- "Princess Wencheng". For the first time, this paper analyses how narratological theory can be integrated into one's own practice, using Chinese national art songs as an example and classifying them according to their narrative text. These three Chinese national art songs tell stories that have been passed down in China for thousands of years and are classical tales that are familiar to the Chinese people. They embody the aesthetic habits of the Chinese people with regard to narrative literature and traditional songs, and the study of these three works is of positive significance to the understanding of Chinese history, culture, art and the way of thinking of the Chinese people.

#### Research Objective

To gain experience in teaching and guiding the interdisciplinary aspects of narrative and vocal art disciplines through an introduction to Mick Barr's narrative theory, combined with my own practical experience in singing, in order to

complement the theoretical and practical research on the interdisciplinary aspects of vocal performing arts and narrative classes in China.

#### Research methods

Survey and analysis, literature research, and summary and induction. In this paper, the author uses the extraction of representative singing fragments in Chinese national art songs and intercepts samples of their scores for analysis. On the basis of this, the author combines his own practice and interviews with several famous Chinese singers to give advice on the interpretation of such works, and finally summarises and concludes the technique of singing such works. The seven subjects I have chosen to interview are the main singing performers who participated in the 2022 New Year's Tea Party of the National Political Consultative Conference of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. They have won numerous singing awards at home and abroad for their exquisite singing skills and excellent stage presence, and have appeared in a number of operas and sung a number of classic singing works, thus becoming known and loved by Chinese audiences and even by fans worldwide. They are: Shi Yijie (a famous singer of Chinese origin who has travelled to Europe for a long time), Wang Yifeng (an opera singer from the China Opera and Dance Theatre, Beijing), Sheng Mei (a professor of vocal music from the University of Macau, Macau), Zhang Shaohan (a famous singer of Taiwanese origin, Taiwan), Gong Shuang (an opera singer from the China Railway Cultural Troupe, Beijing), (Tsering Lam, Lhasa, Tibet, China), and a soloist from the Tibetan Opera and Dance Troupe. (Soloist, Tibetan Dance and Song Troupe, Tibet); (Dr. Mao Yihan, China Conservatory of Music, Beijing).

### **Defining Narrative Vocal Works in Terms of Narratological Theory**

#### **THE THREE ELEMENTS OF MICK BARR'S DEFINITION OF A NARRATIVE WORK**

Mick Barr suggests that the three key levels that can define a narrative work are: fabula, story, and text. The fabula is a series of events caused or experienced by the actors in a logical and chronological sequence. The “text” is the form in which the “story” is conveyed to the recipient of the narrative through a specific medium by the narrative actor or subject. “The 'story' is the content of the 'text', which allows the material to be presented in a particular performative form. According to the French narratologist Bremond and Cancalon (1980): “The content of a novel can be reproduced on stage or screen; the content of a film can be relayed in text to those who have not seen it. Through the words read, the images seen or the dance movements, we get a story - it can be the same story” (Bremond 1964). From this passage we learn that if the same story can be expressed by different media (texts) it is evidence of the relative independence of the story, which does not change according to the form of the discourse (Shen 1998).

#### **NARRATIVE SONGS DEFINED THROUGH THE CRITERIA OF MICK BARR'S NARRATIVE THEORY**

Then we can define a song as a song with a narrative function by the following formula: in a songs with a Narrative three elements need to be present at the same time: fabula, story and text (Fu 2021). Firstly, there needs to be a certain logic to the song, a change in time, the presence of a character and an event caused or experienced by the character. Secondly, the event needs to be described by a descriptive actor or subject, in the narrow sense of a singer, who can convey the event to the recipient in a specific medium: singing, physical performance, facial expressions, and accompanying melody, and this complete performance process is the process of presenting the story. In a narrative song, the 'text' can be expressed through the melody, through the

