

REVIEW

by Prof Daniela Kirilova Dzheneva, PhD

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

Professional field Music and Dance Art

Doctoral program Choreography

Author: **Xiaofang Sun**

Topic: *Principles of Teaching in Choreography - Theory and Practice*

Academic supervisor: Prof Zhelka Tabakova, PhD

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

The author of the dissertation is Xiaofang Sun – full-time doctoral student at the Department of Choreography at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv with academic supervisor Prof Zhelka Tabakova. The materials presented by her in the procedure meet the requirements of the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA) and the Regulations for its implementation for the conditions and procedure for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions in AMDFA. They contain the necessary orders, dissertation work, abstract, list of author's publications - 6 in number (2 – in Bulgaria and 4 – in China), a creative autobiography and a report on the contributions of the dissertation.

2. Brief biographical data of the candidate

Xiaofang Sun is born in 1980 in Yingkou, China, where she graduated high school. In 2003, she graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Dance (Dance Education) from the Shenyang Conservatory of Music. In 2009, she obtained a second degree in Dance Arts from the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. In January 2022, she was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student, and in October 2024, she was discharged with the right to public defense. Xiaofang Sun has an enviable professional background. She has been a dance teacher at the Shenyang Conservatory of Music since 2003. She participated in three consecutive years in 2020, 2021, and 2022 in research projects. She has been awarded for authorship of modern dance in 6 competitions in China and the International Dance Talent Competition in Italy. In total, from 2010 to now, she has published 3 books and 9 articles on topics related to dance education and art. She is a member of the "Song and Dance Committee" of the China Association for Professional Arts Education. She is evaluator for the "Talent Center" of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in China. She is a member of associations and societies related to dance art.

3. Relevance of the topic

The topic of the dissertation is relevant due to the fact that for the first time it analyzes the principles of choreography training in China in terms of theory, methodology and performance. The doctoral student explores the necessary complex skills of choreography teachers, including strict

professional training, broad knowledge in the fields of art and culture and the development of the necessary aesthetic qualities. The analysis of the tangible conditionality between choreographers and choreography teachers is also absolutely relevant, revealing facts that deserve in-depth research in the different national practices.

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

The methods used are a review of the literature on the topic, collection of data from various types of archival documents, analysis and systematization of the acquired information through empirical approaches. A statistical analysis of the collected data on teaching practice and related regularities, including both unforeseen difficulties and expected problems, was carried out. A comparative analysis of data from educational documentation, curricula and other aspects characteristic of choreographic specialties of higher education institutions of the arts in China was carried out. The methodology used provides a broad basis for scientific research on the topic, as well as rich evidentiary material.

5. Evaluation of the dissertation

Xiaofang Sun's dissertation is 210 pages long. The bibliography used includes 79 titles (9 of which are not by Chinese authors), as well as links to 4 Internet sources of information on the topic. A list of the performances analyzed in the dissertation, which were performed on the stages, is attached: Dutch National Opera - Amsterdam, Netherlands; Maly Theater - St. Petersburg, Russia; Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, USA; Shenzhen Opera and Dance Theater, China; National Center for the Performing Arts and Tianqiao Theater in Beijing; Musical Theater in Lanzhou, China.

In the introduction, the author presents her personal motivation to write a paper on the principles of choreography education in China. When listing the chosen methods, she summarizes that *the presentation and analysis of these data not only provide strong evidentiary support for our research, but also point the way for further reforms*. The main goal of this study is similarly formulated – to support teaching practice and to present feasible and applicable innovative approaches to choreographer education. Three specific and clearly defined tasks are argued for achieving this goal.

The first chapter examines the professional qualities of choreography teachers. The pedagogical and social functions of the profession are analyzed in depth. The skills they must acquire are formulated from the perspective of the obvious duality associated with the direct connection between creativity and training. The doctoral student gives an example of such similarities with the analogy between the choreographer-artist and the teacher of choreography. It should be emphasized that she examines in detail all the professional duties of the choreography teacher. It is interesting that the conclusions drawn show an extremely high number of similarities in the requirements for the profession in both China and Bulgaria. This speaks of a universality of the specialist, which implies that he must have performing qualities, pedagogical skills and creative approach. All this also includes knowledge of dance and music theory; of styles and genres; of compositional forms and directorial decisions. In this regard, the author has drawn a very meaningful conclusion that choreography

teachers must learn and improve throughout their lives in order to be able to meet the achievements of dance art and the specific requirements of the time. She believes that after decades of efforts, the specialty "Choreography" in the Chinese higher education institutions is currently showing a favorable development trend. Analyzing the individual modern aspects of this process, she highlights the need for cooperation between the creative industry, education and scientific research.

