

Emotional expressiveness in contemporary Chinese and Ukrainian opera and chamber singing

Expressão emocional na ópera e no canto de câmara contemporâneos chineses e ucranianos



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Abstract: This study examines the influence of cultural context on emotional expressiveness in vocal art based on a comparative analysis of chamber and opera performances in China and Ukraine. Drawing on musicological, psychological, and cultural perspectives, it analyses the characteristics of vocal aesthetics and interpretative approaches across national traditions. The Chinese vocal style is characterised by contemplative emotionality, expressed through restrained dynamics, subtle intonational changes, and smooth phrasing, grounded in the ideals of inner harmony and symbolic moderation. In contrast, the Ukrainian tradition reflects emotional openness and dramatic intensity, influenced by folk and liturgical heritage, as well as contemporary social experience. The results of the study show that both traditions translate emotions into culturally specific performance grammar, illustrating different but equally sophisticated strategies of affective communication. These results may be helpful for intercultural vocal pedagogy and for improving interpretative approaches in globalised performance contexts.

Keywords: affective response. vocal timbre. cultural encoding. melismas. contemplative type.

Resumo: Este estudo examina a influência do contexto cultural na expressividade emocional na arte vocal com base em uma análise comparativa de performances de câmara e ópera na China e na Ucrânia. Com base em perspectivas musicológicas, psicológicas e culturais, analisa as características da estética vocal e das abordagens interpretativas em cada tradição nacional. O estilo vocal chinês é caracterizado pela emocionalidade contemplativa, expressa em dinâmicas contidas, mudanças sutis de entonação e fraseado suave, com base nos ideais de harmonia interior e moderação simbólica. Em contraste, a tradição ucraniana reflete abertura emocional e intensidade dramática, influenciadas pela herança folclórica e litúrgica, bem como pela experiência social contemporânea. Os resultados do estudo mostram que ambas as tradições traduzem emoções em gramática de performance culturalmente específica, ilustrando estratégias diferentes, mas igualmente sofisticadas, de comunicação afetiva. Esses resultados podem ser úteis para a pedagogia vocal intercultural e o aprimoramento de abordagens interpretativas em contextos de performance globalizados.

Palavras-chave: resposta afetiva. timbre vocal. codificação cultural. Melismas. tipo contemplativo.

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1. Introduction

Emotional expressiveness is one of the key categories of vocal performance, particularly important in the chamber and opera genres, where a performer's reproduction of deep psychological states is not only an aesthetic requirement but also a structural element of the interpretation of a musical work. In light of contemporary cultural transformations and increased attention to intercultural communication in the arts, particularly between East and West, the problem of studying emotional expressiveness in vocal art, illustrated by China and Ukraine, has become practically relevant.

The increasing role of individual performance style, the growth of cultural openness, and the current socio-historical contexts in both countries have led to the need for a systematic analysis of vocal emotionality in chamber and opera singing. The study of emotional expressiveness in vocal art has attracted researchers from various disciplines, leading to the emergence of several thematic approaches. One crucial research vector focuses on cultural models of emotional expression, particularly in multicultural vocal performance. Wang (2024) emphasised the intercultural dimension of vocal strategies and developed a classification model reflecting cultural variability in emotional expression. These studies highlighted that emotional interpretation in singing is shaped not only by individual technique but also by collective cultural expectations.

Another significant body of research concerns the intonational and melodic structure of vocal expressiveness. Liu (2025), from a musical-semantics perspective, linked the perception of emotion in music to linguistic structures and cognitive patterns, concluding that cultural codes shape expectations for specific emotional nuances. Xue (2023) and Xiao (2021) analysed Chinese opera and pointed to the codified use of gesture, melody, and intonation as culturally embedded means of conveying emotion. In both cases, the emotional content was shown to depend heavily on predefined

aesthetic canons. These works underscore the importance of melodic organisation as a vehicle for affective meaning, especially in operatic genres.

The technical and analytical dimensions of vocal emotionality were addressed by Shpyrka et al. (2021), who proposed a matrix of expressive tools —such as timbre, phrasing, and dynamic contrast —correlated with different types of emotional states. Meanwhile, the study by Sundberg et al. (2024) explored the physiological and acoustic correlates of emotion in opera singers, revealing consistent links between vocal spectra and affective content. Although their focus was experimental and narrow in scope, it provided an empirical foundation for objectifying emotional mechanisms in performance.

From a historical and contextual perspective, Kadanceva et al. (2023) explored the evolution of Ukrainian opera and its connection to Western European vocal traditions, with emphasis on the adaptation of classical techniques. Loktionova-Oitsius et al. (2022) analysed changes in repertoire and interpretive approaches, noting an increasing role of emotional expressiveness in response to cultural transformations. The psychological component of emotional expressiveness was explored by Rocke et al. (2025), who found that sincere emotional delivery contributes to performers' psychological well-being and professional satisfaction.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that vocal emotionality is a multifaceted phenomenon situated at the intersection of technique, culture, and perception. However, existing research is often fragmented, either technical, cultural, or psychological in focus, and lacks comparative perspectives based on real stage performances, a gap addressed in the present study. The analysis of the sources showed that research in this area was fragmented: either the focus was on technique or emotions were considered in isolation from the cultural context. Studies focused on cross-cultural comparisons often lacked specific examples of stage performances, thereby limiting the empirical value of the findings.

The study aimed to analyse the peculiarities of emotional expressiveness in chamber and opera singing, using the examples of Chinese and Ukrainian performers, taking into account vocal techniques, cultural codes, and historical context. The study also set the following objectives:

1. To summarise the theoretical foundations of the study of emotional expressiveness in vocal art, based on an interdisciplinary approach.
2. To analyse emotional parameters in specific stage performances by Ukrainian and Chinese singers.
3. To conduct a comparative analysis of the identified features of emotional expressiveness and to formulate generalisations about the influence of cultural, social, and genre contexts on performance practice.

