

REVIEW

by Prof Svetla Georgieva Kaludova-Stanilova,

AMDFA “Prof Asen Diamandiev”- Plovdiv

on dissertation work for awarding educational and scientific degree *Doctor*,

Professional field (code 8.3): Music and dance art

Author: Wang Shuaitong,

full-time doctoral student at Department of Classical and Pop and Jazz Performing Arts

Faculty of Music Pedagogy , AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv,

on topic:

A study of the dynamics of the vocal techniques in the Chinese academic folk singing

academic supervisor: Prof Toni Shekerjieva – Novak

Information on the competition procedure

In the competition for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the Field of higher education 8. Arts, Professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art, the Department of Classical and Pop and Jazz Performing Arts at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof Asen Diamandiev" there is one candidate – Wang Shuaitong. All necessary documents according to the Law for the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria are presented.

Presentation of the candidate

Wang Shuaitong was born in Henan, China. His autobiography shows that he has been involved in musical art for many years and has long-standing scientific interests in vocal and traditional Chinese music. He received his Master's degree from Fujian University and is now an established opera singer. He has participated in a number of prestigious music competitions in Russia, Bulgaria, Italy, Hungary, Romania, etc. and is the winner of many awards. He has nine published articles.

Scientific and artistic production

Wang Shuaitong's biography reveals a musician with a broad view and innovative pursuits in the field of vocal art. His interest in singing is evident from the various manifestations of his talent: creative initiative, insight, high level of musical culture and knowledge. Apparently, this interest of the candidate, his training and studies of the genre and his practice, have motivated his participation in the current procedure and the choice of a topic for his dissertation work. He has accepted the challenge to present a serious, large-scale theoretical study that finds its place in the contemporary trends corresponding to the aesthetics of the time. His deep theoretical-practical knowledge is an additional prerequisite for this.

The presented thesis for theoretical research titled *A study of the dynamics of the vocal techniques in the Chinese academic folk singing* contains an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, list of used literature of a total of 170 pages. The bibliography includes 34 sources, which demonstrates the candidate's knowledge on the topic in the study. The structure and content of the work are a success for him. The work stands out with well sustained, logical sequence and completeness. The overall concept of the dissertation is demonstrated through a meaningful and well-arranged text with a clear and logical statement, with accurate conclusions and personal opinions derived from study and practice. The use of the cited literature demonstrates a thorough reading of theoretical studies on the vocal art in historical, evolutionary and methodological aspects, through an analytical approach with comments related to the main objective. The object, subject, purpose and tasks are convincingly presented. The requested methodological framework, formulated clearly and precisely, finds expression in: study of literary sources, study of historical documents, analytical, comparative, systematic, observation, summary, interview, etc.

The first chapter *Overview of the development of vocal music art in ancient china*, points to an in-depth analysis of the development of the traditional vocal art in China during separate periods related to different historical, socio-cultural conditions and practices. The presentation of the vocal national art through various forms in its evolutionary development shows a desire to preserve the folklore works through "a system of collecting and recording folk songs, in order to observe and understand the public opinion and to serve its interests by controlling the folk art" (p. 25). According to the author, singing evolved under the influence of court, religious, and secular music into various forms of a *cappella* or ensemble musicianship. Important for the study is the following summary. "During the performance of songs in the imperial palace, elements such as dance and instrumental passages were added, which form a large-scale music-dance work, consisting of three parts: overture, singing and epilogue" (p.36), and the flourishing of the Buddhist musical system...prompted the creation of song and dance forms that later became elements of the Chinese opera" (p.42). Regarding the national folk music, the doctoral candidate emphasizes the existence of separate regions with different characteristics of the traditional songs, where the instrumental accompaniment of wind or string instruments gradually enters. Here, in a historical aspect, the pedagogical intervention in mastering the vocal art and determining the criteria for voice characteristics is traced. The first schools and teachers also appear, the first methodological guidelines for working on the elements of vocal technique and repertoire, the importance of singing breathing for the qualities of the sound, the interaction between melody and text. The author also emphasizes the strong influence of certain dynasties on the emergence, development and consolidation of the opera art during the period of the New Age. There are in-depth studies of the vocal art, the requirements for singers' performance technique are increasing. All this leads to the development of the Chinese vocal art. To support his arguments, the candidate analyses the work of the representatives of various singing schools along with their requirements for the performance technique of the singers.

