

OPINION

by Prof Milena Shushulova-Pavlova, New Bulgarian University,

on the dissertation work of **Yang Zhiyu**

full-time doctoral student at Faculty of Music Pedagogy, Department of Music Pedagogy and Conducting of the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts „Prof Asen Diamandiev” – Plovdiv

with academic supervisor: Kiril Chaplikov

on the topic:

FOLK FEATURES AND CONDUCTOR INTERPRETATIONS IN THE CHINESE CHORAL WORKS

for awarding educational and scientific degree Doctor
in Professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art

Biographical data

Yang Zhiyu began studying piano at the age of four. He studied with famous Chinese pianists Prof Yang Ming of the Central Conservatory of Music, Prof Zhang Peili of the Music Department of Xiamen University, and Prof Zhu Yafen of the Shenyang Conservatory of Music. He also studied conducting with Chinese conductor Prof Yang Zhen. He graduated from the Polish National Conservatory of Music in Gdansk (2016) with a Master's degree in piano, and before that from the Polish Conservatory of Music in Krakow with a Bachelor's degree in piano (2013). He also specialized at the Frederic Chopin University of Music (2013-2014). He has extensive teaching experience. He teaches at Xiamen Huatian College in South China. He is the director of the Xiamen Siming Musicians Association. Choir director of Xiamen Siming Music Association and pianist of Minnan Theater's Children's Choir *Dream*. He has been a jury member of many competitions in China: Jinping Piano Competition, West Lake Piano Competition, Youth Art League Piano Competition. He won the Best Accompaniment Award at the Ninth All-Star Choir Tournament at the National Theater in Beijing. He is fluent in English and Polish.

Content of the dissertation

The dissertation contains an introduction, 4 chapters¹, a conclusion, contributions, bibliography of 127 sources (81 books and 46 articles) only in Chinese (which implies the

¹ CHAPTER 1 FOLK STYLES AND CONDUCTOR INTERPRETATIONS OF CHINESE CHORAL WORKS (Section 1 Choral works and conductor interpretations of the musical style of Northwest China. Section 2 Choral works and conductor interpretations of the musical style of Southwest China. Section 3 Choral works and conductor interpretations of the musical style of Northeast China. Section 4 Choral works and conductor interpretations of the musical style of the Chinese province of Inner Mongolia. Section 5 Choral works and conductor interpretations of the musical style of Southern China. Section 6 Operatic elements in the Chinese choir. Summary). CHAPTER 2 CATEGORIES AND ARTISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CHINESE CHORAL WORKS (Section 1 Choral works in authentic state in the form of folk songs. Section 2 Choral works with local ethnic character. Section 3 Choral works based on traditional Western compositional methods. Section 4 Choral works based on ancient Chinese songs. Summary). CHAPTER 3 INHERITANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF FOLKLORE TRADITIONS IN THE CHINESE LARGE-SCALE CHORAL WORKS (Section 1 Overview of Chinese national musical styles: 1. Introduction to the pentatonic scale. 2. The combination of the "tritone series" in the Chinese national musical style. 3. Hexatonic scale in Chinese folk music. 4. Heptatonic scale in Chinese folk music. Section 2 The inheritance and development of national elements in large-scale vocal musical works of China - an example of the *Yellow River Cantata*: 1. National mode and compositional technique using the "tritone series". 2. National modes, tonalities and alterations. 3. Counterpoint passages composed of national models. 4. National characteristics of musical sound. Section 3 *Yellow River Cantata* - guidelines for the conductor: 1. Analysis and

impossibility of checking them by the scientific jury), with a total volume of 193 pages, and an appendix of 20 Chinese choral songs, taking up 200 pages.

Precisely formulated objectives and tasks of the dissertation

The origin of the Chinese choral art dates back to ancient court music, ritual and folk music, combined with the Western models introduced into China after the Second Opium War (1860) through the creation of a large number of Christian schools, from where polyphonic choral art spread throughout China. The Chinese choral music is the result of this "*spread of Western music to the East*" and continued its development at the beginning of the 20th century. It was significantly influenced by the Soviet musical practice as the main source of inspiration. After 1970, this music integrated with world choral art and continued its development, passing through a difficult and challenging independent path. For a hundred years of its practical existence, the Chinese choral music began its journey from the application of the experience of the Western choral art, from early forms of unison singing to mixed choir, and the musical form developed from single-part choral works to large-scale multi-part "*choral cycles*". Gradually, choral works with their own national characteristics (creative thinking, concepts, styles, techniques, and aesthetic values) emerged, which in turn influenced the world choral art.