2. Materials and methods

The study was conducted from December 2024 to May 2025. The study analysed the emotional parameters of stage performances by Ukrainian and Chinese vocalists, accounting for genre specificity, social background, and cultural context. The research covered both chamber and opera forms of vocal performance, focusing on specific examples of stage practice.

For the empirical analysis, four-stage video recordings from January 2022 to May 2025 were selected that exemplified diverse models of emotional expressiveness within the Chinese and Ukrainian vocal traditions. The inclusion criteria comprised: affiliation with the chamber or opera genre; demonstrable emotional richness in performance; high-quality audio and video; and cultural representativeness for contemporary China and Ukraine. Materials that lacked expressive depth, exhibited low technical quality, or did not align with national performance traditions were excluded. The selected recordings reflected both high artistic standards and relevant socio-cultural contexts, ensuring the analytical validity of the comparative study.

The selected examples allowed us to study not only the technical and performance features, but also the influence of the symbolic and historical context on the emotional content of the performances. The material base of the study includes: Zhou Shen's performance of "With You" (Zhou Shen "With You"..., 2024), which represented the contemporary Chinese chamber vocal tradition and was characterised by a combination of filigree technique and emotional lyricism; the vocal ensemble number "Mama, your embrace is a gentle river to me" (2025), which demonstrated folklore intonation and deep affective sensitivity; a stage performance by the Ukrainian National Municipal Opera Theatre (Ukrainian National Municipal..., 2022), which illustrated dramatic drama, dynamic intensity and open emotional presentation; and a concert performance of Ode to Joy as part of the Metropolitan Opera for Ukraine project (New York's Metropolitan..., 2022), where collective expression, choral drama and symbolic emotional tension dominated. These recordings were selected as influential and exemplary cases within their national contexts, widely recognized for their professional quality, public impact, and representational value, making them suitable reference points for comparative analysis.

To construct the graph, two representative performances from each tradition, Ukrainian and Chinese, were selected. Each vocal phrase was divided into four segments: beginning, development, climax, and resolution. Each segment was rated individually, and the average score was calculated based on expert assessments. The resulting data were visualized in a comparative graph, highlighting differences in the dynamics of emotional development between the two cultural vocal models.

The level of emotional tension in a vocal phrase was assessed on a 10-point scale, where 0 indicated a complete absence of emotional stress and 10 its maximum intensity. The evaluation was conducted by experts in vocal performance, music psychology, and musicology based on video recordings of the performances. The key assessment criteria included: timbral characteristics (variation, vocal strain, sound richness), dynamic parameters

(volume, contrast, crescendos or decrescendos), facial expression and non-verbal gestures, rhythmic structuring and pausing, and the intonational contour (type of phrasing, smooth or abrupt transitions).

The analysis applied a qualitative descriptive approach, complemented by musical semiotics, implemented through interpretive coding of symbolic vocal gestures (e.g., melisma, glissando) and their cultural connotations. Discursive analysis focused on staging elements, with particular attention to how performers constructed emotional narratives through vocal and bodily expression.

At the third stage of the study, a comparative analysis of emotional expressiveness in the Chinese and Ukrainian vocal traditions was conducted. To enhance cultural accuracy, the interpretation of the Chinese examples was based on secondary literature and audio-visual materials by native performers. At the same time, terminological and semiotic distinctions were cross-checked using scholarly sources in intercultural music studies.

Graphical modelling was used to clarify the dynamics of emotional expressiveness within a vocal phrase. For this purpose, a four-stage structural model (beginning, development, climax, denouement) was developed, within which indicators of emotional tension were recorded. The graph was constructed based on an integrative assessment of vocal parameters across typical fragments of Chinese and Ukrainian performances.

3. Results

Vocal art uses performance techniques to depict a performer's or character's emotions through sound. It affects intonation, rhythm, phrasing, timbre, dynamics, and articulation within the musical and interpretive framework. Psychology links it to affective response, when the actor embodies emotions from personal experience or cognitive modelling. Cognitive theories of emotion emphasise the necessity for emotional resonance and modulation

in art. Musicologically, expressiveness involves melodic contour, rhythmic flexibility, and timbral change, which convey emotions to the listener. Staccato with increasing loudness might convey tension or determination, whereas gentle dynamics and legato can express grief, since performers and audiences share codes and cultural and genre settings shape these expressive indications (Di Stefano, 2023; Demirkol, 2025).

Vocal art aesthetics valued emotional expression in performance. It helped express meaning and structure the performing style. The performer's rendition was distinctive for its degree of emotional involvement, emotive tone, and dynamic variations. Thus, vocal art required technical skill, psychological participation, and aesthetics to portray emotion. Opera and chamber singing differ significantly in form and expression. Chamber singing emphasises textual precision, intimacy, and little theatricality (Gonçalves, 2024; Kaçmaz, 2025). Subtle dynamics, exquisite intonation, timbral nuance, and personal interpretation create restrained yet profound emotional depth. In contrast, opera accentuates scale, theatricality, and emotional range.

Vocal technique, stage activity, and dramatic structure create expressiveness. Arias and ensembles are emotional finales that require dynamic contrast, phrasing tension, and strategic pauses. Chamber singing works best in acoustically neutral, compact locations, while opera requires powerful projection and orchestral texture in big theatrical spaces (Lonsdale & Day, 2020). Chinese opera used a complicated system of canonised gestures, postures, and intonations with symbolic meanings to communicate emotion. Pre-existing codes were read for this interpretation. European opera emphasised individual interpretation and intonation to reveal emotional tension. The chamber tradition in both cultures allowed performers to deal more closely with the text and a sensitive emotional palette, requiring technical and psychological expertise.

