

REVIEW

by

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Faculty of Music Pedagogy, Department of Piano and Accordion

for awarding educational and scientific degree Doctor to

Huang Boyu

in professional direction 8.3 Music and Dance Art,

scientific specialty Music Studies and Music Art

Faculty of Music Pedagogy Department of Piano and Accordion

at AMDFA “Prof Asen Diamandiev”

titled:

Characteristics and Development of the Piano Accompaniment in the Vocal Music of the Chinese Composers from the 20th century to the Present Day

academic supervisor Prof Lyudmil Petkov, PhD

1. General presentation of the procedure and the materials received for review

Huang Boyu is a doctoral student in the Department of Piano and Accordion, and I know him from the preparatory year preceding his doctoral studies as his piano tutor. My impressions of his motivation and determination are excellent, and this has been confirmed in the course of the following three years of training. The thematic direction of his scientific work is not surprising, bearing in mind Huang Boyu's marked interest in piano accompaniment even in his student years. *Characteristics and Development of the Piano Accompaniment in the Vocal Music of the Chinese Composers from the 20th century to the Present Day* – this is the topic of the dissertation work that I received for review together with a full set of documents that meet all the requirements for the procedure for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

2. Brief biographical data of the candidate

Huang Boyu is a Chinese citizen born in 1991. He graduated with honors in Bachelor's program in Piano at the Tianjin Conservatory (China). He completed two Master's programs – from 2015 to 2017 Piano (Performing Art) and from 2017 to 2019 - Piano Accompaniment. Both Master's degrees are from the "Giovanni Battista Pergolesi" Conservatory, Fermo - Italy. His doctoral studies at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" is conducted under the supervision of Prof Lyudmil Petkov. Within the framework of his studies, he actively participated in the activities of the Academy (National Academic Competition "J.S. Bach and his contemporaries", Gala concert in the Ancient Theater "Made at the Academy", Concert with Chinese vocal works "I miss my Motherland", etc.

3. Relevance of the topic

There is a number of Chinese citizens who have defended their doctoral dissertations at AMDFA, and are currently being trained. All of them absolutely logically focus on topics related to the history, development and peculiarities of the national musical culture in the Republic of China. Huang Boyu's theme, however, has no counterpart within the Academy. He is our first doctoral student who developed his scientific interests in the field of piano accompaniment, which makes his work *Characteristics and Development of the Piano Accompaniment in the Vocal Music of the Chinese Composers from the 20th century to the Present Day* particularly relevant and interesting. This is undoubtedly a new emphasis, representing valuable knowledge on the development of the piano art in China and especially on the development of the piano accompaniment of vocal music in a country with ancient and specific cultural traditions. The formation of a modern-type accompaniment that bears the marks of the European compositional elements, is a very long process of historical and aesthetic accumulations in the field of song and opera genres in China. The candidate presents this process and traces in depth in three main directions: the Chinese art song, the art songs based on texts from classical Chinese poetry and the Chinese national opera. The timelines of the subject are with an emphasis on the modern era, namely from the 20th century to the present day.

4. Expediency of the research methods used to achieve the set goals

In the Introduction of the dissertation, Huang Boyu clearly outlines the objectives of his research:

1. Through the research of numerous studies on the history of the Chinese musical culture, to reach general conclusions about the trends in its development in the last 100 years.
2. To deepen the knowledge and understanding of the "national musical culture" by tracing the influence of the European music on it.
3. To bring out the similarities and differences between the three vocal genres under consideration, thereby achieving a new understanding of the Chinese music, open to future research.
4. To study the development and national characteristics of the Chinese piano accompaniment.

The author's "patriotic ambition" to cover such a vast field of knowledge is quite obvious, behind which, however, there is a clear and purposeful methodological plan. Huang Boyu focuses on three types of methods: empirical, theoretical and comparative. A logical motivation is given for each of them. The author bases his research conclusions on the collection and analysis of real artifacts and objective data. He directs the scientific perspectives of the dissertation by placing them in direct engagement with "*existing theoretical frameworks and academic perspectives*". Aware of the value of the available music theory on the subject at hand, Huang Boyu used it as an immutable base on which to build his scientific thesis.

5. Evaluation of the dissertation work (knowledge of the problem, content and structure according to the established norms, credibility, analytical approach, derived results)

The work contains five chapters, the fifth presenting the contributions of the dissertation. The **first chapter** examines the Chinese art song – the specifics of the genre, its historical development and periodization. Even here, Huang Boyu creates a clear structural form of his theoretical analysis, which includes historical context and background, major periods in the evolution of the genre, prominent composers and their representative works. The author dwells in detail on the first attempts to popularize and introduce the Western musical culture into the patriarchal lifestyle of the Chinese society at the beginning of the 20th century. They are performed by young musicians who have returned to their homeland after studying in Europe or America. The numerous school songs they created were popular European, American or Japanese tunes with added Chinese lyrics. This "*embryonic period*", as the author himself defines it, has its prominent representatives in the person of the composers: Xiao Youmei, Huang Tzu and Lu Huabo. Huang Boyu analyzes in depth and with ample examples, the aesthetics, musical expression, lyrics and piano part of popular songs such as *Questions*, *The Three Wishes of the Rose* and *Homeland*. The works are analyzed in terms of melody, harmonic features, structure and piano texture. It is in the latter that the evolutionary changes related to the "Europeanization" of the Chinese song are most evident and indicative.