The second chapter is entitled *Development of the Chinese vocal folk music during the Modern Period*. Here, the author reflects on the influence of historical, social conditions of life, as well as the influence of the European culture on the Chinese music. This is a period of rapid enrichment and development of the traditional music into a professional one. New genres, new styles are formed, which develop at a rapid pace and become a major trend in the modern Chinese music. According to the author, "*this is the beginning of a new period of various social and musical forms, existing in parallel with the traditional music*" (p.76). The vocal genres undergo rapid changes and development. Many singers trained in Japan, Europe and the USA, upon returning to their homeland laid the foundations of the modern Chinese vocal music. The *bel-canto* as a style entered the opera works. Despite the strong influence of political forces on art, during this period there was a desire to preserve folk motifs in the opera style. In terms of singing, all the actors use techniques from traditional Chinese opera singing styles. Therefore, opera in this period represents a successful attempt to combine local Chinese vocal methods with Western opera forms. The dissertation proves that there is an aspiration to preserve the performance style of different ethnic groups and regions in China.

The comments of the author in the third chapter, *Development of the vocal folk music in contemporary China*, reflect the changes and the development of the Chinese music in the second half of the 20th century. The beginning of a new era is set, the so-called "*academic folk vocal music*" appears, which is used to create various types of musical works. Here, the author analytically and thoroughly traces all the stages of the development of the traditional Chinese music empirically, and reaches the educational system, which requires methodical intervention under the guidance of expert "*bel canto*" teachers. Their methods are aimed at preserving the original styles of the ethno-singers and preservation of the regional, singing characteristics. The academic methods in teaching singing are established. In this respect, the author expresses the opinion that this leads to the "unification" of voices by timbre and the emergence of the phenomenon "thousand singers with one voice". There is an urgent need for vocal techniques to demonstrate the new forms of stage performance and artistry. The raging conflict between the "Western *bel canto*" and the traditional Chinese folk singing is not overlooked. Wang Shuaitong examines various music academies where vocal technique and traditional singing are studied. He emphasizes that the establishment of large conservatories led to the emergence of numerous researchers of Chinese vocal folk music. They step on the inherited traditional singing methods, boldly borrow techniques from *bel canto* and thus contribute to the formation of the academic school of folk singing. There is a need for studying of the traditional songs and their preservation. Composers create original folk operas using the experience of foreign composers.

Of importance for the research is the presented objective point of view about the so-called "model operas" that have contributed to some extent to the reform and development of the Peking Opera, local opera genres and folk music. Their content depicts the lifestyle of the people in the new era, with great innovation in singing and musical accompaniment. The research shows that folk singing methods combined with Western "scientific" vocal techniques are more suitable for interpreting new age songs.

The fourth chapter *Comparative study of the folk singing training in China and Bulgaria* shows the doctoral student's awareness of the local and national characteristics of the Bulgarian folk singing. The examined theoretical, vocal and performance characteristics of each region and the used methodology prove this. The emphasis falls on the organization of the educational process, which has its historical and social prerequisites for emergence, development and improvement. The comparative analysis made between the Chinese and the Bulgarian singing, according to several indicators in the different qualification degrees, is successful and of contributing importance for the individual educational systems. All statements are supported with evidence and examples.

Contributions to the dissertation

I fully accept the presented contributions of the dissertation, which are analytically presented and reliably highlighted. They have a practical-applied and contributory significance. The conclusion of the dissertation presents in a summarized form the arguments of the candidate and the contributions of the work, which are important for the enrichment of the musical science and practice. All generalizations and conclusions are based on in-depth knowledge of the problem, which is very valuable. The research successfully achieves its goals not only in the theoretical part, but also in terms of practical results.

Wang Shuaitong has made the required number of publications during the period of his studies. They are related to the topic of the dissertation work and fully meet the requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "doctor". The abstract meets the standards and correctly conveys the essence and the indicated contributions of the dissertation.

In conclusion

The reviewed theoretical work of the candidate Wang Shuaitong has a serious scientific-practical and applied value. It meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the regulations for its implementation. Based on all of the above, I strongly support the author and his theoretical research. I express my positive assessment of the work and the abovementioned contributions.

I strongly recommend to the esteemed Scientific Jury to award Wang Shuaitong with the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in Professional field (8.3): Music and Dance Art, scientific specialty: Music Studies and Music Art, Department of Classical and Pop and Jazz Performing Arts, AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev". I also congratulate his academic supervisor Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak

Plovdiv

Prof Svetla Kaludova-Stanilova

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