

REVIEW

Prof Deyan Evgeniev Pavlov

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

Topic: *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,*

Author: Tianzi Tian

Academic supervisor: Assoc. Prof Plamen Parvanov

Department of Classical and Pop and Jazz Performing Arts
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in professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art,
Doctoral program Music Studies and Music Art

Education

In 2011, Tianzi Tian was admitted to the Music College of Fujian Province (professional courses and creative courses). Graduated from higher music education, Bachelor's degree at the Department of Music at Xiamen University. Won the Outstanding Graduate award. From 2016 to 2018, she received a scholarship and studied at the Manhattan School of Music in the USA, majoring in vocal music in the class of the famous soprano Joan Patenaude. During her studies at the Manhattan School of Music, she won the Honourable Mention Award for academic excellence. From 2020 to 2024, she is a doctoral student at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof Asen Diamandiev" in Plovdiv in doctoral program Music Studies and Music Art and from April 2024 she was discharged with the right of defence.

Awards:

Vocal Music - June 2021 Third prize in the professional category of the Online International Vocal Competition of the Paris Art Association, France. December; 2020 Second prize in the Chinese Division of the New York International Opera Competition (qualifies for the Asian Semi-Final). 12.12.2020 Silver medal in the bel canto category of the 5th Fujian Province Golden Bell Vocal Competition. 2019 Outstanding Singing Award in the Final of the Asian International Vocal Competition.

Piano Art - Won first place in the professional performance category, Fujian Division at the 4th Hong Kong International Piano Open in 2013 and first place at the Hong Kong Finals.

Performing Experience – February-April 2018 participated in the Outreach Opera Project at the Manhattan School of Music in New York and performed the role of the Queen of the Night in the English version of *The Magic Flute*. Her performance is highly praised on the opera's website: "Tianzi Tian was irresistible as the 'Queen of the Night' in her performance of the heroine's most popular aria in the abridged version, standing with authority in the plot of the story". She performs in seven concerts in New York, playing that role.

July-August 2018. Participated as an opera singer at the International Lyrics Academy in the Italian Summer Spectacle - a performance at the Teatro Vicenza, Italy.

June-July 2019 Participated as an opera singer (the only representative of China in this project in 2019) in the Manhattan Opera Studio's summer performance program in the United States. Performed the role of the Queen of the Night in the original German opera *The Magic Flute* at the National Opera Centre.

In July 2019, she performed the aria of the heroine Manon in the opera *Manon* at the MOS Opera Gala Aria Concert at Carnegie Hall in New York. Passes the selection of the Berlin Opera Academy, a prestigious opera program in the musical circles. In the 2019 summer opera program, she performs the role of Zerlina in the opera *Don Giovanni* in Delphi. The opera performance is co-directed by Peter Leonard, conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, Tom Seligman, conductor of the Royal Opera House, Pamela Armstrong, renowned soprano of the Metropolitan Opera House, and Ricardo Tamura, renowned tenor of the Metropolitan Opera.

Professional Experience

For three years, from September 2019 to June 2022, she worked as a visiting lecturer in vocal music at the University of Minnan, teaching vocal music classes and the professional elective course Learning the Language of Singing. During her three years of teaching at Fujian Normal University, she was well received and her students made great progress. The percentage of her students passing the postgraduate entrance exams is 100%, and they are studying for master's degrees in domestic and foreign universities - Fujian University, Jimei University, Quanzhou University, Wenzhou University, Qinghai University, etc. From September 2019 to June 2020, she worked as a visiting teacher of music theory and singing and ear training in the high school class of the Xiamen Conservatory of Music, teaching instrumental music students. She received high marks for her work.

Author's works

1. Composed the Chinese bel canto art song *Homesick* and the English art songs *Blind Love* and *Fill My Class with Love*.

2. Composed string quartet *Consequence*.
3. Composed the cycle *Memoirs of a Dead Man* (piano/cello/viola/flute).
4. Composed the choral song *Music Brings Us Together*.
5. Creates film theme songs and interludes for the works *Winter Cradle* and *Heritage Poems* presented at the Student Short Film Festival. Composed the modern song *Distance*. Created the multimedia project "Spirit".