body language of the performer, and through the performer's singing. When a well-known classic event is created by the creator as a 'story' in a song, it is particularly important that the performer, as the transmitter of the 'text' of the song, can more accurately convey the 'fabula' of the 'story' as depicted by the lyricist. fabula', is particularly important. As a performer, this is a process of secondary narration and secondary creation. We may wish to analyse and infer the state and mood of the performance in relation to the passages in the repertoire in the following ways. 5. Analysis of Chinese national art songs in terms of narratological theory. In a narrative song 'story' performance, the narrative 'text' can be basically divided into three parts: the lyrics, the accompanying melody and the performer. The composer's accurate grasp of the melodic character of the music allows us to hear the melody created by the composer in a way that gives the listener and the singer the same artistic association with the narrative text, through the speed of the tone lengths and the harmony and contradiction of the tone layers.

#### **THE NARRATIVE STYLE OF CHINESE NATIONAL ART SONGS**

In Chinese national art songs works, influenced by traditional Chinese opera compositions and Chinese poetry, lyricists present the 'Fabula' in different ways through different narrative 'texts', either explicitly or metaphorically, so that the audience will have a rich storytelling experience.

### **The Profundity and Research Significance of the Three Works**

(1) “Mulan enlisted”: The story of Mulan originates from the folk song “Mulan Poem”, a long narrative folk song and a musical poem from the north of China during the Northern and Southern Dynasties. For thousands of years, the story of Mulan has influenced generations of Chinese people, and in this narrative poem, we see a flesh-and-blood heroine with a heroic

posture, and the poem occupies an important place in the history of Chinese literature.

(2) “Meng Jiang Niang Nü”: As one of the four classic Chinese love stories, the story of “Meng Jiang Nü” can be traced back to the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods or between the two Han dynasties. This story represents the common aspiration of the entire human race and expresses the truest voice of working people. That is: the desire for peace, the pursuit of stability, the desire for happiness and peace in family life.

(3) “Princess Wencheng”: Princess Wencheng is one of the most recognisable historical figures in contemporary Chinese knowledge of 'ethnic history' (Wang and Cedain 2019). In 641, the Tang Emperor Taizong Li Shimin married Princess Wencheng to Tubo, who became the queen of Songtsen Gampo. The marriage of Princess Wencheng to Tibet not only strengthened the western border of the Tang Dynasty, but also spread the culture of the Han people to Tibet, and the economy and culture of Tibet were nourished by the Tang culture. Princess Wencheng, who knew how to read and write and who had to brave hardships to marry in Tubo, made a historic contribution to the promotion of economic and cultural exchanges between Tang and Tibet, and to the enhancement of close, friendly and cooperative relations between the Chinese and Tibetan peoples.

All three of these works express the simple values of Chinese life: advocating peace and development, looking forward to national stability and harmony, valuing etiquette and filial piety, and valuing tradition, responsibility and family. In these three works of Chinese national art songs the melodies and narrative style of the lyricists convey such cultural characteristics very well and are therefore suitable for use as examples for research.

#### THE ARTISTIC RELEVANCE OF THE NARRATIVE 'TEXT' IN THE CHINESE NATIONAL ART SONGS 'MULAN ENLISTED'.

The song “Mulan enlisted” (Wang 2020) tells the story of a girl called 'Mulan' who, after her father receives a conscription mission, cannot bear to see her aged father go off to fight in the battlefield and resolutely joins the army for him. She becomes a general for her skill in leading battles and returns home after the war. It was then that the crowd realised that Fa Mulan's was a woman. From a musical aesthetic point of view, this song contains the traditional moral values represented in Chinese Confucianism: “loyalty”, “courage” and “filial piety”, values that are well reflected in the lyrics and melody of “Mulan enlisted” from the Army.

In the performance of a song with a narrative function, the narrative 'text' can be basically divided into three parts: the lyrics, the accompanying melody and the performer. The composer's accurate grasp of the melodic character of the music enables us to hear the melody composed by the composer in the same way as the narrative text, through the harmony and contradiction of the tone lengths and the relationship between the layers of sound, giving the listener and the singer the same artistic association. In Chinese national art songs works, influenced by traditional Chinese opera compositions and Chinese poetry, lyricists present the 'material' in different ways, either explicitly or metaphorically, through different narrative 'texts', so that the audience can have a rich storytelling experience.

