

REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof Eduard Magardich Sarafyan, PhD

AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev", Plovdiv
of dissertation work for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"
in professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art
in the doctoral program Music Studies and Music Art

on

Tianzi Tian

PhD student at the Department of Classical and Pop and Jazz Performing Arts

Faculty of Music Pedagogy of AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev"

titled: *A History of Modern Opera in China from the Birth of the Genre to the Present - a detailed analysis of the most significant operas of the period*

Academic supervisor: Prof. Plamen Parvanov

General presentation of the procedure and the materials presented for review

Tianzi Tian's **dissertation** on *A History of Modern Opera in China from the Birth of the Genre to the Present - a detailed analysis of the most significant operas of the period* meets the regulatory requirements for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor". The candidate has presented a work that, in its size and content, meets all expectations for a complete and valuable scientific literature in the field of musical art with an even greater contribution to the Chinese musical culture. The **abstract** is 59 pages, in which the author skillfully synthesized essential highlights of the research, which in turn are able to fully reveal the content of the dissertation work. The presented **scientific publications** on the subject outline in different stages of the research, respectively, the periods in the development of the Chinese opera. The personal **artistic biography** of the doctoral candidate reveals the achievements and educational parameters of her development as a musician and teacher, which naturally leads to her in-depth knowledge and interests in her professional career. The **contributions** of the work listed by the author correspond directly with the goals and tasks of the research set in advance.

The dissertation follows the scientific style of writing, relevant terminology, analytical attitude to the object, consistency in construction, references and interrelationships between eras, styles and other components directly related to the subject of the study. The scope of the subject is undoubtedly wide, but the author has managed to look at all possible sides of the problem and extract the significant circumstances and facts. On the basis of this evident preparation and extensive knowledge

in the field, the doctoral student Tianzi Tian analyzes logically and objectively both the events and facts of history, as well as the artistic values of the musical compositions themselves.

Brief biographical data for the candidate:

Tianzi Tian is born on 19 November 1992. From 2011 to 2015, she studied vocal music at Xiamen University - Fujian Province, China, where she obtained a Bachelor's degree in Music Art. During her studies at Xiamen University, she won a National Scholarship for Outstanding Results, which placed her on the list of the Three Excellent Students.

From 2016-2018, TianziTian studied in a master program at the Manhattan School of Music (ranked third in the world) majoring in Classical Singing under the class of renowned soprano Joan Patenaude. While at Manhattan, she won the Academic Excellence Award with a GPA of 3.9.

Since 2019, she has been a vocal teacher at Minnan Normal University in Fujian Province, China.

In 2020, she was enrolled as a doctoral student at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv in full-time study with academic supervisor Assoc. Prof Plamen Parvanov.

Participation in contests and received awards

Classical singing:

- In December 2020, she won second prize at the International Opera Competition in New York, participating in the semi-finals in China.
- In December 2020, she won the Golden Bell Award and Silver Medal in the Fifth Fujian Province Vocal Competition.
- Won the Outstanding Singing Performance Award at the 2019 Asian International Vocal Competition Final.
- 2012 - Golden Award at the Campus Talent Competition of Fujian Division (Pele).

Piano

- First place with the Fujian Provincial Professional Concert Ensemble in the Fourth International Piano Competition held in Hong Kong in 2013.

Work as performer

- Zerlina in the opera *Don Giovanni* by Mozart - performed with great success at the Berlin Opera Academy in July - August 2019 under the direction of Kevin Klass and the direction of Metropolitan Opera tenor Ricardo Tamura.
- The Queen of the Night in the opera *The Magic Flute* by Mozart (German version), performed at the National Opera Center from June 3 to July 1, 2019, conducted by Stephan Fillare. Tianzi Tian is the only Chinese woman cast in Manhattan Opera in 2019. In April 2018, she took part in performances of the English version of the opera at the Manhattan School of Music in New York. The production visited New York 7 times.

- In the period 2015-2018 Tianzi Tian did active concert work, after which she began her teaching career at Minnan University, where she still teaches Classical Singing and Piano.

Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation work and contributions

The dissertation consists of 228 pages, structured in an introduction, 5 chapters, conclusion, contributions, bibliography and scientific publications on the subject. The candidate outlines in detail and clearly the parameters of the literature review on the subject of the study, the relevance of the subject and the author's personal motivation. The text emphasizes the conscious concern of the dissertation to the need to make efforts in the research aspect to make a contribution to the development and affirmation of the Chinese opera in the future. In this regard, we can conclude that the present dissertation work is the fruit of a peculiar cause, which Tianzi Tian zealously defends in harmony with her skills of conducting independent in-depth scientific research with contributing qualities.

The **motivation** for the choice of topic is clearly evident in the scientific research and is expressed in the author's personal attitude and concern for the development of the Chinese opera art. The dissertation aims to cover and systematize the path of development of the Chinese opera by tracing and analyzing the evolution of the genre up to the present day.

It is not surprising that in the following lines of the **Introduction**, the doctoral candidate precisely formulates the object, the subject, the goals and tasks of the research, namely:

Object: the Chinese opera from its birth to the present, and in particular the most significant operas from the various stages of the genre's development.

Subject: the historical development and the circumstances in the formation of the features of the most significant Chinese operas during the individual periods and their influence on the appearance of the modern Chinese opera from different points of view.

Goals: outlining the evolution of the Chinese opera; classifying and systematizing varieties in relation to dramaturgy; prospects for the future development of the genre.