Vocal art uses psychoacoustic elements — such as dynamics, timbre, and articulation — to elicit emotional responses in listeners (Efremov, 2025; Volkov, 2023). Softer dynamics indicate grief or tranquilly, whereas louder dynamics indicate enthusiasm or wrath. Opera dynamics emphasise dramatic peaks, while chamber singing dynamics are nuanced and personal. Timbre allows spectral diversity to express tenderness to aggressiveness. Timbral shifts shape emotional imagery and add an expressive dimension (Hakanpää, 2022). Timbre in vocal art depends on frequency, harmonic content, noise, and emotional meaning. In Chinese, *huayin* (vocal “breaking”) improves expressiveness through symbolic timbre variation. Precise consonant-vowel formation and rhythmic clarity affect emotional perception (Demchenko et al., 2023; Guliyeva & Kopanitsa, 2024). Clear speech conveys openness, while softness implies fragility. Opera requires clarity for projection and intelligibility in vast theatres, while chamber singing prefers nuance and naturalness. Both components significantly affect the emotional impact of the voice performance. Thus, dynamics, timbre, and articulation established the psychoacoustic basis of voice art’s emotional expressiveness regardless of language or genre. All three aspects were interrelated and enabled the performer to build a complex emotional sound structure that underpinned chamber and opera vocal interpretation.

Within the framework of vocal practice, it serves not only as a means of expressing the performer’s or character’s inner states but also as a tool of communication with the audience, embedded in the drama of the work, the acoustic environment, symbolic connotations, and cultural codes. For a complete understanding of the nature of emotional expressiveness, it is necessary to take into account not only vocal means but also the specifics of the performance format, the influence of the historical situation on the perception of the work, and the characteristic features of the national performance school.

The analysis of Chinese vocal performances demonstrates a peculiar combination of chamber sensitivity, technical restraint, and culturally encoded symbolism. In both examples, Zhou Shen's performance of the song "With You" (Zhou Shen "With You"..., 2024) and the piece "Mama, your embrace is a gentle river to me" (2025), the aesthetics of intimate emotional expression dominated, which was realised through dynamic microplasticity, timbral lightness, and intonational flexibility.

Zhou Shen used the falsetto technique as the main instrument of emotional transmission, which in the Chinese performance context is identified with delicacy, openness, and spiritual concentration. According to the principles of traditional Chinese vocal schools, such as those associated with Jingju and modern conservatory-based chamber training, the use of falsetto is taught as a culturally encoded expression of refinement and inner emotion (Wang, 2024). Zhou Shen used the falsetto technique as the primary instrument for emotional transmission, which, in the Chinese performance context, is associated with delicacy, openness, and spiritual focus.

According to the pedagogical framework at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, the training emphasises vocal refinement, emotional discipline, and stylistic fidelity to Chinese expressive norms. The department incorporates both traditional and contemporary techniques, teaching falsetto as a culturally encoded vehicle for conveying subtle internal states. Particular attention is given to maintaining even dynamic delivery, which is regarded as a reflection of emotional equilibrium and is rooted in Confucian ideals that value moderation and restraint in artistic expression.

Zhou Shen's phrasing followed these principles: built on gradual dynamic waves, it avoided climactic peaks and instead generated internal emotional tension through sustained tones, strategically placed breathing pauses, and varied accentual patterns. These schools also emphasise even dynamic delivery as a means of maintaining emotional balance and avoiding overt dramatism, aligning with the Confucian ideal of moderated affect

in performance. Its phrasing was built on gradual dynamic waves that did not strive for a culmination but created an internal emotional tension through delays on individual sounds, breathing micro-pauses, and uneven accentual relief.

For instance, in Zhou Shen's performance of *With You* (timestamp 1:42-1:55), the phrase “陪着你一直走到尽头” is delivered with an extended pause after “一直”, followed by a decrescendo into “走到”, where the pitch gently falls and the consonant onset is softened. The delay on “尽头” is emphasized by a breath catch and slight emphasis on the first syllable, creating a rhythmic imbalance that simulates hesitation and quiet longing.

This use of rhythmic displacement and whispered articulation intensifies the sense of unresolved emotion, replacing climactic drive with introspective tension. This type of vocal line formed a sound field in which each intonation unit sounded like an autonomous emotional microstructure that resonated with the work's overall meaning, a subtle, personal appeal.

In the performance of “Mama, your embrace...”, the emotionality was immersed in the national and cultural fabric. Here, the vocal expressiveness was formed through melodic glissandos, tonal shifts, folklorically coloured intervals, and minimalist textual presentation. The intonational structure relied on pentatonic scales and symmetric phrase construction, typical of Chinese folk vocal traditions. Melismatic passages and ornamented transitions between tones contributed to a sense of stylised continuity, while the lack of harmonic modulation reinforced a ritualistic quality of delivery.

In contrast to Zhou Shen's falsetto-based emotional minimalism, this interpretation leaned towards traditional emotional intonation, where culturally codified pitch patterns and modal clarity functioned as carriers of affective meaning rooted in ancestral sound codes. Emotion is not demonstrated here, but represented as a stable structure of reproduction, through the image of the mother as a symbol of calm, stability, and inner warmth. Intervallic motion was predominantly stepwise, with repeated descending seconds and thirds that created a circular, non-teleological progression.

Rhythmic structures were steady and symmetrical, often built on evenly spaced durations without syncopation, enhancing the perception of emotional stasis. This was complemented by melismatic closure on final syllables, which slowed the temporal flow and gave weight to each concluding tone.

In terms of structure, both performances had a chamber form, with a minimalist accompaniment by a piano or a stringed instrument. This not only created acoustic transparency but also allowed the vocalist to work at the level of intonational microgestures, maintaining control over every nuance of timbre and dynamics. The intimacy of the performance, combined with visual restraint (no active stage action), focused the listener's attention on the voice as a carrier of an emotional signal, without dispersing perception to other components.

Contextually, these works were realised in an environment that did not allow for open emotional extraversion. The Chinese aesthetics of perception involves the interpretation of emotion as a deep but restrained experience that manifests itself through symbols, metaphors, and intonational hints. Therefore, both examples embody a model in which emotion functions as a sub-surface layer, readable in the interaction between a cultural listener and the aesthetic code.