The CONTRIBUTIONS of Tianzi Tian's dissertation are:

A proposed classification of Chinese opera:

In the scientific literature on the history of the Chinese music, there is no shortage of analyzes of specific Chinese opera works, but there are not enough studies devoted to a systematic classification of the Chinese operas based on musical material, subject matter, composition technique, and other aspects. In the present dissertation, the Chinese operas are carefully examined and categorized, the types of operas in the different periods are presented in tables and relevant examples of representative works are analyzed. Especially opera works in the 21st century are numerous, diverse, include many cross-border elements and are difficult to classify; in this sense, the dissertation is an attempt to pave new paths to scientific and reference literature.

Opera material is presented in maximum detail

The researchers of Chinese opera have a large amount of material on works from the 20th century, but the operas from the beginning of the 20th century to the present are impressive in number and from a wide variety of origins: opera houses, universities, public or private performing institutions, works of authors from the independent cultural sector, professionals or amateurs from different parts of the country - all these circumstances make it difficult to collect research material. In addition, due to copyright issues, it is difficult to obtain video materials and complete scores of operas in the new century, making their analysis and classification particularly difficult. The dissertation work of Tianzi Tian is the result of numerous meetings and conversations with composers and musicians to obtain information about the works, sheet music, video, audio, etc. materials to achieve comprehensiveness in the presented data, and the correctness of the classification.

The evolution of the artistic elements in Chinese opera is demonstrated

The plot themes, musical material and modes of singing in the original Chinese operas during the various periods are detailed, tracing the changes and development of the artistic elements from simplicity to complexity and from monotony to variety.

A characterization and comparison of the relevant periods is made

The characteristics of the original Chinese operas during the different periods are analyzed and summarized in view of various aspects such as musical material, plot and theme, expressive

forms and composing technique, with the emphasis placed on innovation and progress compared to the previous period.

A comparative analysis is made between the different categories and types of opera

The comparative study made between opera and other artistic forms of the same period reveals how they influence approaches in the creation and construction of the Chinese opera stylistics; the characteristics and differences between the two main creative trends in opera are indicated: the Chinese national opera and the Western-type opera; the technical approach to incorporating material from traditional Chinese dramas into Chinese national opera and the commonalities with the Western opera are noted.

A comparative analysis of the operas of the same type during different periods of development is made

The manifestations of innovation in the selection of musical means, musical form and structure, and compositional technique in operas of the same type in different periods are compared, as well as their evolution, correlation and development from the early formative period to the heyday of Chinese opera.

The connections between Chinese and Western opera are analyzed

The influence of the Western opera on the creation of Chinese opera works and the knowledge that Chinese opera reaches are examined; the differences between Chinese and Western operas are clarified.

The characteristic features of the Chinese opera are summarized. Trends for future development are outlined and suggestions are made.

The 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* consists of an introduction, five main chapters, conclusion, contributions and scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation work.

Review of the scientific literature on the subject.

A detailed search and review of the three databases: the National Library of China, Duxiu Chinese Library, Duxiu Chinese Academic Search, and Chaoxing Electronic Books with the search parameters "Chinese opera" found over 300 scientific publications for the thirty-year period since its publication in 1990 *Collection of Chinese Opera Art* to 2023. Among them, 42 theoretical titles refer to "opera work analysis" and "performance analysis", over 160 are opera scores and anthologies, and the other related publications are 106. When searching the database such as CNKI, Wanfang Database, Web of Science and China National Knowledge Infrastructure Document Analysis Platform, as of April 2024, the total number of documents related to Chinese opera reached 2,918, including 2,709 in Chinese (1,734 articles in academic journals and newspapers,

231 Master's theses or dissertations, 509 conference collections, 6 books) and 209 titles in foreign languages.

Relevance of the topic

The conclusions of the detailed research of the scientific literature indicate that the research on Chinese opera is in the following two main directions:

1. Studies of the development of the Chinese opera from a purely historical point of view. This type of research focuses on the time and circumstances surrounding the creation of the opera work, a brief description of the music in it and the situation with its stage realization;
2. Studies related to the performances of Chinese operas, which focus mainly on the ways and forms of their vocal-stage re-creation.