On the basis of the stated goals, the doctoral student sets relevant **tasks**, which in the development, conclusion, outcomes and contributions of the Dissertation can be easily tracked and evaluated as fulfilled.

The author uses various **research methods** such as statistical analysis, comparison, inductive method, personal meetings with composers, vocal educators and artists in order to study the development and to systematize the evolution and characteristics of the Chinese operas, as well as presenting personal author's views and reflections on future trends in Chinese opera art.

The **first chapter** traces the entry of the traditional Western opera, its place and significance in China. The creative pursuits of the Chinese composers and their attempts to combine Chinese and Western musical elements are reviewed. In this line of thought, school songs are first examined as the first musical form in the Chinese composition school to borrow elements from the Western music.

The **second chapter** examines the types of operas during the Anti-Japanese War and analyzes the artistic meaning, musical material, musical form and vocal style in the first Chinese opera *The White Haired Maiden*. A classification of Chinese original operas from the war period to the founding of the People's Republic of China is made in terms of plot type and musical material, accompanied by an analysis of the most essential qualities of the representative works. The author compares in a summarized form, the Chinese opera and other theatrical forms during the considered period and studies their influence on the opera art in building its own image. At the same time, the cultural exchange between China and the Western countries in the field of opera has been traced in the course of its perception and study during this period. The period is associated with the first appearance of Chinese operas on the international stage.

Chapter Three presents the state of the Chinese opera in the context of the Cultural Revolution. In particular, the role and significance of the opera *Legend of the Red Lantern* as the most influential opera at that time is presented and analyzed. The representative works during the stagnation period, their varieties, musical material and their characteristic artistic innovations are examined. The measures for the development of the Chinese opera during the years of recovery after the Cultural Revolution are traced, with the original opera works grouped according to plot and musical material. Three representative works from this period are used as examples of the refinement and renewal of the opera art during this period.

The **fourth chapter** outlines the development of the Chinese opera in the period from 1980 to 2000, categorizing operas according to their subject matter into the following four categories: Operas modeled after the classical Western opera; Operas on revolutionary themes; Folk operas (based on regional folk music or music of ethnic minorities) and Operas of a modernist nature (created according to the compositional concepts of the Western modernism). In tabular form, the author also presents the vocal performance styles of the operas from the specified categories. A separate column presents examples that do not fall into any of the categories defined as "specific" [DT, p. 127]. The doctoral student uses examples from different categories and looks for peculiarities in artistic concepts and trends in their construction. *Grievance about the Past* is analyzed in detail as an example of a work in the style of the Western opera. The modernist operas *Wild Fields* and *Nine Songs* are analyzed in terms of their compositional technique, vocal forms, artistic significance and innovative value. The characteristics of the Chinese original operas during this period are summarized and the qualitative differences compared to the previous period are noted.

The **fifth chapter** focuses on the development of the Chinese opera in its heyday (2000 – 2023) by bringing out the six main types of opera and classifying them according to type, theme and singing style. Based on the examples of *Saying Goodbye to Cambridge Again*, *Dunhuang Hymn of Kindness* and *Dunhuang Ode to Mercy* in addition to the traditional opera, three types of innovative opera works in the new century are analyzed - chamber opera, opera-oratorio and innovative complex

opera. The opera *Jianzhen Voyage to the East* is presented as an example of a new type of classical opera, and the differences compared to the previous type of classical opera are pointed out.

The individual chapters of the dissertation end with summaries and conclusions presented in the form of tables where applicable. This approach provides a clear idea of the main highlights of the materials discussed in the relevant chapter. The evolution and varieties of the Chinese opera for the relevant periods from its inception to the present day are systematically and orderly traced.

The **Conclusion** summarizes the main lines in the development of the original Chinese operas, analyzes the differences between the Chinese national operas and those modeled after the Western operas, as well as their influence on the history of the Chinese opera art. This part of the work also articulates the future perspectives in the development of the Chinese operas. The author makes predictions on the basis of the premises studied in the course of the research about the future trends of the development of the Chinese opera art, expressing her personal point of view and ideas.

The **bibliography** at the end of the work consists of 91 sources, of which 58 are in Chinese and 33 are Internet sources. The amount of literature used is absolutely sufficient, but I would recommend using literature that is based on studies of European musical culture in the original language.

Undoubtedly, this is a huge topic, but Tianzi Tian has managed to build a coherent scientific work, through which she systematizes all the important moments of the development of the Chinese opera, introduces readers to significant opera titles, their history, happenings, etc. by analyzing the approaches from their creation, through their artistic and performance characteristics and value, to their (non)existence on the Chinese and world opera stages to date. Among the merits of the dissertation work are also the music examples, photos and illustrations contained in it, as well as the correct citations, reliance on other sources and author's explanatory notes, which make it easier to follow the main scientific text.

Contributions and significance of the dissertation and the publications on its topic

The mentioned contributions of the dissertation are correct and eloquently outline the research work done by the doctoral student. The scholarly publications of the doctoral student are quite numerous and present key moments and compositions of the development of Chinese opera. The work can be defined as a thorough and comprehensive systematized study of Chinese opera art.

I give my positive assessment of Tianzi Tian's dissertation work *A History of Modern Opera in China from the Birth of the Genre to the Present - a detailed analysis of the most significant operas of the period*, under the skillful scientific guidance of Assoc. Prof Plamen Parvanov. I believe that the dissertation fully meets the requirements of the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria Act. I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award Tianzi Tian an educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art.

26.06.2024 г.

Reviewer:

Plovdiv

/Assoc. Prof Dr. Eduard Sarafyan /