The **object** of study of the dissertation are the folk features and conductor interpretations in the Chinese choral works. The Chinese choir differs from the European choral music in terms of thematic content, language model, musical techniques and social role of the work. This thesis presents the development of the Chinese choral music in the last century and characteristic features of its performance, revealing the periodization and its artistic characteristics.

The research **objective** of the dissertation is to analyze certain choral works and their features from an ethnic perspective, as well as the different styles of some large-scale choral works from the conductor's perspective (content; structure; melody characteristics; conductor's interpretation; conductor's guidelines; musical form analysis). The doctoral student tries to propose recommendations for promoting the development of the Chinese choral art, with practical significance.

Significance of the research problem and relevance. Degree of knowledge of the candidate

The **first chapter** analyzes the national styles and conductor interpretations of choral music in different regions of China. According to their regional distribution, choral works from the

interpretation of the first part "The Song of the Boatmen of the Yellow River". 2. Musical analysis and interpretation of the second part "Ode to the Yellow River". 3. Analysis and interpretation of the third part "The Water of the Yellow River Coming from the Sky". 4. Analysis and interpretation of the fourth part "Ballad of the Yellow Water". 5. Analysis and interpretation of the fifth part "Dialogue by the River". 6. Analysis and interpretation of the sixth part "The Wrath of the Yellow River". 7. Analysis and interpretation of the seventh part "Protection of the Yellow River". 8. Analysis and interpretation of the eighth part "The Roaring Yellow River". Conclusion). CHAPTER 4 INHERITANCE AND INNOVATION IN MODERN CONCEPTS FOR CREATING CHORAL WORKS (Section 1 A brief introduction to the creative concepts of contemporary Chinese choral works: 1. Diversity of creative ideas. 2. Diversity of singing techniques. 3. Diversity of performance forms. Section 2 Inheritance and innovation in choral works based on folk songs – example: "Ode to the Eight Horses": 1. Analysis of the choral work "Ode to the Eight Horses". 2. Musical characteristics of the choral work "Ode to the Eight Horses". Instructions for staging "Ode to the Eight Horses". Section 3 Inheritance and innovation in artistic choral works – example: choral cycle "Hu Jia Ying": 1. Analysis of the choral cycle "Hu Jia Yin". 2. Musical characteristics of the choral cycle "Hu Jia Yin". 3. Tips for staging the choral cycle "Hu Jia Yin". Section 4 Innovation in popular choral works - example: the choral work "Big Fish": 1. Analysis of the choral work "Big Fish". 2. Musical characteristics of the choral work "Big Fish". 3. Instructions for staging the choral work "Big Fish". Chapter summary)

northwestern, southwestern, northeastern, Inner Mongolian and southern regions of China are analyzed here. "Exorcism of the Animal Spirits", "The River Flows", "Ussuri Boatman's Song", "Pastoral", "This is Me" and other choral works with typical local characteristics are selected. Through the interpretation of the choral work "Dream in the Lou Mountain Pass", the *operatic elements* introduced into the Chinese choral music are analyzed.

The **second chapter** mainly classifies the Chinese choral works according to various criteria of their "nationalization". They are divided into: choral works based on original folk melodies; choral works with local ethnic flavor; choral works created by borrowing foreign compositional techniques; choral works based on ancient musical elements. An analysis is made and an interpretation of typical representative choral works is proposed.

Chapter three describes the national characteristics of large-scale Chinese vocal cycles. The classical choral work *Yellow River Cantata* is used as an example. Its artistic characteristics are summarized and a comprehensive and detailed analysis of its creative ideas, themes, compositional techniques, etc. is conducted.

Chapter four analyzes contemporary choral works. Contemporary composers in the country use Chinese traditional music in their choral works through innovative musical language, unique harmonic processing, and expression of current social themes, bringing new vitality to this genre.

In **the conclusion** the author summarizes the two ways to preserve the national character of the Chinese choral music and presents constructive opinions and suggestions for the future development of the Chinese choral practice. "*Composers combine elements of folk songs with Western composition techniques, using polyphony and harmony, giving Chinese choral works a unique "folk flavor" and "nationality". Many composers also skillfully integrate theatrical elements in their choral works, boldly using the melodic structure, rhythmic patterns and percussion instruments of Chinese opera.*" (quote from the dissertation) The use of Chinese pentatonic tonalities, hexatonic and heptatonic modes is mainly among different ethnic groups and regions in the Chinese folk music, and hence in the choral works. Different regions have different preferences in choosing melodies combined with elements of ethnic folk songs. The doctoral student analyzes the categories of the Chinese choral works and their artistic characteristics. He divides them into four sections: The **first category** is choral works that are originals of folk songs, based on long-standing mass oral folklore creation and singing, and their artistic characteristics are quite primitive (such as songs of the *Dong* ethnic group). But he sees in this evidence that polyphonic music has existed in China since ancient times. The **second category** is choral works with a local ethnic flavor, composed based on the music of various ethnic minorities in China and having obvious ethnic expression in the melodies (taken as an example the choral song *Guests from Afar, Please Stay* for a mixed choir with musical characteristics of the Yi ethnic group). The **third category** is choral works created by borrowing traditional Western composition methods, a major contemporary trend in Chinese choral work (they use a unique fusion of Chinese and Western styles). The **fourth category** is choral works based on