Motivation for choosing the topic

Although opera as a genre originated in the West, in the process of its *Sinicization*, the untiring efforts of several generations of artists resulted in the transformation of the original Chinese opera into a complex art form, combining Chinese and non-Chinese characteristics, and functioning as one of the important conductors of Chinese and Western music, art and culture. The in-depth study of the century-long history of the original Chinese opera and the present study is motivated by the desire to keep the Chinese opera art flourishing and for the Chinese opera to take its rightful place on the world opera stage. To realize this aspiration, one must work hard, researching the regularities in the development of Chinese opera, and thus plan the most suitable path for its development. These circumstances determine the motivation for the choice of topic and the significance of the dissertation.

Object of the research is 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 is 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:

- To trace the evolution of the Chinese opera; To classify and systematize its varieties from the point of view of dramatic construction (musical material, theme, compositional technique, etc.); An attempt to trace the prerequisites for the future development of the genre and author's proposals for its popularization.

Tasks:

- To highlight the peculiarities of the original operas during the different periods from different aspects and to visually present the transformations and evolution of the artistic components from simple to complex and from uniformity to diversity.

- A study of the historical process of creating the original Chinese opera from the earliest years to the mature period, from the uncertain first steps to its heyday.

- Using the method of comparative analysis, to trace progress and innovation in each period compared to the previous one.

- Comparison of operas of the same variety; Comparison of different types of Chinese operas.

- Tracing the regularities in the development of the Chinese opera.

- Predictions of the trends of the future development of Chinese opera creativity and compilation of author's proposals that could attract attention not only in view of the development of the Chinese opera, but also for the benefit of international musical and cultural exchange.

Research methods.

The used research methods include: review of scientific literature, statistical analysis, random research, comparative research, inductive method, personal visits to cultural circles and meetings with artists for a deeper study of the historical development, subject matter, musical characteristics, etc. of the original Chinese operas and systematizing the development process and characteristics of the Chinese original operas, as well as presenting the author's personal views and reflections on the future trends of the Chinese opera art.

Scientific publications on the topic of the Dissertation work – the candidate presents three sources in which she has published articles related to the topic of her work.

CHAPTER ONE traces the entry of the traditional Western opera into China and examines the reasons for its difficult first steps on Chinese soil. The creative pursuits of Chinese composers and their attempts to combine Chinese and Western musical elements (e.g. in school songs and short lyrical dramas) are reviewed.

CHAPTER TWO 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 on the path of its *Sinicization*.

CHAPTER THREE describes the state of the Chinese opera in the political context of the Cultural Revolution, analyzes in detail the artistic significance and musical qualities of *The Legend*

of the Red Lantern. Representative works during the stasis period are listed and their varieties, musical material and innovations are summarized.

CHAPTER FOUR traces the development of the Chinese opera from 1980 to 2000, grouping the works of this period into three main categories according to subject matter (with examples from the respective categories, explanations of their artistic concept and creative trends in each category).

CHAPTER FIVE examines the development of the Chinese opera from 2000 to 2023, outlines the six main types of opera in this flourishing period, and makes a detailed classification according to typology, musical themes, etc. explains the artistic concept of each type of opera and the subject matter, indicates relevant representative titles, etc.

The CONCLUSION summarizes the development of the original Chinese operas and outlines the different types of operas, plot themes, musical material and singing styles during different periods. Additionally, the differences between the Chinese national operas and those modeled after the Western opera are analyzed, as well as their influence on the history of the Chinese opera art. Predictions are proposed based on the prerequisites studied so far for the future development trends of the Chinese opera art, and the author's personal point of view and ideas about them are presented. Each individual chapter of the dissertation work contains a table that presents systematically by category the evolution and varieties of the Chinese opera for the corresponding period of its development from its inception to the present day.

Having read the dissertation I appreciate the depth with which the candidate has worked and the many materials, interviews and personal conversations have been used, I find that the dissertation work is necessary for a deep understanding of the essence and originality of the Chinese opera.

With conviction, I propose to the scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Tianzi Tian.

26.06.2024

Prof Deyan Pavlov, PhD