

Retrospective Study of Choral Conducting Courses in Chinese Normal Universities (2000-2024)

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Abstract: *In recent years, the construction and research of choral conducting courses in Chinese normal universities have achieved significant results, driven by the reform of higher education. To comprehensively understand the current state of research on choral conducting courses in Chinese normal universities and to reveal gaps and deficiencies in existing research, this paper systematically organizes and summarizes the main research outcomes of choral conducting courses in Chinese normal universities from 2000 to 2024, classified by similar research topics. It is hoped that this will provide some references for further research and optimization of choral conducting courses in China.*

Keywords: *Normal Universities; Choral Conducting; Literature Review*

1. Introduction

November 2006 saw the issuance of the "Guidelines for Compulsory Curriculum Teaching in Music (Teacher Education) Undergraduate Specialty of General Colleges and Universities" by the Office of the Ministry of Education, which officially established "Choral and Conducting" as a required course for undergraduate majors in music. This course has evolved from the organic integration of the original two courses of chorus and conducting in the music teacher education curriculum system, with the initial intention of enabling music majors in higher normal universities to master the abilities of choral conducting and rehearsal.

In recent years, choral conducting courses in Chinese normal universities have gradually formed a relatively complete education system. Many universities have hired highly qualified professional teachers with rich experience, the curriculum content has been continuously enriched, and students' choral practice abilities have been enhanced through various choral competitions and concerts. However, it cannot be denied that research on choral conducting courses in China still faces some problems.

Sorting out the existing literature on choral conducting courses in Chinese normal universities helps to understand the current state of choral courses in China, reveal gaps and deficiencies in existing research, and provide some references for further research and optimization of choral conducting courses in China. The author searched the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database for keywords such as "normal universities," "universities," "choral conducting," "choral courses," and "choral training," collecting approximately 100 articles from Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) and its extended version. After excluding non-research articles, more than twenty representative research documents were selected for review. These documents mainly come from authoritative domestic music publications such as "China Music," "Chinese Musicology," and "People's Music."

2. Research on Choral Training

In the aspect of choral voice training for normal universities, Liu Bo (2011) in his article "On the Basic Principles of Choral Sound Production," discussed fundamental issues of vocal production such as principles of singing, breath support, vocal registers, coordination of physiological functions, and the enhancement of vocal amplitude. The impact of singing posture, physical state, rational use of vocal organs, and conscious breathing methods on choral voice production was also addressed. The author emphasized the difference in vocal production methods between choral and solo singing, the importance of increasing vocal amplitude, and the application of vocal teaching methods in choral education. It was suggested that teachers should avoid using abstract vocal jargon in choral teaching and instead use understandable scientific terms to help students better understand and master vocal techniques ^[1].

Regarding intonation training in choral singing for normal universities, Shi Qiwei in his 2000 article "On Intonation Training in Choral Singing" pointed out that intonation is a crucial part of choral art, and training for choral intonation involves not only auditory aspects but also multiple factors such as breathing, vocal placement, and articulation. The author analyzed the impact of musical tempo, rhythm, dynamics, melodic line, modality, tonality, breathing, vocal placement, and articulation on intonation and proposed corresponding training strategies ^[2]. Li Jinbo (2013) in his article "A Preliminary Exploration of Intonation Training in Choral Teaching" discovered that melodic intonation is subject to the tendency relationships between notes, melodic style, modal characteristics, and harmonic function through the analysis of horizontal and vertical intonation in choral singing. Based on this, he explored the intonation processing methods of different chord types in choruses and discussed the importance of maintaining relaxation, high vocal placement, and breath support for maintaining intonation ^[3]. Liu Bo in his 2013 article "Research on Choral Intonation Teaching Methods in Colleges and Universities" discussed the limitations of traditional solfège teaching methods that primarily rely on aural training. Choral intonation teaching should focus on the combination of pitch memory and correct vocal production. He analyzed pitch memory symbols used in choral teaching in different countries and regions, discussed their advantages and disadvantages, and explored the importance of correct vocal production and how to improve intonation through vocal exercises. In addition, the article discussed the role of piano accompaniment in choral teaching and pointed out the problems that may arise from over-reliance on the piano, advocating for a cappella choral singing as an effective way to train intonation ^[4].