ancient Chinese songs. This type of choral works uses a creative concept to combine traditional musical characteristics with modern techniques, so as to preserve and express the rhythm of the Chinese classical music. The composer penetrates the characteristics of modern consciousness in the creation of works, rethinking the essence of ancient Chinese culture.

Correctness in citation

Yang Zhiyu is correct in his quotations.

Assessment of the correspondence of the author's abstract with the main positions and contributions of the dissertation work. The abstract corresponds to the dissertation.

Publications on the topic of the dissertation

The doctoral student has three publications on the topic:

Yang Zhiyu. *Analysis of the origin, development and features of Chinese choral music* In: III International Scientific Conference "Science, Education and Innovation in the Field of Art" (2021), Plovdiv, AMDFA "Prof. Asen Diamandiev", ISBN: ISSN: 2738-8956 (Print) ISSN: 2738-8964 (Online), VOLUME 1, pp. 393-403.

Yang Zhiyu. *Chinese polyphonic folk songs - analysis of the musical characteristics of the great song of the Dong nationality.* In: Spring Scientific Readings (2022), Plovdiv, AMDFA, ISSN 1314-7005, pp. 198-209.

Yang Zhiyu. *Musical analysis and conducting decisions in the mixed four-voice choral part "Rage fiercely, Yellow River!"* In: VI International Scientific Conference "Science, Education and Innovation in the Field of Art" (2023) Plovdiv, AMDFA "Prof. Asen Diamandiev", ISBN: ISSN: 2738-8956 (Print) ISSN: 2738-8964 (Online) (in press).

Contributions of the doctoral dissertation

1. This work adds to the knowledge of the Chinese choral art and is of significance for its history and development, as well as for enriching theoretical research on it. The current studies of the Chinese choir are mainly historical overviews, as well as case studies of choral training, choral aesthetics, choral vocalization, choral performance, choral conducting, ontology of choral works and composers. There are few comparative analyses of choral works of different ethnic groups and their conducting performance, as this work does, comparing choral works from different regions and historical periods in China and exploring the similarities and differences in their national characteristics, the specifics in conducting performance, thereby contributing to the understanding of the Chinese choral music.
2. This work explores the national characteristics of the Chinese choral music through in-depth insight into the essence of the Chinese traditional music and culture, the national elements integrated into the Chinese choral music, including melody, harmony, various themes and images, to better understand the uniqueness of Chinese choral music, and

through theoretical analysis and special guidance to support relevant conductor's performances.

3. The dissertation offers effective strategies and techniques for conductors performing Chinese choral works. The degree of analysis of the choral works, including their history, musical structure, harmonic counterpoint, etc., directly affects their performance. It provides guidelines on how to guide (organize, lead) choral performers to accurately express the musical elements of national characteristics, how to perform rhythmically and emotionally, etc.
4. The work provides ideas for integrating modern musical elements, expanding creative visions of traditional Chinese aesthetics, aiming promotion, development and prosperity of the Chinese choral music. The doctoral student seeks a combination of heritage and innovation. By studying the influence of the Western musical culture on the creation of new choral music in China, the innovations and changes brought about by the exchange are revealed, as well as the unique styles and characteristics of the works produced by this exchange.

In conclusion of this Opinion I will end with the following assessment: The work of the doctoral student corresponds to the scientometric indicators for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", according to the Law on the development of the academic staff of Republic of Bulgaria. The dissertation of **Yang Zhiyu**, doctoral student at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv, titled *Folklore Features and Conductor Interpretations in the Chinese Choral Works*. The dissertation work, together with its scientific and practical contributions, as well as its publications, I consider sufficient to give my **positive assessment** and to propose to the esteemed scientific jury **to award the educational and scientific degree Doctor** in professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art, to **Yang Zhiyu**, according to the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

20.07.2024, Sofia

Prof. Milena Shushulova-Pavlova, PhD