Chapter two is entitled "The professional skills a choreography teacher must have". At first reading, there is a resemblance to the first chapter, but this is definitely not the case, especially if we disregard the titles. Here, the necessary professional and creative abilities of the choreographer are examined. The doctoral student has separately developed the qualities that must be acquired, starting from the sense of aesthetics and the inner emotional feelings generated by the harmony between reality and illusion. Moreover, she defines emotion as the *true driving force of dance*. Here I will have to repeat the obvious analogy in the requirements for dance artists in China and Bulgaria, but already at a higher level, when they must create "images" and breathe "life" into them. The analysis of dance vocabulary is carried out in three aspects. For the ballet performance, the movements are considered as subject to the plot, space and expressiveness of the performer. Regarding the creation of contemporary dance, the inherent characteristics are defined – multidimensional spatiality, "time" techniques and mandatory contrast as a condition for a good result. The necessary skills for the Chinese folk dances are related to observing the ethnographic affiliation (style) of the dance and its functionality (character). An extensive and detailed analysis of "dance thought" follows, as this term includes all the necessary skills for achieving a creative symbiosis between "form" and "content", as well as between "time" and "place" of the action. A special place is devoted to the work on the metro-rhythm in contemporary dance as a challenge in terms of musical phrasing.

The third chapter analyzes the skills that the choreographer must have in order to perform a performance in a specific dance form. Regarding the choice of training methods in this direction, the author considers three main options. She puts first the combination of theory and practice (demonstration). The second type is associated with the acquisition of skills for evaluation and analysis, followed by a discussion of the achieved results. These methods are examined in detail according to the need to acquire specific skills for performing different types of dances - chamber and mass. By revealing choreographic dramaturgy as a type of art, training in creating a dance performance is also initiated. The doctoral student places great emphasis on mastering the "dance" vocabulary, as an important part of the dynamic analysis of the works, again examining them separately for traditional, classical and contemporary dance. Emblematic works have been selected as examples, which in turn has a positive effect on the visualization of the methodology.

An extensive conclusion follows with meaningful summaries and conclusions. A place is devoted to the new trends in choreography of the 21st century, identifying four inherent characteristics. One of them sounds particularly positive, because the art of dance, through its means of expression, becomes a means of intercultural communication and influence. Finally, the conclusion

analyzes some shortcomings in the teaching of choreography in the Chinese universities. The aim is to formulate certain recommendations, namely: the need for a comprehensive, systematic training program is growing; a balance is needed in the regional distribution of specialists; approaches must be found to stimulate the creative thinking of students and, last but not least, contemporary choreography must develop on the basis of Chinese dance culture.

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

In general, I would summarize that Xiaofang Sun knows the problems and has approached analytically and constructively in presenting his thesis. The contributions defined by her clearly and accurately reflect the results of the dissertation in two directions – in scientific and in practical. The significant among them are the first-ever structural analysis of dance education in the Chinese universities and the analysis of the similarities and differences in the professional requirements for choreography teachers and choreographers. The publications attached to the materials are inherent to the main topic, with two of them being published in Bulgarian scientific editions – the Yearbook of AMDFA “Prof Asen Diamandiev”, Plovdiv for 2023 and the edition of “Doctoral Readings 2024” of National Academy of Music “Prof P. Vladigerov”, Sofia.

7. Critical remarks and recommendations

I recommend that the doctoral student publish this dissertation in a book, if this can be done in Bulgarian it would be an interesting read for students and dance specialists in our country. The text is written academically, with understanding and a lot of facts. I attribute some inaccuracies in the statement to the translation, given the specific words and expressions related to choreography.

8. Abstract:

The presented Abstract introduces us briefly to the main chapters, conclusions and contributions of the dissertation. It is 65 pages and in a synthesized form it informs us about the content and the motivation for writing it. It is prepared in compliance with the requirements of the relevant rules and regulations.

9. Conclusion:

Considering the above, I am convinced that I give my positive assessment of the conducted research, represented by a dissertation, an abstract, achieved results and contributions, and I propose to the honourable scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Xiaofang Sun in professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art, doctoral program Choreography.

02.12.2024

Reviewer:.....

/Prof D. Dzheneva, PhD/