

STATEMENT

By **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nina Kubratova Naydenova**

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For obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

PhD Candidate **Wang Bo**

regular PhD student of the Doctoral Program "Music"

Department of Music of New Bulgarian University

Vocal Interpretation of Selected Songs by Franz Schubert, Richard Strauss, Gabriel Fauré and Qing Zhu, Huang Zi, Li Yinghai: a Comparative Study from a Singer's Perspective

Research Supervisor: **Prof. Dr. Milena Shushulova-Pavlova**

Vocal supervisor: **Dr. Natalia Afeyan**

The choice of "*Vocal Interpretation of Selected Songs by Franz Schubert, Richard Strauss, Gabriel Fauré and Qin Zhu, Huang Zi, Li Yinghai: A Comparative Study from the Singer's Perspective*" as a topic is prompted by doctoral candidate's Wang Bo personal motivation to derive a methodological approach for a singer's work on one of the most specific and challenging chamber music genres, namely art song. In the very title, i.e. theme, the PhD candidate cleverly "insures" her research by considering the problem through the prism of her own creative experience as a singer-performer. At the same time, she broadens the field of research by applying an interdisciplinary approach to trace historical processes in Western and Chinese vocal music. By selecting the works of three Chinese composers and three Western European composers as examples and through the comparative analysis of their works, Wang Bo discovers those similar

characteristics that not only reveal different cultural perspectives but also provide new ideas for the interpretation of art song. This is why I think the topic is significant in that it outlines cultural bridges that transfer anthropological differences on the one hand and in that it sets its applied codes to certain aesthetic norms of musical interpretation on the other. I would like to emphasise that it takes courage to explore a complex creative concept that captures the subtlest musical nuances, linguistic givens and bridges significant cultural differences. Wang Bo not only possesses this courage, but also skillfully brings out the construction of the research so that it does not sink into the ocean of information. Last but not least, this dissertation explores the influence of religious beliefs, humanism, and other factors on the development of musical aesthetics, making the work important and appropriate for a variety of audiences, both professional and general readers.

The main purpose of the thesis is to explore archetypal relationships between three Chinese and three Western composers, focusing on art songs in China and their stylistic development. A major quality of the work is the analysis of positive and negative influences on musical interpretative and aesthetic currents sought in parallels between the music of the East and the West. Another main aim of the thesis under review is to present Chinese art songs in their uniqueness, stimulating the interest of various communities and artists in Chinese and international contexts to explore the rich possibilities of Chinese artistic expression in the song genre. A worthy goal through which Wang Bo is contributing to the elevation and showcasing of the Chinese song genre to the wider music community. The PhD dissertator is not content with merely highlighting the national significance of her work and sets her goals in a purely applied aspect, namely /quote/ 'to assist classical vocal performers in establishing a more comprehensive view of musical aesthetics by balancing the consideration of aesthetic characteristics and singing techniques'.

I believe that the stated aims have validity and defend the choice of topic. Wang Bo succeeds in deriving and developing the stated aims in their thesis and applicability using the following judgements as a basis:

- **The art song**, as a prestigious genre in classical vocal music, is a unique art of miniature due to /quote/ "its accessible structure and melody, flexible musical texture, rich subject matter, and variety of styles (folk song, lyric song, etc.)";
- **The performance of art songs** requires knowledge of specific vocal and technical skills, a high level of culture and high interpretative literacy on the part of the performer;
- In the course of the evolution of musical art, **the study of musical aesthetics** has gradually become a compulsory necessity for performers.

Wang Bo compares Chinese and Western aesthetics, analyses the similarities and differences, and uses them as a theoretical basis for the subsequent comparative study of three pairs of Chinese and Western composers. She skillfully chooses the compositional style and musical aesthetic principle distinctions as starting points by tracing temporal parallels three Chinese composers representative of different periods compared with three Western composers. A method that allows the unique contributions and styles of each to be explored. To gain a deeper and more sensitive understanding of the development of Chinese art songs and the influence of Western composers at different stages, Wang Bo provides a detailed analysis of three compositions by each Chinese composer. I believe that this 3+3+3 approach /Western and Chinese composers and works/ is extremely well chosen by the dissertator, both in terms of volume and future applicability of the text. Moreover, these ratios have the potential to become a formula-method not only of this study but of others like it. Here I suppose that the contribution is also made by the supervisors prof. Shushulova and Dr. Natalia Afeyan, for which I congratulate them.

In terms of **research methodology**, Wang Bo defines her research fields very accurately and with precise skill:

- **socio-cultural** in the aesthetic search for differences between Chinese and Western culture;
- **historical analysis** through the prism of the aesthetic evolutions of the two cultures and the existing external influences on musical styles;
- **religious values and humanistic ideas** and their related developments in Western music;

□ **emotional expression characteristics** in both cultures - restrained emotional expressions (in Chinese song music) and emotionally compelling lyrical expressions (in Western classical vocal music/).

I define the following scholarly and applied **contributions** of the dissertation:

- One of the **most important conclusions** reached by Wang Bo in her study of Western and Chinese musical aesthetics is the intersection of the two cultures in a common viewpoint, namely: the need for restrained emotional expression to strike a balance between sensitivity and rationality in art. I acknowledge that this judgement leads to an interpretive approach important for contemporary music-making.

The dissertation has sufficient length, bibliography and correct citations.

In conclusion, I believe that the dissertation defends the stated thesis and objectives, has its contribution and application, **and I give my positive evaluation and my vote to award Wang Bo the scientific degree of Doctor of Philosophy of New Bulgarian University.**

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Assoc. Prof Dr. Nina Naydenova