The final phrases in the examples were particularly significant. In Zhou Shen, the gradual fading of the voice on the last word was accompanied by the preservation of the breath impulse, which created the feeling of a completed but not closed emotional circle. In "Mama, your embrace...", the finale was based on a timbre thickening, where each note of the final line was delayed to the point of silence, acquiring an expressive emotional load not through strength, but through trembling stillness.

In contrast to the Chinese chamber music restraint, Ukrainian performances, the Ukrainian National Municipal Opera (Ukrainian National Municipal..., 2022) and the Ukrainian Freedom Orchestra "Ode to Joy" (New York's Metropolitan..., 2022), were characterised

by the scale of the emotional gesture, the focus on dramatic climax, and active stage presence. This expressiveness was achieved through a combination of expanded vocal range, intensified use of forte dynamics, wide intervallic leaps (often ascending sixths and octaves), and emphatic phrasing that drove phrases toward climactic peaks.

Microintonational inflections added tension to sustained notes, while timbral shifts —from resonant chest tones to bright head voice —enhanced the emotional trajectory. The phrasing style often favoured crescendo-shaped arcs, accelerating toward a dynamic and rhythmic culmination, underscoring a sense of urgency and dramatic progression.

In these examples, emotionality functioned as a structuring factor: it did not just accompany the plot, but organised its internal logic. In the performance of the municipal opera, her vocal technique was based on the classical academic school: resonant accuracy, flexibility of registers, and dynamic contrast. The singer consistently unfolded phrases with a clearly defined dynamic peak, using long phrases with changes in timbre and tension. In the performance of the municipal opera, her vocal technique reflected the classical academic tradition, incorporating seamless transitions between chest, middle, and head registers (*voix de poitrine*, *voix mixte*, *voix de tête*), ensuring both range fluidity and expressive nuance. She employed controlled crescendo-decrescendo techniques within single sustained notes to sculpt dynamic relief, and utilised forte-piano contrasts to emphasise phrase boundaries.

The articulation was emotionally charged: consonants were delivered with percussive clarity (particularly plosives and fricatives), while vowels were elongated and shaped to enhance resonance and textual legibility. This articulatory expressivity, in combination with nuanced vibrato control and phrasing shaped by diaphragmatic breath support, contributed to a layered and technically refined emotional delivery. The emotion was built up gradually: from the initial inner restraint to the culminating breakthrough, enhanced not only by the vocal but also by the orchestral background.

The Ukrainian Freedom Orchestra created a multi-layered emotional impact through the interplay of solo voices, full chorus, and orchestral texture. Structural dominance lay with the choral mass, which served as the central vehicle for collective affective resonance, while the orchestra provided dynamic scaffolding and thematic propulsion. Solo vocal episodes introduced intonational vectors that guided the emotional contour. Still, the climax was architecturally formed by the synchronized crescendo of the tenor section and the gradual timbral thickening in the lower woodwinds, particularly the bassoons. This orchestral surge, paired with the ascending harmonic progression in the choral parts, generated an acoustic uplift that culminated in a moment of intensified unity.

The emotional peak of the performance occurred in the final choral reprise of “Freude, schöner Götterfunken”, where the chorus moved from homophonic precision to an expansive tutti, marked by a broadening of tempo and a broadening of the forte dynamics. The orchestral support at this point, through brass accents and sustained harmonic undercurrents in the strings, amplified the sense of grandeur. The resulting affective elevation was not only musical but socio-symbolic: the collective timbre, rhythmic unanimity, and ascending harmonic trajectory conveyed a model of solidarity and resilience, turning vocal expression into an embodiment of communal identity and historical continuity.

The ensemble format of both performances had a large-scale construction, which determined the type of emotional expression as public-dramatic. In the case of the opera, the interaction between the soloist and the orchestra formed a dramatic arc, in which the climax was achieved through timbre expansion and intonational tension. In the case of the chorus, the structure was built on an alternation of individual and collective voices, creating an emotional tension between the personal and the national.

The historical context of both performances, a full-scale war in Ukraine, determined not only the subject matter but also the nature of the emotional load. The stage became a space not just for aesthetic experience, but for a real ethical statement. In this

context, emotional expressiveness went beyond the musical form, becoming a tool for social dialogue, a narrative of resistance and dignity. The audience perceived these performances not as artistic events but as part of their own experience, thereby ensuring a high degree of emotional involvement.

In stage terms, the most potent emotional episodes were associated with pauses, changes in light, performer movements, and audience reactions. In the performance of the opera, the moment when the voice stopped to the sound of a siren, captured in the recording, acquired a symbolic meaning as a moment of simultaneous vulnerability and strength. In *Ode to Joy*, the highest emotional effect was achieved in the finale, when, after the maximum choral rise, there was a deep silence as an echo of a collective emotion that did not require any explanation.

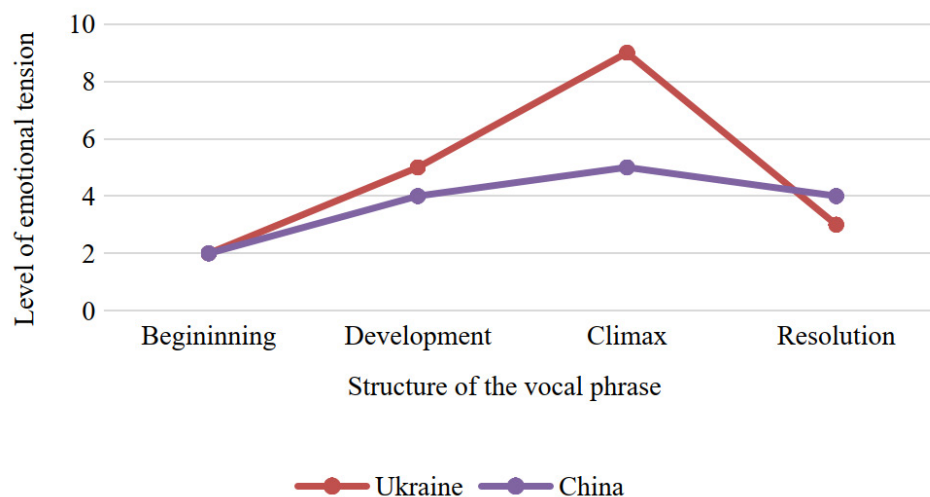
A comparative analysis has shown that emotional expressiveness in vocal art is not a universal category equally realised in different cultures. In the Chinese tradition, it is embodied through nuance, restraint, intimacy, and symbolism; in the Ukrainian tradition, through scale, drama, collective sound, and socially coloured stage energy. The only thing that remained common was the vocalist's ability to embody emotion in a sound structure in such a way that it resonated with the listener, regardless of language, genre, or context.