Score example 1 “Mulan enlisted” Lyrics by Liu Lin Song by Wang Zhixin Score example excerpt from “Selected Vocal Works by Liu Lin and Wang Zhixin” published by China Drama Publishing House 9 (2002).



Figure 1. “Mulan enlisted” example 1. Lyrics by Liu Lin, Song by Wang Zhixin. Score example excerpt from Chen, Junhua. 2002. Selected Vocal Works by Liu Lin and Wang Zhixin. Shenzhen: China Drama Publishing House.

The classic passage in this piece, bars 50-60 of “Mulan enlisted”, embodies the “YaoBan” vocal style of traditional Chinese opera, which is presented in such a way that the accompaniment music is separated from the singing, with the accompaniment music following the normal eye rhythm while the singing rhythm is slow, commonly known as “tightly shaken and slowly sung”. The singing style is able to express emotions such as tension, excitement, joy or grief. In the example clip, in the main melody, the singer is required to sing at a medium-slow, medium-weak tempo in the middle and high register, reflecting the 'subjective image' represented by the heroine 'Mulan', expressing her uncompromising filial piety towards her parents, her loyalty to her father, to her country and to the king, and her firm will for the unknown future. The song is an expression of the complex psychological state of the female protagonist, Mulan, who expresses her uncompromising filial piety towards her parents, her firm will to serve her father, her loyalty to her country and her king, and her confusion and uncertainty about her future. In the accompanying melody, the composer uses four consecutive fast and dense sixteenth notes per measure as the main rhythmic pattern, creating a blend of slow singing and fast

accompaniment. This accompaniment expresses the “objective image” of the brutality of war and the stress of the march. The presence of the two different ‘texts’ at the same time creates a sense of contradiction in the interweaving and pulling of the narrative “Fabula” (Song and Cohen 1988), which brings the audience to a different level of associative visual experience. The passage presents the complex psychological activities of the protagonist after a huge life change. When singing this passage, the singer needs to express the “Fabula” with a different emotional connotation to the accompanying melody. The singing advice given in this article is that as this piece is based on the music of the Chinese Yu Opera (Guo 2005), it has a strong traditional musical style of the northern region. Performers need to follow the score while paying attention to the musical feeling that Henan opera gives a straightforward feeling like chilli. Emphasis is placed on the resilience of the character “Mulan”. One of the most important aspects of modern Chinese folk song singing is the “correct and rounded character”. Singers need to develop clear and round pronunciation, practising with an excited facial expression, keeping the laughing muscles up, keeping some space in the mouth, with the tongue slightly depressed in the middle and the sides up, while keeping the uvula and palatopharyngeal arch of the throat up. When singing the line “Saying goodbye to my parents and going to the distant frontier to put on armour and fight”, highlight the use of the “dragging cadence” in Chinese opera, where the accent at the beginning of the word and the rhyme at the end of the word should be fast. The use of ‘dragging the cadence’ prolongs the final sound of the word. The lower abdominal cavity’s rectus abdominis muscles need to be flexibly used to guide the diaphragm and its flexible rhythmic movements, creating a sense of flexibility that “breaks the voice and keeps the breath coming”. In terms of performance characteristics, the singer needs to emphasise the feeling of

reluctance in Mulan's heart towards her parents, which must not be happy and light-hearted, but rather the willingness to say goodbye to them, and partly the confusion about the future, as we can learn from the text that Mulan should be dressed as a man in armour and military attire when she bids farewell to her parents. In the expressions and movements, the traditional male gesture of bidding farewell in Chinese opera can be added, with the head slightly turned away to express the feeling of not being able to bear the separation. In the performance of the song “To the battlefield I've travelled thousands of miles, over the mountains as fast as I can fly”, the performance should emphasise the process of the protagonist's growth from a battlefield to a decisive general. The powerful and energetic character should be highlighted as much as possible in the eye movements.