In the realm of melodic intonation hierarchy management, Yang Li (2007) delved deeply into the strategies and techniques for choral conductors in handling the layout of melodic intonation hierarchies. In his two-part series of articles, "On the Choral Conductor's Treatment of Melodic Intonation Hierarchy (Part I)" and "On the Choral Conductor's Treatment of Melodic Intonation Hierarchy (Part II)," he explored how conductors should meticulously analyze and arrange the levels of melodic intonation to ensure the accurate expression of the musical image and the profound conveyance of emotion. The articles highlighted that conductors need to leverage the artistic expression of melody based on the structure, harmony, counterpoint, and choral writing techniques of the piece, while adhering to the intrinsic dynamics and the directional flow of the melodic line in rhythmic form. This approach enables conductors to better grasp the levels and expressiveness of the work during rehearsals and performances, thereby enhancing the artistic impact of choral performances ^{[5][6]}.

3. Research on Conducting Teaching Methods

In the field of conducting teaching methods for normal universities, Chen Bo, in his 2012 article "Reflections on the Role and Status of Conducting Techniques in Choral Art," analyzed the current phenomenon of neglecting conducting techniques in the choral community and the reasons behind it, discussing the necessity of emphasizing the teaching of conducting techniques. Chen Bo pointed out that conducting techniques are not only basic skills in music performance but also an important means of artistic expression for conductors. He emphasized that conductors need more than just basic musical qualities; more crucially, they need conducting skills that can accurately convey the connotations of the music and personal interpretations. Based on this, the author further discussed the cultivation of choral conducting talents and believed that higher art colleges should pay attention to the teaching and practice of conducting techniques in choral conducting education ^[7]. The following year, Wang Yan (2013) in his article "On Ma Geshun's Choral Conducting Education" delved into Professor Ma Geshun's choral conducting teaching philosophy and methods. The article introduced how Professor Ma Geshun broke down choral conducting techniques into multiple basic teaching points, such as types of beats, basic requirements for conducting, entrances, extensions, and syncopations, and emphasized the importance of "points" and "lines" in teaching, meaning that conductors should not only pay attention to the beats but also the reflections and indications between the beats. The article pointed out that Professor Ma Geshun particularly emphasized the importance of breath in choral conducting, believing that the quality of the conductor's breath would directly affect the timbre of the choir, and in teaching, he would use various practice methods to strengthen students' understanding of the combination of breath and entrances ^[8].

In terms of innovation in choral conducting teaching methods, Sun Jingying in his 2023 article "Innovation in Content and Methods of Choral Conducting Teaching in Colleges and Universities" analyzed the current state of choral conducting course teaching in Chinese universities, pointing out that there are problems such as singular forms, one-sided teaching content, and outdated teaching methods. The author emphasized that choral conducting teaching should shift from traditional knowledge impartation to focusing on cultivating students' innovative thinking and practical abilities, and proposed

innovative teaching methods such as updating teaching concepts, enriching teaching methods, scientifically setting up teaching courses, improving teaching content, strengthening the use of modern information technology, and enhancing teaching practice ^[9].

4. Textbook Construction Research

In the realm of textbook compilation, Zhang Bin (2003) in his article "Reflections on the 'Chorus and Conducting' Course in Normal Universities—Sound Concepts, Textbooks, and Methods," delved into the issues surrounding textbooks for the "Chorus and Conducting" course in music education majors at normal universities. Zhang Bin noted that for an extended period, choral textbooks have been lacking in informational content, with outdated material and a scarcity of new knowledge and repertoire updates, which has constrained the development of the discipline. He advocated that choral textbooks should encompass a diverse array of choral art forms, such as early Western religious chorales, madrigals and motets from the Renaissance era, oratorios from the Baroque period, masses from the Classical era, opera choruses from the Romantic era, and folk chorales from various ethnic groups ^[10]. Li Wei (2011) in his article "Reflections on Several Issues of Choral Textbooks in Normal Universities" pointed out that current choral textbooks for normal universities lack individuality and specificity, have monotonous content, and are slow to update, which limits the comprehensive development of students' abilities and the cultivation of new types of teachers. He suggested that the selection of choral textbooks should reflect classic, diverse, and comprehensive qualities, and should fully utilize teaching resources and technological methods of the internet era to construct multimedia and online learning platforms to adapt to the teaching demands of the new era. He proposed the compilation of choral textbooks with correct guiding principles that reflect the characteristics of the times, diversity, and teacher training ^[11]. Additionally, Hu Xianlin (2013) in his thesis pointed out that local comprehensive universities face issues such as inconsistency with their own developmental needs and funding shortages in the compilation of "Chorus and Conducting" textbooks. In response, the author put forward textbook design suggestions that integrate local university teaching characteristics, combine theory with practice, reflect the regional nature of choral works, and include piano accompaniment scores ^[12].

