

REVIEW

by
Prof Svilen Raichev, PhD

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

to

Wang Shuaitong

titled

A STUDY OF THE DYNAMICS OF THE VOCAL TECHNIQUES IN THE CHINESE ACADEMIC FOLK SINGING

Professional field (code 8.3): Music and dance art
doctoral program Music Studies and Music Art
academic supervisor: Prof Toni Shekerjieva – Novak

Wang Shuaitong is born in China. He receives Bachelor's degree in 2011, and Master's degree from Fujian University, China in 2015.

In September 2019, he is admitted a full-time doctoral student, paid education, in professional field 8.3 Music and dance art, doctoral program Music Studies and Music Art at the Department of Classical and Pop and Jazz Performing Arts, AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv,

He was discharged with the right of defense by order of the Rector No RD-27- 029 of 17.03.2023.

The dissertation was discussed and proposed for public defense at a meeting of the Department of Classical and Pop and Jazz Performing Arts at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev"- Plovdiv, held in March 2023.

In addition to his native Chinese, he is speaks Bulgarian, English.

He has some pedagogical experience in China,

He has participated in numerous concerts and performances and has won prestigious awards in a number of singing festivals and competitions:

2020 - Moscow International Vocal Competition - second prize

2020 - Arts Festival Borovets 2020 - second prize

2020 - Second prize at the 23rd International Music Competition "Pietro Argento", Italy, November 2020.

2020 - First prize at "Danubia talents International Music Competition 2020", Hungary,

The dissertation consists of a total of 172 pages, which include an introduction, four main chapters with subchapters, a conclusion, bibliography, contributions of the dissertation and a list of scientific publications on the topic of the study.

I am impressed by the way the dissertation was conceived and constructed - academically, with an excellent style.

The main goal of this work is to research the historical achievements of the ancient Chinese vocal folk music, a systematic review of the evolution of the academic folk singing under the influence of *bel canto* after the entry of Western culture into China.

The idea of a thorough research and analysis of the characteristics of training, representatives and singing styles for each of the periods of development of the Chinese academic folk singing is in itself a great challenge. The concepts, methods and results of the teaching experience of prominent music educators are summarized, based on which recommendations are made for improving identical performances of the Chinese folk singers. The dissertation discusses the concepts in the development of folk singing in the Western countries and especially in Bulgaria, as well as the similarities and differences with the Chinese folk singing.

The first part of the work offers an overview of the Chinese vocal folk music in antiquity. The characteristics of folk singing in traditional Chinese music are described, as well as the periods of transformation of folk singing and the borrowing of features and methods from the Western music and especially *bel canto*.

The traditional Chinese music developed under the influence of the incoming Western music. This is considered in the second chapter, *Development of the Chinese vocal folk music during the Modern Period*. The author mentions the formation of new genres that are becoming a major trend in contemporary Chinese music. Children's song and dance productions, new folk songs are created, the "Yang" as opera genre is born, the national opera *The White-Haired Girl* is created as a combination of Western and Chinese music.

Wang Shuaitong divides the traditional Chinese vocal music in this period into three main categories: traditional folk songs, recitative songs, and Chinese opera singing. He makes a thorough analysis of these three categories, clarifying some specific features of the Chinese opera, such as symbolic stage performances, singing technique, basic types of roles, tonal characteristics, etc.

The modern period of the Chinese history finds a place in the third chapter *Development of the vocal folk music in contemporary China*. This chapter examines the formation of the Chinese academic folk vocal music, the creation of original folk-style vocal works using traditional folk singing techniques. New folk operas are created. These, according to the author, are various attempts by the Chinese composers to create opera music, striving to compose national operas with Chinese characteristics based on the traditions of national opera music and using the experience of foreign opera composers.

I quote: "*In terms of musical composition, they possess the distinctive style of traditional Chinese music and opera music, emphasizing vocal parts and singing*" (p. 97).

Particularly interesting is the section *"Formation of academic teaching and characteristics of the vocal music training"* The author makes an analysis of the training in the various music academies in China and the restructuring of the traditional vocal education, which at the time consists of folk singing groups, into educational majors such as Folk Singing and Folk Vocal Music. The academic system for teaching folk singing was launched, and the disciplines were taught jointly by vocal teachers from the bel canto school and teachers of Chinese folk music.

I quote: *"During this period of development in the teaching of vocal folk music in academia, the similarities and differences in the training offered by different educational institutions come from the awareness and practical experience of the various teachers of traditional Chinese folk vocal music and bel canto singing."* (p. 105)

The dissertation also discusses the differences in views on the development of the Chinese folk singing – both political and artistic-pedagogical. The periods of development and stagnation of the Chinese academic vocal music are shown, as well as the transformation in its creation, vocal training and performance in order to meet the already high and diverse aesthetic demands of the public.

The author's good knowledge of the Bulgarian folk music is also impressive. The fourth chapter *Comparative study of the folk singing training in China and Bulgaria* is dedicated to it. With the help of a comparative analysis, the similarities and the differences between the Bulgarian and the Chinese academic folk vocal music are summarized. A comparison is made between the curricula, teaching methods and training in the field of folk music in Bulgaria and China.

In the separate parts of the dissertation, the principles and difficulties in solving the specific tasks in the performance of Chinese academic folk singing are emphasized and brought out.

As a benefit of the dissertation, I would also note the presence of all kinds of photographic and musical material, as well as specific tables from various sources, which greatly contribute to the research.

The dissertation is not just a historical, chronological study of a particular genre or era. This is the author's analytical reflection on the traditions of the European and the Chinese folk vocal music and how young people should prepare to perform works in this style. The dissertation work is very useful and will be useful for young people who are learning this kind of art.

The dissertation thus presented enriches our scientific literature and can serve with its ideas for new scientific studies.

The work is very practical in its nature. In this sense, it is a natural link with the past and the prospective development of both the European and the Chinese vocal music.

With a laconic, clear and unambiguous thought, the doctoral candidate poses the questions, and everywhere, without sometimes being expressed in words, subtextually his personal view and attitude on the topics concerned are visible. For his research he has used numerous works classified according to the historical period of their origin. He also dedicates a special part to schools or authors who are particularly important and who are unfortunately little known in our country.

The conclusion makes an attempt to summarize the problems and to bring out the contributing points in the text. This research serves as a guide in finding a stylistically correct interpretation not only of the performance of the Chinese academic folk singing, but also of the vocal music in general..

I fully agree with the contributions of the dissertation work listed by the author.

The candidate also has the necessary scientific publications on the subject.

As a conclusion, I would like to say that the work has the necessary contributing qualities of a dissertation for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

I am convinced that the dissertation of Wang Shuaitong has a contribution nature, both in a theoretical and an applied sense. With his overall work and contributions, the candidate meets the requirements for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

Prof Svilen Raichev, PhD