#### THE ARTISTIC ASSOCIATION OF THE NARRATIVE “TEXT” IN THE CHINESE NATIONAL ART SONGS “MENG JIANG NIANG NÜ”

The song “Meng Jiang Niu” tells the story of a famous Chinese tragic legend (Idema 2012). The heroine of the story is called “Meng Jiang Nu”. She is a newlywed woman whose husband is conscripted to build the Great Wall. She waits from spring until winter, but her husband still does not return home. During the Spring Festival when all families were reunited, she sewed a winter coat for her husband to protect him from the cold and went out in the snow to look for him. When she couldn't find her husband, she cried so loudly that the Great Wall couldn't bear to hear her cries and broke apart, revealing the tragic story of Meng Jiang Nü who saw her husband's body and the bodies of millions of labourers lying at the foot of the Great Wall.



Figure 2. “Mulan enlisted” example 1. Liu Lin's Lyrics, Wang Zhixin's Music, excerpts from Chen, Junhua. 2002. *Selected Vocal Works by Liu Lin and Wang Zhixin*. Shenzhen: China Drama Publishing House.

In Bar Number 50-60 of Meng Jiang Nü, composer Wang Zhixin uses a large number of musical expressions such as F, sustains, rests and arpeggios, as well as adding a general term for the traditional Chinese opera “DuoBan”, which is a fast and flowing board. This vocal style is similar to that of “YaoBan” above, and is also characterised in the “text” as “tightly shaken and slowly sung”. In contrast to the narrative approach in example 1, the melody of the accompaniment in this passage is unified with the narrative association given by the lyrics. In the lyrics, the soprano accompaniment uses a large number of sixteenth notes and eighth notes to reflect the severe weather and the continuous eighth note rests in the bass clef to reflect the urgency of the “Meng Jiang Nü” in her search for her husband. The melody is narrative in nature. The melody is both narrative and vocal, in keeping with the narrative character of the lyrics “The snow is flying, the north wind is rushing...” The melody reinforces the audience's sense of the urgency and coldness of Meng Jiang Nu's search for her husband. The singing suggestions given in this article are that the singer needs to sing the passage in such a way as to render the accompaniment emotionally cold and difficult, in order to achieve an audiovisual experience in sync with the accompanying melody. The

pharyngeal state still requires the laughing muscles to be raised, the space in the mouth to be maintained, the middle of the tongue to be slightly depressed and the sides to be raised, and the uvula (Echternach et al. 2016) and palatopharyngeal-arch to be raised, both of which can be raised even higher to achieve a slightly weeping trill when the singer is expressing the anxiety, anxiety and confusion of Meng Jiang Nu. In contrast to the flexible abdominal training required for the first instance, the passage requires a consistent and stable vocal state, which requires a constant force from both the rectus abdominis and transverse abdominis muscles in the lower abdominal cavity to express the singer's determination to find her husband despite the wind and snow.

THE DIFFERENT SINGING STYLES OF THE “TEXTUAL FOCUSERS” IN THE CHINESE NATIONAL ART SONGS “PRINCESS WENCHENG” “Princess Wencheng” tells a famous Chinese historical story (Wang and Cedain 2019): during the Tang Dynasty, Princess Wencheng went to the Tibetan region to make peace with Songtsen Gampo, which promoted economic and cultural exchanges and prosperity in the Tibetan region and brought long-lasting friendship between Tibet and China, and Princess Wencheng has been loved by the people of the Tibetan region since ancient times. The story is set against the backdrop of Princess Wencheng's marriage, and follows her journey from the beginning of the

marriage to her arrival in Tibet, where she falls in love with Songtsen Gampo and misses her homeland, to her eventual adoption of Tibet as her homeland and the admiration and love she receives from the people.