The comparative approach to the study of emotional expressiveness in vocal art allows us to identify structural, aesthetic, and functional differences and to establish common patterns across national performance traditions. An analysis of Chinese and Ukrainian stage performances in chamber and opera formats has shown that emotional expressiveness in vocal performance is not a universal, but a complex phenomenon integrated into the cultural, genre, and contextual matrices of performance.

Despite differences in technique, ensemble structure, and intonation system, both traditions demonstrate conscious work on the emotional component of vocal sound. As an illustration of differences in the structure of emotional development in a

vocal phrase, it is advisable to consider the graph (Figure 1) that demonstrates changes in emotional tension across typical vocal constructions in the Ukrainian and Chinese traditions.

Figure 1 – Comparative emotional tension dynamics in vocal phrasing



Source: created by the author.

Figure 1 illustrates fluctuations in emotional tension throughout the structure of a vocal phrase, comparing characteristic models of the Ukrainian and Chinese vocal traditions. The Chinese approach shows a gradual buildup of emotional stress, followed by a gentle decline after the climax. The Ukrainian model, on the other hand, is characterised by a rapid increase in emotionality, a distinct dramatic climax, and a sharp decline at the end of the phrase. The horizontal axis represents the sequential stages of vocal phrase construction: Beginning, Development, Climax, and Resolution, while the vertical axis shows a notional scale of emotional tension ranging from 0 to 10. The Ukrainian model demonstrates a sharply defined dramatic arc. Emotional tension rises rapidly from an initial level of 2 to a peak of 9 at the climax, then steeply declines to 3 in the resolution.

This corresponds with the expressive nature of Ukrainian academic and folk vocal practices, which emphasize dynamic contrast, vocal power (*forte*), wide-range pitch modulations, and emotional articulation structured around a clearly identifiable high

point. In contrast, the Chinese model presents a more restrained and gradual progression. Emotional tension begins at the same level of 2 but increases slowly to a moderate climax of 5, followed by a slight decrease to 4 during the resolution. This pattern aligns with traditional Chinese vocal aesthetics, where emotional expression is balanced and internalized rather than overtly dramatic.

Techniques such as controlled falsetto, consistent dynamics, and subtle phrasing reflect a cultural ideal of emotional moderation and continuity. Overall, the Ukrainian phrasing style prioritizes dramatic emotional peaks and narrative drive, whereas the Chinese approach maintains a stable emotional contour that flows evenly across the phrase. These distinct profiles illustrate deeper cultural attitudes toward the representation and modulation of emotion in vocal performance.

The analysis of the technical aspects showed that the Chinese vocal style is based on chamber aesthetics, which implies delicate dynamics, falsetto delivery, smooth registers, and restrained intonation and timbre. In Zhou Shen's example, the falsetto technique dominated as a means of conveying psychological vulnerability, with changes in dynamics occurring within a narrow range.

The intonational plasticity was based on microglissandos; the articulation was smoothed; and the phrase construction tended to exhibit intonational fluctuations without sharp contrasts. In the folk song example ("Mama, your embrace..."), there was a tendency toward archaic intonation, in which emotional meaning emerged from repetition, modality, and timbre warmth.

In contrast, the Ukrainian style of performance is focused on intense dynamic construction, clearly defined climaxes, and large-scale timbre projection. The performance of the opera was dominated by wide chest sound, resonant amplification, sharp register changes, and accented phrasing.

The dramaturgy of the vocal line was built through escalating tension, culminating in an affective breakthrough. In the choral and orchestral format ("Ode to Joy"), collective expressiveness was observed, realised through uniform dynamics and timbre saturation, aimed at a large-scale sound with a public affective orientation.

As for the ensemble structure, the Chinese examples demonstrated the dominance of the “solo + instrumental accompaniment” format, which gives the performer complete autonomy in shaping the emotional microstructure. This leads to a high level of detail in the vocal line and a focus on the individual emotional gesture.

Ukrainian examples were realised in the form of a large ensemble (an opera with orchestra, a symphony choir), where emotionality was organised not through nuance but through the architectonics of drama, polyphony, collective dynamics, and coordinated phrasing. In this model, emotional expressiveness functions within a large-scale structure rather than as an individual affect.

There are profound differences in the phonetic and intonational dimensions. The Chinese language, with its tonal nature, predisposes vocal material toward melismatic figurations, ascending intonations, and smooth recitation. Ukrainian vocal intonation developed within the syllabic tradition, characterized by clear diction, logical phrasing, and substantial accentuation. This affects the way emotions are conveyed: the Chinese vocal phrase tends to a continuous emotional flow. In contrast, the Ukrainian one tends to dramatic division and a consistent unfolding of affect.

In terms of stage design, Chinese performances relied on visual static, which enhanced the intimacy of the interpretation. The lack of gestural activity and a static body position focused attention on the voice as the primary carrier of emotion. Ukrainian examples, by contrast, included active stage mimicry, spatial interaction, changes in posture, and light accents, which together formed a multi-level emotional composition.

Despite numerous differences, a number of common features have been identified. First of all, in both traditions, the vocalist serves as an emotional mediator between the author’s content and the audience. Regardless of the technical means, both the Chinese and Ukrainian interpretations showed a deep emotional motivation, which was realised in the coordination of sound

and semantic relief. In addition, in each example, there was an orientation towards the cultural code of the listener: emotionality was not unified but built into the expected model of perception determined by the national tradition.