In the study of existing textbooks, Li Gaifang (2010) in her article highly praised Mr. Yang Hongnian's work "Choral Training Studies." Li Gaifang believes that "Choral Training Studies" is characterized by its strong practicality in teaching theory, applicability in teaching methods, and systematic nature in training principles. The book not only provides specific steps and methods to make theoretical knowledge highly operable but also offers a wide range of excellent works from different periods and styles for learners to understand and master a variety of singing styles. Subsequently, Zhao Lin (2015) also conducted an in-depth analysis of Mr. Yang Hongnian's "Choral Training Studies" in her article. Zhao Lin believes that the book, as an important part of Professor Yang's choral training system, is characterized by its practicality, comprehensiveness, and authority. In the book, Professor Yang Hongnian transforms complex music theory into easily understandable and practical choral training methods with vivid language and precise gestures. Professor Yang often uses dialectical thinking to view and solve problems from multiple perspectives in the book ^{[13][14]}.

5. Comparative Studies on Chinese and Foreign Teaching Methods

Sun Yu, in his 2007 publication "An Overview of Choral and Conducting Courses in the Music Department of Russian State Pedagogical University," provided a detailed introduction to the choral and conducting curriculum system of the Music Department at Russian State Pedagogical University. The curriculum primarily consists of four teaching modules: conducting techniques, choral theory and composition, choral conducting rehearsal practice, and choral piece performance. The institution boasts a comprehensive array of choral conducting courses, diverse teaching methods, a focus on the integration of theory and practice, and a rational and varied course evaluation system, supported by a large and highly professional faculty ^[15]. In the same year, Sun Yu compared choral and conducting courses in music education majors between Chinese and Russian universities in his article "A Comparative Study of Choral and Conducting Courses in Music Education Majors at Chinese and Russian Universities." The article pointed out that while choral and conducting courses are crucial for undergraduate students majoring in music education, they have not received due attention in Chinese universities, with some institutions exhibiting irrational course settings, arbitrary teaching content, and inaccurate evaluation methods. In contrast, Russian State Pedagogical University has a well-established teaching system, with clear and specific assessment requirements at both national and institutional levels, a strong faculty,

systematic and comprehensive teaching content, and a diverse and integrated evaluation approach. Sun Yu suggested that Chinese universities could improve the quality of choral and conducting courses by adopting a combination of required, elective, and major-specific courses ^[16].

Luo Gangqin, in her 2012 publication "An Overview of Choral Conducting Teaching in Ukraine and Its Enlightenment—Taking Kyiv National Pedagogical University as an Example," provided an in-depth look at the rich tradition of choral art in Ukraine and the choral conducting teaching system at the Music Department of Kyiv National Pedagogical University. The article highlighted the significant role of Kyiv National Pedagogical University in the cultivation of choral conducting talents in Ukraine, with an excellent faculty, a rich array of course offerings, strict teaching requirements, and a diverse assessment mechanism. By comparing the choral conducting teaching system at Kyiv National Pedagogical University, the article offered insights for Chinese normal universities on choral conducting teaching, including strengthening the emphasis, optimizing the faculty structure, improving course settings, and refining assessment and evaluation methods ^[17].

Liu Wei, in his 2013 article "Enlightenment from the Normal Education at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Hungary," introduced the normal education system at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music, which was established based on Kodály's music education philosophy, successfully transforming Hungarian music education from benefiting a few to serving the masses. The article analyzed the similarities in professional structure and course settings between the Music Education Department of Tianjin Conservatory of Music and the Normal Music Department of the Franz Liszt Academy, pointed out the existing problems in China's conservatory music education departments, and proposed reform suggestions. Liu Wei emphasized that by drawing on the experience of the Franz Liszt Academy, in conjunction with China's national conditions, it is possible to introduce choral conducting majors on the existing professional foundation, strengthen choral and choral conducting education, and cultivate music teachers with high comprehensive qualities to meet the broad demands of China's primary and secondary schools and social music culture. The literature also discussed the three teaching levels of choral conducting education and analyzed the feasibility and necessity of building a new type of conservatory music education department ^[18].