From a narratological perspective, there are different classifications of narrative perspective within a story text (Tan et al. 2021). The French scholar Genette in *Narrative Discourse* has simplified and generalised his taxonomy into a trichotomy, using the term ‘focalization’ (Van Leuven-Zwart 1989) to explain this classification (Fang 2019). (1) The narrator says more than the other characters i.e. ‘unfocused’, narrator > characters, (2) The narrator can present only what a character knows. That is, “internally focused” narrator = character, (3) The narrator is presented with less information than the characters know, that is, the narrator is ‘externally focused’ < character. Dutch narratology Mick Barr likewise refers to focus. She suggests that in situations where there is a focus, three questions are crucial. (1) What does the character focus on and what is it aiming at? (2). How does it engage with this: with what attitude does it observe things? (3) Who focuses on it: who is it focusing on? Many of us struggle to distinguish between these three questions when analysing sentences specifically, thus creating a subjective bias in our understanding of the narrative text.



Figure 3. Score 3 “Princess Wencheng”. Lyrics by Zhang Minghe Yin Qing Qu “Princess Wencheng”, bars 7~10 Excerpt 2010.

As can be seen from the examples, the melody of the accompaniment is subordinate to

the melody of the singing and does not have independence and has a certain narrative

emotion. This means that, unlike the example above, the accompaniment itself does not have the attributes of a story text and therefore, as far as narrative texts are concerned, the melody of the accompaniment has no guidance for the singer as a narrative text. Given this feature, we can turn our attention to the lyrics themselves for storytelling guidance. From the example lines, we know that the original Chinese phrase in bars 7 to 10 of the song lacks a subject. But by comparing what follows, we can see that the passage refers to the situation of Princess Wencheng, who is about to be married off accompanied by a magnificent procession, and who, on her last stop in her native land in the Middle Kingdom, sees the green hills and feels sadness and longing for leaving her homeland, Mick Barr suggests that when the reader is provided with a vision that is as direct as possible, so that the different actors

cannot be separated, they overlap each other, this is the form of a 'stream of consciousness', where the focal point is the point of view from which the components are observed, a point of view that can be embedded in a character (as in the components of the fabula) or outside of it. As can be seen from the example sentences, the focus of the text revolves around the character "Princess Wencheng". However, it is not clear from the text whether the narrative focuses exclusively on her perspective. In this sentence, the narrative observer is controversial; the focuser can be an outside observer or the character of Princess Wencheng herself. The performance and emotional state required for the technique to be focused on is a completely different criterion. So in singing, the narrator can design the performance from several different perspectives.

Table 1. Lyrics focus perspective compare text (form "Princess Wencheng")

Reader Focus Simulation	(Princess Wencheng) surrounded by gorgeous regalia, her eyes seeing the green hills and water as if in a painting, why did (she) leave all this beauty behind and leave her homeland in the snow?
Intrinsically focused simulation	(I) am surrounded by magnificent regalia and nobility, and my eyes are filled with the picturesque beauty of the green hills of my home, but why should I suffer myself to leave my native land in this blizzard and say goodbye to them?
Composite focus simulation	(She) is surrounded by magnificent regalia and nobility, and her eyes see the green hills full of greenery, as if in a painting, but why should I suffer myself to leave my native land in this blizzard and say goodbye to them?

(1) The external focalizer (Berendsen 1984) narrative from the reader's point of view: the story is seen from the 'God' point of view, which is more neutral in terms of the singer's emotional expression of the music, and the emotion of the parting is more restrained and objective than the second narrative from the emotional point of view of the "master" focalizer. The narrative perspective is more restrained and objective than the second narrative perspective, which is based on the emotional perspective of the "master" focuser. In this perspective, the narrator appears as an outsider evaluator, and the

event is a fact of the text that has happened and cannot be changed for the narrator, so that the emotions of the narrative are not based on the characters in the text to produce a deeper sense of experience and immersion. (2) The character of Princess Wencheng is used as the basis for the performance.