The comparison of vocal practices in China and Ukraine demonstrates not only different forms of emotional expressiveness but also the typological flexibility of the category of “emotion” in the performing arts. Regardless of the genre, both traditions confirm the role of emotional structure as an integral part of stage expression.

Analysis of the historical context is key to understanding the formation of emotional expressiveness in vocal art. The historical and cultural background determines the aesthetic guidelines, genre dominants, performance models, and social functions of musical performance. It is within the historical tradition that the foundations of perception and interpretation of emotions in the vocal process are laid, from the nature of intonation to the semantic load of voice delivery.

In Chinese musical tradition, vocal art developed through a complex synthesis of philosophical, theatrical, and institutional practices, which together shaped its emotional and technical aesthetics (Shmarko & Hrechanyk, 2023; Sun & Rubanka, 2025). Historically, it was based on the Confucian ideal of moderation, the Taoist principle of balance, and Buddhist meditative restraint, all of which promoted controlled emotions and inner harmony as the highest artistic virtues. Within this framework, emotionality in performance was codified through fixed gestures, melodic formulas, and symbolic intonations rather than spontaneous expression.

The main institutional form of this tradition is kunqu opera, which emerged during the Ming dynasty and became known for its lyrical refinement, ornamental vocalisation, and slow, stylised movements. The delicate technique of kunqu falsetto and exquisite melismas embody a contemplative emotional type that

values continuity and refinement over dramatic climax (Chen & Krotova, 2024). Later, with the emergence of Beijing opera (Jingju) in the Qing dynasty, a more theatrical synthesis of singing, speech, dance, and martial movements emerged. Although its emotional vocabulary remained symbolically coded, with each melodic mode (shengqiang) and rhythmic pattern (banqiang) corresponding to specific emotional states, Beijing opera expanded its expressive palette through timbral contrast and dynamic staging.

Since the early 20th century, the establishment of modern conservatory training systems (the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and the Shanghai Conservatory) has institutionalised a hybrid approach that combines Western bel canto methods with traditional vocal aesthetics. This combination has led to the emergence of a modern “Chinese conservatory style” in which emotional discipline and precision coexist with psychological depth. Students are taught to achieve purity of timbre and balanced breathing, and to interpret emotions as a structured process rather than an external manifestation (Lyu et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Thus, the modern Chinese vocal school represents a historical synthesis of ritualised operatic restraint and Western-influenced introspection, giving rise to a particular model of emotional expression rooted in the philosophical concept of harmony.

Historically, emotional expression in stage performance was shaped as ritually restricted: facial expressions, gestures, and vocal modulations had to follow predefined canons in which each sound had not only an artistic but also a social or even sacred function. As a result, vocal emotionality appeared not as spontaneous self-expression, but as a coded manifestation of culturally significant content. In the twentieth century, with the spread of Western musical forms and ideological changes (in particular after the Cultural Revolution and the subsequent liberalisation of artistic space), a new layer of performers emerged who adapted traditional restraint to a more lyrical, psychologised presentation.

It is on this basis that the contemporary Chinese chamber vocal school was formed, where the example of Zhou Shen represents a synthesis of individual emotional colouring with the cultural tradition of filigree technical precision and restraint. Thus, the historical context of China has determined the dominance of mediated, structured emotionality, realised through nuanced technique and deep cultural introspection. These historical factors directly influenced the technical parameters of vocal performance in the Chinese tradition. The peculiarities of intonation, articulation, facial expressions, and performance strategy result from deep cultural encoding of emotional expressiveness (Table 1).

Table 1 – Characteristics of vocal emotionality: technical parameters in the historical context

Parameter	China	Ukraine
Emotional dynamics	Gradual tension build-up, smooth emotional descent	Rapid rise to climax, sharp release of emotional tension
Intonation	Microtonal shifts, subtle melismatic modulation	Clear melodic arcs, emphatic pitch contrasts
Articulation	Controlled, restrained, fluid consonant-vowel transitions	Open, expressive articulation with strong diction
Gestures and facial expressions	Codified, ritualized, minimal	Naturalistic, expressive, spontaneous
Vocal timbre	Soft, balanced, internalized	Bright, resonant, externally projected
Aesthetic ideal	Inner harmony, emotional control	Catharsis, emotional openness
Cultural function	Symbolic-ritual, philosophical communication	Collective expression, historical narration

Source: compiled by the author based on Bryant (2021), Leongómez et al. (2021).

In the case of Ukraine, the historical context of vocal emotionality was shaped by oral folk tradition, liturgical singing, and Western European operatic practices that penetrated the Ukrainian space through imperial and academic channels from the second half of the eighteenth century. Folk songs, including ceremonial, historical, recruitment, emigrant, and lullaby songs, accumulated a high emotional intensity, expressing grief, longing, joy, loss, and hope, often in the context of collective memory and

traumatic experience. In the case of Ukraine, the historical context of vocal emotionality was shaped by oral folk tradition, liturgical singing, and Western European operatic practices that penetrated the Ukrainian space through imperial and academic channels from the second half of the eighteenth century.

Folk songs, including ceremonial, historical, recruitment, emigrant, and lullaby songs, accumulated a high emotional intensity, expressing grief, longing, joy, loss, and hope, often in the context of collective memory and traumatic experience. The factor of church singing was especially significant, with traditions such as the Kyiv znamenny chant (Kyivskii rozspiv) and the partesnyy style playing a formative role.

The Kyiv chant, with its elongated melismatic phrasing and modal solemnity, fostered a contemplative and emotionally charged vocal delivery. The later part of the concert style, characterised by multi-voice polyphony and dramatic contrasts, stimulated the development of active emotional articulation and performative expansion. These liturgical traditions laid the foundation for expressive vocal techniques that were later transformed and developed in the academic repertoire of the Ukrainian operatic school.

In the course of the formation of Ukrainian opera (from Lysenko's classical works to the contemporary academic repertoire), vocal technique retained its focus on dramatic climax, contrasting dynamics, and openness of emotional presentation, which became a characteristic feature of the Ukrainian performing school. The events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including the struggle for independence, the trauma of repression and war, affected the thematic content and emotional structure of vocal performance.

