

REVIEW

by

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of

dissertation work for awarding educational and scientific degree DOCTOR

Professional field **8.3. Music and dance art**

Doctoral program **Music Studies and Music Art**

Title: A Comparative Analysis between the Peking Opera Jingju and the Italian Opera

Author: Wang Ye, doctoral student at

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at AMDFA, “Prof Asen Diamandiev” - Plovdiv,

with academic supervisor: Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva – Novak

Wang Ye is an opera singer (baritone), Chinese by nationality.

He received his Bachelor's degree from Quanzhou University, China, and his professional skills include classical opera singing and traditional Chinese music (folk music and singing). In the period 2011 - 2015, he studied and successfully completed his Master program at the Conservatory of Music Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, Fermo, Italy. There, in addition to singing, his interests are related to chamber vocal ensembles, history of musical theatre, stage and choral practice, etc. He speaks Chinese and, to varying degrees, English, Italian and Bulgarian.

Upon the recommendation of Prof Nicola Verzina, Dean of the National Conservatory of Music in Fermo (Italy), he left for Bulgaria to continue his education in the opera singing class of Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak.

He has won several awards from international and Bulgarian vocal competitions, as well as numerous performances as an opera and chamber artist in Italy and Bulgaria.

The work submitted for review consists of 176 pages and includes: introduction, four chapters, conclusion, literature and appendices. The doctoral student has referred to 38 titles in Chinese, Italian, English and Bulgarian, of which 36 are printed and 2 are internet sources.

The work includes a wide range of interconnected components, the entirety of which covers the topic of the dissertation, giving visibility to a logically conceived and comprehensively illustrated construction.

The author, based on his experience and interests, clearly motivates the reasons for his choice of topic, using the powerful processes of globalization that have occurred in the world for a timely comparative study of two of the leading trends in the genre in the Eastern and Western traditional cultures – Peking Opera Jingju and the Italian Opera. The prevailing detailed and theoretically exhaustive research collection until now is mostly in its field of research and the step to overcome the outlined boundaries gives not only a scientific charge to this study, but also suggests a bold approach, even more so when phenomena are concerned with important cultural status. For this purpose, an empirical and theoretical research method was used, and one of the main tasks of the work is arranging, systematizing and classifying the researched scientific materials that are close to and directly affecting the topic.

In the **First Chapter**, dedicated to the origin and development of the Peking and the Italian Opera, Wang Ye navigates and illuminates with a very acute intuition, the labyrinth of the complex background of the emergence of Peking Opera. He outlines the importance and the significance of Kunqu opera for the Chinese culture, as the most significant when first introduced through different stylistic opera troupes (for example Yiqiang, Neiju, Qiu and Jintou) of this art form in Beijing. The decline over time of Kunqu opera, which naturally led to and was associated with the rise of new vocal opera genres, is made easier to understand by elucidating specific concepts from the Chinese music-theatre genres. Thus, for example, the relationship between the four main musical systems (Kunshatian, Gaojia, Pihuang and Baudzatian) with the regions that characterize them, is extensively analysed through the specificity of the used vocal-intonation motifs, the instrumentation, the melodic patterns Xipi and Erhuang, (which in their collective concept Pihuang dominate the Peking Opera), of the peculiarities of performance styles and performance manners.

An achievement of the first chapter of the dissertation is the way in which the musical art is inscribed and conformed to the historical context. The hidden and overt symbolism of the Chinese opera theatre is further complicated by the constant changes, sudden integration of new parallel processes, and the unceasing aspiration towards the improvement of the existing practice. Thus, the significance of the popularization of the Hui opera in Peking is expressed in multiple layers, in which the various characteristics of creative expression create the dynamic environment in which Jingju matures. The importance of the performances expressed in a distinctive way is such that in a rivalry between Qinqiang and Jingju (relative to Kun opera) it developed with the direct intervention of the Government. The chapter also mentions important representatives of the Peking Opera such as Mei Lanfang, Chen Yenqiu, Xun Huisheng, whose deep understanding of views and ways of achieving their aesthetic goals through various techniques have given impetus to the establishment of a unique performance style.

The opposition of the Renaissance opera, in the XVII-XIX centuries, and the Italian modern opera, as well as clarification of styles and concepts underlying the candidate's research plan, are competently arranged and creatively thought out in their most important aspects.

The **second chapter** of the work, offers a comparative analysis of two significant works of the genre, *The Drunken Concubine* and *Madame Butterfly*. Here the author discusses the processes shaping the difference in the organization of the plot, in the creation of the artistic image, in stage art and in music. Seen "from the inside" with their inherited and accumulated experience, analysed functionally and with their applied activity, in their key aspects the two works are a suitable choice for unfolding the potential of scientific work.