(2) Internal narration with the character Princess Wencheng as the focuser: the perspective of the internal focuser (I). This is the most accessible and easiest way for many singers to sing. In terms of designing the performance in relation to the narrative text, the use of the image



of Princess Wencheng as the singer herself has the advantage of allowing for a more subjective and emotionally charged interpretation of the text, and in the case of more emotionally-charged lyrics such as “But why do we part, the wind and snow go to the ends of the earth? The performance of such emotionally charged lyrics as ‘But why do we part, the wind and snow go to the end of the world’ is more empathetic to the recipient and thus more sincere. In this narrative, the singer should pay more attention to the part of the song that represents the character's actions and situations: “prosperity”; “the wind and snow go away” is sung as a heavy beat, with a more pronounced rhythm in the contrast between light and heavy, and with a focus on the expression of personal emotion.

(3) Compound focus linked to the characters - i.e. the mutual movement from extrinsic to intrinsic focus: in the example sentences corresponding to this situation in the narrative text, we should actually focus more on thinking about the analysis of this type of focus. In order to identify a focus type, one must first go through the three questions that Barr raises about the focus type, and whether the example sentence is able to provide a very complete answer to all three questions in a unified way, we can derive the most appropriate focus object from the example sentence corresponding to the three questions. 1. What does the character focus on, and what does it aim at? Firstly, in a broad sense: the character focus takes place in the historical story embodied in the lyrics of the song “Princess Wencheng” - the part of the story in which Princess Wencheng is about to leave for Tibet and is fond of her homeland. In a narrow sense, the focus is on the scene around Princess Wencheng before her marriage and the commentary on this event. 2. Who focuses on it: whose focus is it on? A subjective description of the main character, Princess Wencheng, or an ‘impersonal’ objective description of the historical Princess Wencheng. Both can be the subject of focus. The object of

focus can change as the lyrics change. In the first half of the sentence, the text describes an objective scene before the marriage, but uses the word ‘around’, which can refer to either to Princess Wencheng herself (me) or to ‘Princess Wencheng’ “(she), which are two completely different perspectives. The attitude of this perspective is expressed in the second half of the sentence: “(Who is it?) But why did they indulge in parting, (who) let the wind and snow go to the ends of the earth”, this (who) is also very important, indulging in parting, which can mean: “Who indulged in such parting?” The subject of this question can be asked by the author, by the ‘I’ who represents the identity of Princess Wencheng's protagonist, or even by a third person who may be around the princess.<sup>3</sup> How does it engage with this point: what attitude does it take to observe things? It is clear from the narrative text that the attitudes expressed in this text are the same - disbelief, pity, frustration. But it is not clear from whom such an attitude comes, so this object is not fixed and is open to discussion in a compound focus.

In compound focus, the object of focus in each sentence needs to be judged first; in the first half of the sentence the object of focus is external, and we need to approach this type of focus with a sense of overall picture and personal emotion in the singing process, as well as a clear sense of the timing of the shift in focus. In contrast to traditional omniscient narration, in which the narrator adopts a God-like narrative vision in which he or she is outside the story and can change at will, in transformative or multiple internal focus, the narrator abandons his or her own external vision and looks at things through the eyes of several characters within the story. In fact, in this example, both the in-focus and out-focus expressions make sense, but the emotional characteristics of the different expressions are very different. The singing of the first half of the example phrase, which I would classify as reader-focused, requires a big generalised, less personal

emotional approach, sung with a sense of big lines and without obsession with the contrast between the strength and lightness of a particular word sound. From the second half of the phrase onwards, which can be classified as internally focused, more personal emotion needs to be added, with accents on words such as 'yet'; 'indulge'; 'go', which reflect personal behaviour. The treatment. As a vocal narrator, we must be very clear in our performance about who we choose to understand and choose to focus on in order to bring the audience an accurate focus experience.