In particular, the performances of the Ukrainian National Municipal Opera House in 2022 and the *Odeto Joy* concert in New York became not just musical events but forms of aural representation of historical memory, in which emotional expressiveness served as

a means of collective articulation of pain, dignity, and resistance. Thus, the historical context in Ukrainian tradition has fostered the formation of an emotionally open, socially engaged style, in which vocals are not only an aesthetic instrument but also a channel of historical communication.

A general analysis of the identified features of emotional expressiveness in the vocal arts of China and Ukraine has shown the existence of clear aesthetic guidelines shaped by the historical and cultural traditions of each country. The vocal technique, the nature of the presentation, the structure of emotional tension, and the role of the performance context demonstrated not only genre and national specificity, but also different models of communication between the performer and the listener. The results obtained provided a basis for understanding vocal emotionality as a complex phenomenon that combines technical skill, cultural codes, and socio-historical functions.

4. Discussion

The study has enabled the identification of several features of emotional expressiveness in the vocal arts of China and Ukraine, which are closely connected to genre, cultural, and socio-historical parameters. The results obtained were consistent with several previous studies that emphasized the complexity of emotional expression in vocal art and its dependence on genre, cognitive, and cultural factors.

Thus, in the work of Hakanpää et al. (2021), differences were found between classical and commercial vocal styles in the ways they convey emotions, with the authors emphasizing the roles of timbral variations and articulatory clarity in emotional expression. These results were consistent with the description of Ukrainian tradition, in which timbral richness, articulatory expression, and dynamic contrasts culminate in a pronounced emotional peak.

Thus, a meta-analysis by Laukka and Elfenbein (2020) confirmed the existence of an in-group advantage in the recognition of vocal emotions, consistent with the prevalence of culturally specific means of emotional expression found in this study. However, whereas the meta-analysis covered a wide range of languages and vocal interpretations without in-depth analysis of musical works, the present study refined these findings through a detailed analysis of specific performances, in which emotional structure was derived from vocal technique, phrasing, and genre context.

Sundberg et al. (2024) investigated the physiological and acoustic performance of two opera singers, proving the relationship between technical skill and emotional expression. Their conclusions about the importance of microdynamics and respiratory support were relevant to the analysis of Zhou Shen's vocal technique in the present study, where these elements were key carriers of emotional restraint. However, in contrast to the narrowly focused experimental approach of J. Sundberg et al., the present study focused on the cultural meaning of such techniques within the traditional aesthetic.

Comparison with the results of Lyu and Egermann (2024), who found cultural preferences in emotion recognition in Chinese and Western music, indicated consistency with the dominance of smooth, contemporaneous emotionality in Chinese works identified in this study. However, the authors focused on listener perception, whereas this study detailed performance strategies and technical parameters, which allow for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that shape such reception.

Emotional expressiveness in chamber vocals as a form of intimate communication was confirmed by the findings of Hunter (2022), who analysed the experience of amateur chamber musicians. The study emphasized that chamber music activates deep forms of emotional interaction between the performer and the listener precisely because of the proximity of space, shared breathing, and mutual intonational sensitivity.

This fully corresponds to the characteristics of the Chinese chamber tradition identified in this study, where emotionality appears not as an open expression but as a filigree, internal intonational work with microdynamics and breathing pauses (as in the example of Zhou Shen's performance).

The multi-component structure of emotional perception in vocal art was also confirmed by Lange et al. (2022), who emphasized multimodal integration in the perception of vocal emotion. Their experiments showed that listeners not only recognize vocal emotions by timbre or dynamics, but also integrate nonverbal visual cues (facial expressions, posture) into their overall emotional assessment.

These results were consistent with the observations of Ukrainian opera performances, where it was precisely the facial expressions, lighting, and pauses between phrases that enhanced the effect of the emotional peak (in particular, in "Ode to Joy", the climactic silence after the choral crescendo served as a dramatic equivalent to the completed affective arc).

This study found that the intonation structure of a phrase and timbre modulation are central tools for building emotional tension, especially in the Chinese tradition. This position was confirmed by Yue (2021), who emphasized that emotionality in performance results from artistic reconstruction based on intonational analysis of the text and its affective potential. Yue emphasizes that even with minimal textual load, a vocal phrase can convey powerful emotional information through register modulation, pause control, and intonation shifts, elements also evident in the vocal technique of the Chinese folk model "Mama, your embrace...".

The analysis of Ukrainian chamber performances revealed the dominance of expressive means aimed at achieving a culminating effect, expressive timbre contrast, and emotional rhetoric. These features coincided with the characteristics proposed by Putiatytska et al. (2024a; 2024b), in which the genre structure of Ukrainian chamber vocal music was considered through the prism

of dramatic intensification and active emotional dynamics. These authors described a sequence of performance techniques in which drama was combined with flexible timbre modelling and textual emphasis. The results of the present study concretised these provisions through an empirical analysis of stage performance, confirming that the climax not only reflects the internal logic of musical construction, but also functions as an element of collective emotional interaction with the audience.

Particular importance in the interpretation of Ukrainian vocal emotionality was given to Konorov's (2024) opinion, who, as a practitioner and analyst of vocal texts, highlighted the subjective nature of the performance act. His text emphasises the importance of the interpersonal channel of emotional transmission, not as a unidirectional expression, but as a dialogical construction in which the singer acts as an emotional mediator between the work, the social context, and the listener.

These observations correlate with the features of the public reaction to performances by Ukrainian artists in times of crisis identified in the study. In particular, the audience's response to symbolic performances during the war confirmed the presence of interpersonal resonance, in which emotionality serves not only as artistic but also as social communication.

In analysing the vocal strategies of Ukrainian and Chinese performers, it was found that emotional expressiveness fell within an aesthetically and socially acceptable spectrum, where intonation, dynamic flexibility, and timbre modelling were subject to cultural norms of restraint or drama, but did not cross the line into unfiltered expression.