The **third chapter** is a kind of work centre, "receiving", "sending" and coordinating the scientific work. The comparative analysis of the Peking and the Italian opera is done in a very detailed form and in a profoundly meaningful content. The discussed territories of cultural origin, philosophical concepts, forms of expression, methods, focus of performers, etc. are represented conceptually by their "quintessence of unity and conviction". The penetration of Confucianism into the culture of the opera theatre, as well as of Western philosophical systems into the European one, is balanced and developed in its dialectical perspective. The enigmatic nature and the traditional limitations accompanying the specific charm of the development of art in the Qing period are in the service of the harmonious wholeness and preservation of an aesthetic tradition that is unitary in its disposition. At the same time, the unity of action, time and place in Western drama is accounted for in its determining impact on one of the main form-forming principles in the European drama.

The doctoral candidate thoroughly explores the differences in music composition, accompaniment, vocal performance and expressive methods between the two research subjects. In respect with the types of singing voices, Wang Ye uses the typology created by Miglena Tsenova-Nusheva, which is a great recognition for the Bulgarian researcher. Through the prism of the diversity of the stage performance, the shaping of the stage space, sets, stage design, props (simplified or enriched), the aesthetics of movement, posture, grace, colour modelling, power of expression and the various connotations associated with the terminology, are used as foundation.

An important role for illuminating the scope of the problem and achieving a high critical level in its research is the presentation of the inheritance models along the development path of the two operas, the training system, and the transfer of skills, training periods, schools and phenomena. The importance of the Fulien Chen School, its pedagogical methods and practices, the way of exchanging learning content at the different level of learning, peculiarities and the ultimate goal in practicing and learning the repertoire are entirely in the context of the place assigned to a typical representative of an art school.

Of particular interest to the researcher is the modern academic training system at the Peking Opera. The discussed specifics give visibility to the understanding of the modern concept of education in harmony with the world trends and practices. In the model of inheritance in the Italian opera (*bel canto*), the research moves in a similar way. The Roman, Neapolitan, Bolognese and Venetian schools are presented here with their peculiarities and main representatives. The author studies the mechanism of origin of *bel canto*, the technique of its teaching, the leading medical, psychological and vocal

principles, the recognition of the physiological mechanism and the scientific knowledge of the anatomical features of the vocal apparatus are examined. The image of Antonio "Toto" Cotogni as a "Teacher" with exceptional qualities in this vocation and his role in preserving, teaching and spreading the most defining and valuable norms for bel canto is personalized. Cotogni vocal technique as "the culmination and even the norm of the Italian bel canto" was documented by his student Luigi Ricci and collected in four books – a guardian and subject of the tradition.

The last **fourth chapter** of the work studies the problems and the constructive solutions valid for the two operas. Wang Ye explores the uncomfortable new realities of both arts. This is directly related to the different temporality of life now, and at the time when the Peking Opera and the Italian Opera were created. The author shows the ways of renewal and integration into the new changed cultural, spiritual and social environment.

Indisputably, the digital age is putting strain on the high art in its ways of survival. Communication is changing through mass media and displacing the natural process of communicating with the audience. The development of technology also creates advantages, which Wang Ye conceptualizes and reflects as a resource, emphasizing the advantages in process-reflecting categories, such as: convenience and companionship, generality and individuality, interactivity, etc. The communication process is multidirectional in its manifestations and its results have a two-way influence.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above, I consider that the doctoral candidate demonstrates a high degree of erudition, excellent awareness and highly critical rational thought on the stated topic. I was particularly impressed by the cognitive versatility of the work, refracted creatively through the personal prism and experience of the researcher.

The purpose and subject of research, laid down in the synthesis of origin and development, as well as the illumination of the differences in the historical prerequisites of the two operas, their current state, problems, difficulties and proposed solutions to deal with them, have been fulfilled.

Undoubtedly for me, this work is a solid bridge for the convergence of two cultures and a starting point for new research on the subject.

Briefly, the contributions of the dissertation can be summarized as follows:

1. The dissertation is the first comparison between the educational and hereditary models of the Peking and the Italian opera.
2. Wang Ye makes the first comparative study of the Peking and the Italian opera in a comprehensive systematized form.
3. Regarding their stage performance in the social, historical and cultural processes, the vocal techniques are analyzed in detail, the role of the musical characteristics and dramaturgical structure of two iconic works - *The Drunken Concubine* and *Madame Butterfly* are classified.

4. The author's suggestions for solving the problems that the two operas are facing during the time of digitalization are well-argued.

5. This work is encouraging in terms of academic research and cultural exchange between two historically established phenomena and contributes to their better understanding.

I congratulate Wang Ye and his scientific leader Prof Tony Shekerdzhieva-Novak on the result of their joint work.

On the grounds of the above, I confidently give my positive assessment and propose to the respected scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (in professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art, Doctoral Program Music Studies and Music Art") to Wang Ye.

18.11.2022 .
Plovdiv

Reviewer:
Prof Lyudmil Petkov