### Chinese Vocal Aesthetics for Chinese national art songs

In the course of this research, the author of this paper interviewed seven renowned singers from different regions of China, including Beijing, Tibet, China, and Taiwan and Macau, China, respectively, in a face-to-face recording at the auditorium of the National Political Consultative Conference of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on 25 December 2021 Beijing time. One of the questions asked was: "What aspects of Chinese vocal artistry (including Chinese national art songs) do you value most when singing Chinese vocal works?" The author did not give any fixed answers to the question in advance, but rather the data was collected from the respondents' open-ended answers, which were then collated by the author. Through consolidation, the author found that the seven respondents gave a total of nine answers, which were: 1 Sincere expression of emotion. 2 Clear and correct bite in Chinese. 3 Rigorous score. 4 Portrayal of characters recognised by the audience, with attention to audience response and feedback. 5 Identification of different local and ethnic characteristics in the repertoire. 6 Variation in throat cadences. 7 Intimate stage presence. 8 In-depth knowledge of the background of the lyricist and the background of

the role performed. 9 Integrity of the overall stage presentation.

In this article, I have plotted this data based on the nine answers mentioned by the singers:

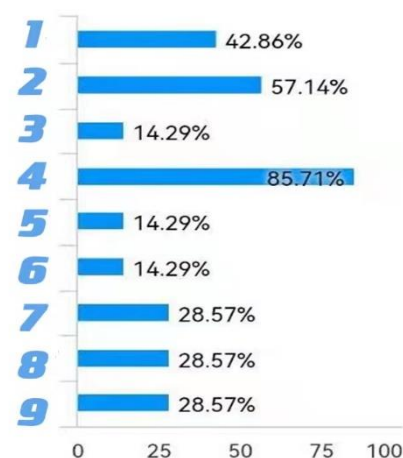


Figure 4. Summary data chart of seven famous Chinese singers on the importance of interpretation in the stage performance of Chinese song works (including Chinese national art songs).

The data plot percentages show that the seven singers generally valued areas 1, 2 and 4. In the course of the interview, six singers coincided in saying that it was important to create a characterisation of the audience and to pay attention to audience reaction and feedback when performing Chinese songs (including Chinese national art songs), accounting for 85.71% of the total number of respondents. At the same time, a significant number of singers felt that clear and correct diction in Chinese and sincere expression of emotion were equally important.

### Conclusion

I have combined the analysis of the singing of the three Chinese national art songs on the subject of female characters in this paper with the discovery through observation of the musical narrative material of other Chinese national art songs that

the song with a narrative from Chinese national art songs function can be classified according to the narrative text into the following two main types: 1. The musical accompaniment can, like the singer, become a “two-line narrative song” carried out independently of the narrative text”. The musical accompaniment of these two pieces, such as “Mulan Follows the Army” and “Meng Jiang Nu”, closely follows and accompanies the development of the story and has its own narrative nature. When singing the two-line narrative songs, the singer needs to pay attention to the lyricist's intentions buried in the accompaniment text, and should be more rigorous in telling the storyline in place, with less freedom of play. 2. The musical accompaniment does not have an independent story logic and cannot become an independent narrative text development, but needs to be driven by the singer's singing to develop the story text “single line narrative song”. For example, “Princess Wencheng”. Unlike the first type of narrative song, the single-line narrative song allows for a more open-ended choice of narrative text to be sung from the perspective of a rich characterisation or story emotion.

### Comments and Suggestions

When singing Chinese national art songs, one needs to first understand the traditional Chinese cultural background and the famous Chinese historical legends and biographies mentioned in the songs. Singing Chinese narrative songs is a golden key to opening the windows of Chinese culture and art. When studying this genre, it is important to look more closely at: gaining a deeper understanding of the archetypes of the stories described by the lyricists and analysing them in layers. Theoretically guided by narratology, the details of the story and the characters presented in the material are interpreted, the characters are subjectively understood and sung, and a more comprehensive and objective, macroscopic reading of the story is

required. In practice, the relationship between the accompanying melody and the sung melody is analysed, and in the process of analysing the lyrics, attention is paid to the different feelings brought to the audience by the different objects of focus. The singer is required to sing from a different perspective in order to express a musical emotion that is more in line with the original author's intention.

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