In this context, Murphy (2024) proposed an alternative paradigm for scream vocals in the hardcore genre—an aggressive, direct expression of affect that takes emotionality beyond the aestheticised. Although this model of emotional presentation is not typical of the academic vocal tradition, the comparison enabled a better understanding of the role of social and genre constraints in the construction of expressive vocals.

Against this background, academic performance appears as a structured and culturally mediated form of emotional communication that does not allow for excessive affectivity that might lead to loss of control. As part of the analysis of the correspondence between the lexical content of the vocal text and musical means, the study's results confirmed the presence of synchronicity in the works of the Ukrainian repertoire, where the meanings of words, intonation phrases, and timbre palettes interact as a single communicative unit.

This finding resonated with the conclusions of Spreadborough (2022), who investigated the relationship between emotional tones and textual content in vocal music. Spreadborough's work emphasised that musical structures often either reinforce or soften linguistic content, forming a complex emotional intention. The results of this study empirically confirmed the effectiveness of this concept in the context of the Ukrainian vocal scene, where text and sound were inextricably linked as channels of emotional communication.

The analysis of audience reactions to vocal performances by Ukrainian and Chinese performers, recorded during international concerts, revealed that even in the presence of complete or partial linguistic ignorance, vocal performances evoked expressive emotional responses, including tears, standing ovations, and non-verbal empathy. This allowed us to conclude that vocal intonation, timbre, and dynamics can evoke an affective response regardless of the lexical code.

In this sense, the results of the study confirmed the findings of Sláviková and Kráľová (2021), who argued that the emotionality of vocal performance can be transmitted perceptually through the characteristics of the human voice as an affective carrier, rather than solely through semantically intelligible text. Their study was experimental, whereas the present study was based on real performances, providing empirical support for the hypothesis of the universality of affective intonation.

Another position confirmed by this study concerned the historical contingency of emotional presentation. As the examples of operas in the Chinese and Ukrainian traditions have shown, the emotional profile is not arbitrary or spontaneous, but is formed in accordance with historical stylistic paradigms.

In this context, the work of Yu et al. (2024) considered vocal interpretation as a historically structured semantic system grounded in stylistic clusters, such as rhythmic patterns, melodic formulas, and typical dynamic configurations. These conclusions served as the conceptual basis for interpreting the parameters identified in the study, such as restraint in Chinese intonation solutions or climactic openness in Ukrainian samples. Thus, this study allowed us to elaborate on the theoretical model through examples of real stage performances supported by contextual analysis.

The findings confirmed and clarified earlier theoretical assumptions by demonstrating that emotional expression in vocal performance is shaped not only by technical mastery but also by culturally encoded expectations and genre-specific strategies. The chamber performances in the Chinese tradition revealed a microintensive model of emotionality based on dynamic restraint, timbral nuance, and symbolic intonation. In contrast, Ukrainian operatic and ensemble practices emphasized large-scale dramaturgy, vocal projection, and emotional climax as key structuring principles. This contrast enabled the present study to articulate a comparative framework that highlights how national traditions embed emotional expression within specific performative grammars, thereby offering deeper insight into the interplay among sound, cultural code, and audience perception.

5. Conclusions

The study achieved its aim by identifying and systematising the defining features of emotional expressiveness in vocal performance across Ukrainian and Chinese traditions, using an interdisciplinary framework that integrated musicological analysis,

psychological interpretation, cultural context, and aesthetic evaluation. The notion of emotionality in vocal performance was considered a multilevel phenomenon, encompassing acoustic parameters (dynamics, timbre, articulation), semiotic mechanisms, performance strategies, and socio-cultural meanings. It was found that emotional expressiveness is not an exclusively individual act but functions within specific genres, stylistic conventions, and traditional canons formed in a particular cultural environment.

Based on the analysis of stage performances, the author has traced how the emotional load is realised in vocal pieces. It was found that in Chinese samples (in particular, in the performance of Zhou Shen and in the song “Mama, your embrace is a gentle river to me”), a smooth development of emotions with a gradual increase and a delicate decrease prevails, which is ensured by filigree breath control, the use of falsetto, microdynamics, and minimalistic gestures. Within Chinese tradition, emotionality was a codified process grounded in cultural ideas of inner balance and restraint.

In Ukrainian stage samples (in particular, in the performances of the National Municipal Opera House and during the Ode to Joy concert), expressive forms of emotional expression dominated, characterised by rapid climaxes, sharp dynamic amplitude, emotive facial expressions, and a powerful impact on the audience. These parameters were implemented in both solo and choral episodes and reflected the tradition of emotional openness inherent in Ukrainian vocal art.

In solo performance, the culmination was typically built through gradual intensification of dynamics, register shifts, and timbral expansion, while in choral format, emotional peaks emerged from collective sound layering, harmonic density, and synchronized phrasing that amplified the sense of communal pathos.

The comparison revealed that historical experience, philosophical paradigms, social transformations, and genre conventions shaped emotional expressiveness in the Chinese

and Ukrainian vocal traditions. In the Chinese tradition, emotional development followed a gradual, inward trajectory with restrained dynamics and codified mimicry, reflecting ideals of harmony and introspection.

In contrast, the Ukrainian model demonstrated rapid emotional escalation, expressive gesturality, and open dynamics, often tied to collective historical memory and socially engaged performance contexts. It has been confirmed that the intimacy of sound does not reduce, but rather enhances the intensity of emotional presence, giving the vocal image an intimate and reflective dimension.

A limitation of the study was the relatively small sample size, as the empirical analysis was based on four-stage performances. Although these cases were carefully selected to represent diverse cultural and stylistic models, the limited number of examples restricts the generalisability of the results. Future research should expand the sample to include a broader range of performances across different traditions and contexts, enabling more comprehensive statistical validation and cross-cultural comparisons. Nevertheless, the qualitative approach used in this study provided sufficient depth to identify characteristic patterns of emotional expressiveness and formulate an interdisciplinary analytical framework.

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