The author approaches in similar way the succeeding periods in the development of the Chinese art song, namely: the time between the 1950s and 1960s and the period after 1979 (the introduction of the reform policy in China). The evolution of the genre in the work of composers: Du Minxing, Gu Jianfeng, Shu Wanchun and Lu Zai-yi is traced.

Particularly valuable, in my opinion, is the summary that the candidate presents in the third subchapter "*...under the influence of the situation in the modern Chinese society, on the one hand, the Chinese art song shows similar features to its Western source, but on the other hand, a very bright national flavor is noticeable*" - says Huang Boyu, emphasizing the following valuable conclusions about the evolution of the song accompaniment:

1. The texture of the piano accompaniment is becoming more and more diverse
2. The accompaniment moves from a purely subordinate position to the melody to a more multidimensional relationship with it.
3. The piano part is enriched with the use of Chinese folk tunes
4. Grace, variety and originality of the accompanying party become the norm
5. Simultaneous creation of vocal melody and piano part is achieved.

The **second chapter** of the dissertation discusses the art songs based on texts from the classical Chinese poetry. In this part of his work, Huang Boyu also explores in depth the genre formation of the original songs, also related to Chinese musicians who have returned to their homeland with "Western" education. Again in the context of the era, the work of Liao Shanguo alias Qing Ju, Liu Xue-an, Luo Junjun, Li Yinghai is examined. According to the truthful summaries of the doctoral

student, the ancient Chinese poetry deeply influences the song melody with its extraordinary aesthetics and rhythm, with the "bottomless depth" of its poetic images, with the sound symbolism of the rhymes. All this leads to an incredible improvement of the compositional technique, visibly moving away from the major-minor system. In search of new harmonic solutions, Chinese composers experimented with the so-called "pantonality" as a manifestation of pentatonic relationships, combining them with dodecaphonic means. For its part, the texture of the piano accompaniment acquires more and more vivid features of rhythmic and harmonic complexity, of previously unknown emotional intensity.

The **third chapter** is entitled *The Chinese National Opera (with an emphasis on the Chinese opera in the modern era)*. I consider the historical review of the national opera forms in China to be an extremely difficult and massive task. The immersing of the author in the vast scientific-theoretical array of this unique musical phenomenon in China, is an achievement in itself. Using this basis, the candidate makes a clear periodization of the evolution of the genre, which takes place in the modern era: a period of early flourishing (1949-1957), a period of maturation (1957-1966), a period of the "Cultural Revolution" (1966-1976), progress of the Chinese opera (1976-1986) and the Chinese opera to the present day (1986 -). The author presents briefly two iconic titles from the most recent period: the opera *Wild Fields* (1987) by composer Jing Xiang and *The Poem of Mulan* (2006) by Liu Lin and Guan Xia. In subchapter four, Huang Boyu concludes that the traditional folklore elements have always been present, albeit to varying degrees, throughout the historical development of the Chinese national opera. As an example of an organic combination of Chinese traditional features with the specifics of the Western opera, the author mentions the opera *The White Haired Maiden*. The candidate points out the new version of the operatic recitatives, which in this case reflect the Chinese speech specificity, the sound features in the articulation of the Chinese language. Along with this, the structural stereotypes of the European opera are also preserved. The standard line-up of the Western-type opera orchestra also undergoes changes. The traditional instruments are included, whose sound and modulating capabilities are closely related to the folklore environment (song and dance) of China.

In the **fourth chapter**, Huang Boyu presents a brief summary of his Master's thesis. It outlines the evolution in the development of the piano accompaniment in China from imitation of the Western traditions through the ever-greater diversification of compositional techniques, the breaking of harmonic and tonal functions of a European type. The atonal compositional technique increasingly enters in the piano part. The accompanist often has the difficult task of bringing his piano sound closer to the exceptional softness and tenderness of the traditional instruments made of bamboo or silk.

6. Contributions and significance of the thesis and the relevant publications

A special section highlights the contributions of the dissertation, which I accept and admire. I fully accept the possibilities of the work related to the spiritual exchange between China and Bulgaria. To this I would add the poetic translations of the Chinese poetry used as text of selected song included

in the appendix. I believe that this is an irreplaceable way of authentic artistic suggestion, of experiencing magical emotional states, unknown and exotic to the European sensibility and sound environment.

7. Brief remarks and recommendations

As I firmly stand behind the dissertation work, I would make two recommendations related to the possibilities for its future publication.

-At the beginning of each sheet music example of an art song, the key signatures of its tonality should be noted.

- In the literary sources should be added important titles from the European and the Bulgarian sources related to the theory of piano art and piano accompaniment.

8. Abstract – approved

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the doctoral candidate and his scientific supervisor - Prof Lyudmil Petkov for the rich dissertation work and the high level of its future beneficial effect. I hereby confidently propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" to Huang Boyu.

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Plovdiv

Reviewer:

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