6. Research on Curriculum System Optimization

In the area of choral conducting course reform, Feng Yebing, in his 2004 article "Reflections on the Reform of Choral Classes in Normal Universities," conducted an in-depth analysis of the current state of choral courses in music majors at normal universities. The article pointed out issues such as outdated learning concepts, incomplete textbook content, and a lack of full-time teachers in choral courses for music majors at normal universities, and discussed the underlying causes of these issues. It elaborated on the important role of choral courses in cultivating the comprehensive qualities of music teachers and proposed that choral courses should strengthen their connection with other disciplines, enhance their status in the curriculum, and place greater emphasis on the combination of theory and practice in teaching ^[19]. Zhou Juanjuan and Wang Yang (2010) in their article "The Reform of 'Chorus and Conducting' Teaching in Normal Universities Should Advocate Practical and Innovative Principles" expounded on the necessity of teaching reform in choral and conducting courses at normal universities. The authors believe that cultivating choral conducting talents with practical abilities and innovative spirit plays a significant role in aiding the construction of a socialist harmonious society. They suggested that teaching reform should start with updating educational concepts, valuing choral art, optimizing course settings, strengthening practical teaching, improving teaching evaluation methods, and selecting textbooks with practical and innovative characteristics ^[20]. Ding Yan, in an article published in 2017, analyzed the views on choral conducting teaching reform in the book "Inquiry into the Teaching Reform of Chorus and Conducting in General Colleges and Universities." The article also proposed reform suggestions to highlight the main position of students, improve textbooks, and reform evaluation methods, pointing out that teaching practice should enhance the scientific nature of teaching and carry out joint teaching of choral and conducting ^[21].

In terms of the construction of a national choral curriculum, Han Zaihong, in his 2010 article "The Inheritance of Regional Folk Songs in Choral Classes—Taking the Shanxi Normal University's Shanxi Folk Song Choral Teaching as an Example," discussed the importance of regional music culture inheritance in music education at normal universities. The article used the Shanxi folk song choral teaching at the Music College of Shanxi Normal University as an example to show how to integrate local knowledge into teaching content and promote national spirit and regional advantages through teaching reform. By analyzing the creation and practice of the "Peach Blossoms Red, Apricot Blossoms White"

Shanxi Folk Song Choral Collection for Women, the article emphasized the significant role of folk song choral teaching in fostering students' attention to local culture and customs, disseminating regional culture, and preserving intangible cultural heritage ^[22]. Subsequently, Xu Jingmin (2018) also pointed out in his article "The Importance of Minority Characteristic Choral Teaching and Its Reform" that due to historical issues, minority choral art once faced the loss of national choral materials and a scarcity of minority characteristic choral conductors. However, against the backdrop of the state's emphasis on traditional culture and the strengthening sense of cultural mission among the people, minority choral art has ushered in new opportunities for development. The author proposed reform strategies to promote the new development of minority choral art, including strengthening the organization and innovation of minority choral music resources, establishing a professional teacher training mechanism, focusing on students' basic training, increasing choral competitions, and using new media to expand influence ^[23].

7. Summary and Prospects

7.1 Research Trends

By sorting out the research outcomes related to choral conducting courses in Chinese normal universities from 2000 to 2024, it is found that the research focus in China's normal universities has gradually extended from the initial basic training of choral voice and intonation to the discussion of conducting teaching methods and the enrichment of textbook content. In recent years, it has begun to focus on the optimization of the curriculum system, especially under the background of globalization, on how to promote the international development of choral conducting courses in normal universities by combining with national music culture.

7.2 Research Methods

In terms of research methods, most of the research on choral conducting courses in China adopts literature research, case analysis, comparative studies, and other methods. These methods help to deeply explore and understand the theoretical and practical issues of choral education. However, with the development of educational technology and the arrival of the big data era, it is also necessary to continuously expand and improve the selection of research methods in future research, and to introduce more quantitative research, qualitative research, and mixed research methods to provide a more comprehensive research perspective for choral education.

7.3 Research Prospects

Overall, the choral conducting courses in Chinese normal universities show a positive development trend. In the future, China should continue to promote further deepening and diversification of research directions, continuously cultivate in existing research fields, and innovate in research methods to ensure the effectiveness and innovation of research on choral conducting courses. Actively explore new areas of course research, such as: building a comprehensive and diverse course evaluation system; exploring the intersection and integration of choral conducting courses with other disciplines such as psychology, education, and sociology; how choral conducting courses can be combined with AI (artificial intelligence) and VR (virtual reality) to enhance the learning experience, etc.

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