

REVIEW

by
Prof Svilen Raychev, PhD

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

to

Zhou Xiangfei

titled:

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE CHINESE AND THE WESTERN OPERA ART

Academic supervisor Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak

Zhou Xiangfei was born in China. He graduated with a Bachelor's and Master's degree from the Sichuan Conservatory in China, where he was subsequently appointed as a teacher of classical singing. During his studies and teaching, he repeatedly won awards in various vocal competitions.

He has participated in numerous opera productions and concerts, such as the operas *La Traviata*, *Carmen*, Chinese operas by Wang Guangqi, and other opera roles.

Since 2022, he is a full-time doctoral student, paid studies in professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art, doctoral program Music Studies and Music Art at the Department of Classical, Pop and Jazz Performance Art at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv.

He was discharged with the right of defense by order No RD-27- 165 of 05.11.2024.

The dissertation was discussed and proposed for public defense at a meeting of the Department of Classical, Pop and Jazz Performance Arts at AMDFA "Prof. Asen Diamandiev" – Plovdiv, held on 29.10.2024.

The dissertation contains a total of 163 pages, which include introduction, seven chapters with subsections, conclusion, bibliography, contributing points. A list of scientific publications on the topic of the research and applications is also attached. The dissertation covers various aspects of the Chinese opera art by exploring the historical development of the Chinese opera, which absorbs validated creative techniques and performance methods of the Western opera, incorporating elements and forms of the Chinese folk and traditional music.

The main goal of this work is to trace the evolution and adaptation of the Chinese opera in different cultural contexts, studying its influence and integration into these diverse traditions. The research expands our understanding of vocal techniques, which is useful for performers and teachers of classical, contemporary and Chinese opera.

Through a comparative analysis of the Chinese opera and the Western singing, an existing research gap can be filled, increasing the academic community's understanding of vocal education and cross-cultural communication. The dissertation is a groundbreaking study of the different uses of singing technique in view of the characteristics of the different languages.

The **first chapter**, Economic Foundations of the Origin and Development of the Chinese and the Western Opera, examines the origins and early development of vocal art and the importance of music education in Ancient Greece and Rome, it also points out that opera originated from the ancient Greek and Roman theatrical tradition, which combined poetry, music, and dance. Religious and secular music played a significant role in the increasingly marked independence of music, but the author pays special attention to the role of the Renaissance and subsequent eras in the undoubted maturation of vocal art and its spread, and emphasizes the precision of vocal technique. The rapid development of the industrial and commercial economy in the Italian cities is shown as a result of the legacy of the commercial civilization and maritime trade of ancient Rome and ancient Greece. This is compared with the initial state of the Chinese economy during the period of the emergence of opera and after the Opium War.

The **second chapter** is titled The Political Origin and Development of the Chinese Opera and the Western Opera, and compares the historical political traditions in Europe and China.

The **third chapter** is titled The Cultural Origin and Development of the Chinese Opera and the Western Opera. This chapter compares the culture of Western Europe, which inherited the rich cultural heritage and erudite artistic cultural tradition of ancient Greece and ancient Rome, and the early yin-yang figurative thinking in China and the huge influence of the New Culture Movement in modern China. Special attention is paid to the contemporary Sino-European cultural exchange, which brought new musical theories and creative techniques to the birth of the Chinese opera.

The **fourth chapter** is about the “Cultural Genes” and the ways of thinking in the Chinese and the Western opera culture. I quote: “*These “cultural genes” are the soul of the cultural phenomena of the peoples, the basis for distinguishing different cultural phenomena*”. Page 24 of the Abstract.

The author concludes that, I quote: “*Despite the completely different “Cultural Genes” of Western Europe and China, the coexistence, exchange, collision and integration of such strong cultures must continue.*” Page 25 of the Abstract.

The **fifth chapter** examines the artistic aesthetics and artistic expressiveness in the Chinese and the Western opera, with the aesthetic ideal being the beauty of goodness and true beauty. The European realistic style and the Chinese classical artistic style of harmony and grace are compared.

Chapter six is titled Comparison between Chinese and Western Literature, which naturally leads to a comparison of the literary characteristics of the Chinese and the Western opera and drama, noting the differences in the Chinese and the Western dramatic literary traditions: poetry and epic.

Logically, the next **seventh chapter** is titled The Integration and Development of the Chinese and the Western Opera Culture through Exchange and it emphasizes that this exchange is two-way and the “Chinese Elements” enrich the Western opera music culture.

Quite naturally, in view of the author’s background, his attention is focused more on the historical roots and stylistic characteristics in the development of the Chinese opera, which, under the influence of the Western musical education and cultural exchange, gradually introduced the techniques of the Western European opera and integrated it into the local musical culture, combining it with elements of the traditional Chinese music.

In the conclusion, an attempt is made to summarize the issues and bring out the contributing points in the text. The research focuses on how Western European singing styles have been adopted and adapted by artists and educators to meet the cultural and linguistic characteristics of China.

The dissertation is an analytical reflection of the author on the traditions of the European and the Chinese vocal music. 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 developments, also as a valuable guideline for the benefit of both the singers who begin their creative journey with the intention of conquering the world stages, as well as their teachers.

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

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

The abstract fully corresponds to the content of the dissertation.

The doctoral 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 Zhou Xiangfei 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" in professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art and I call on the esteemed scientific jury to award him this degree.

I would also like to express my special congratulations to the academic supervisor Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak for the work well done.

Prof Svilen Rachev, PhD