

STATEMENT

by Prof. Dr Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak,

Lecturer at the Academy of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts “Prof. Asen Diamandiev” in Plovdiv,

on the dissertation of doctoral candidate **Wang Jiaxin**

for the award of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor, on the topic:

The Development and Integration of the Saxophone in China Over the Last 20 Years: A Methodological Perspective

under the supervision of **Assoc. Prof. Dr Rositsa Becheva**,

in the professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Arts, scientific speciality Musicology and Musical Arts,

Department of Music at New Bulgarian University – Sofia

General overview of the procedure

This opinion was prepared based on Order No. 3-RK-114 / 30.01.2026 of the Rector of NBU.

I have been provided with the following documents: the candidate’s CV, dissertation, abstract in English and Bulgarian, list of publications on the topic and concerts, Order for the Academic Council and Protocol No. 1, which are in accordance with the requirements of the Law on Higher Education and the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on Higher Education for the award of the educational and scientific degree of “Doctor.”

Brief biographical notes about the doctoral candidate:

Doctoral candidate Wang Jianxin was born in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, China. He obtained his bachelor's degree in 2013, having specialised in the saxophone. He was a student of Professor Li Manlong at the Central Conservatory of Music in China. At NBU, he pursued specialisation under the supervision of Dr Trifon Trifonov. He was awarded his bachelor's degree from Tianjin Normal University and his master's degree from NBU's Department of Music, with a specialisation in sound engineering. He is currently enrolled as a doctoral student at the same institution, under the

supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr Rositsa Becheva. He has been the recipient of numerous awards and distinctions in both China and Bulgaria. In addition, he received a diploma at the 16th Classical Music Competition in Pernik.

<https://www.24chasa.bg/mezhdunarodni/article/11491148> **Young Chinese musician wins top prizes at International Competition for Young Talents in Pernik, May 2022.**

Related publications.

As a doctoral candidate at NBU, Wang Jianxin has the following publications:

1. Jiaxin Wang. HOW TO MASTER THE SAXOPHONE.

PRACTICAL AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGICAL IDEAS, IN: collection “YOUNG SCIENTIFIC FORUM FOR MUSIC AND DANCE,” issue 19/2025, Published by NBU, Department of Music, pp. 271–286, ISSN 1313-342X

2. Jia Xin, Wang. THE SAXOPHONE COMPETITION—CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE, IN: collection “YOUNG SCIENTIFIC FORUM FOR MUSIC AND DANCE,” Published by NBU, Department of Music, ISSN 1313-342X (submitted for printing)

Also presents the following concert performances:

1. June 7, 2022 - Jazz and Classical Music for Saxophone

2. August 2024

- Concert at the Saxophone Festival

3. May 2022 - Sixteenth Classical Music Competition

4. October 2022 - Concert marking the 120th anniversary of the Pernik Wind Orchestra

May 5, 2023 - Concert by the Pernik Wind Orchestra

September 6, 2023 - Concert by Jazz Saxophone Instructors

July 7, 2023 - European Night of Museums

Relevance of the topic.

The relevance of the topic is argued convincingly in the introduction. The author establishes a correlation between the issue and the processes of globalisation and the increasing importance of intercultural exchange. They emphasise that music can be considered 'an art form without borders' and that the saxophone has become an important mediator between different styles and cultural circles (pp. 6–7). Of particular importance is the assertion that the saxophone is gradually becoming "an important bridge connecting Eastern and Western musical cultures" (p. 7). This thesis outlines the study's overarching objective. The relevance of this study is further supported by a clearly articulated lack of research in this area. The author does not merely assert that the subject is intriguing; rather, they draw attention to three distinct lacunae. Firstly, they note that the extant research on the impact of regional culture on saxophone performance is "relatively limited". Secondly, they observe that most existing publications focus on technique rather than on cultural integration. Thirdly, they remark that the analysis of real-world cases is also inadequate, thereby impeding the application of theoretical conclusions (pp. 7–8). The three points under discussion are articulated with clarity and provide a robust rationale for the study. The text also identifies an educational problem. The author posits that teaching can facilitate a deeper integration of regional culture and the art of the saxophone (pp. 7–8). This shift in focus entails a transition from a purely historical-descriptive paradigm to a musical-pedagogical one, thereby conferring enhanced practical relevance on the work.

Scope, Subject, Objective, and Research Tasks

The objective is stated explicitly and without ambiguity: The objective of this study is to examine the development and integration of the saxophone in China over the past two decades. The objectives of this study are as follows: firstly, to provide an overview of the European and American context; secondly, to analyse the integration of the saxophone into the contemporary Chinese musical environment; thirdly, to focus on training, interpretation in various styles, and improvisation; fourthly, to examine saxophone competitions; and fifthly, to analyse innovative teaching methods (p. 6). The subject of this study is the development of saxophone art in China at the intersection of performance, repertoire and pedagogy. The central question guiding this study is how the saxophone integrates into Chinese musical culture and how this integration influences pedagogical models, performance styles and emotional expression. By formulating the aim and objectives, the author does not merely document events that have already occurred; rather, they

explore how the saxophone can be taught and performed to facilitate its integration into the broader context of global musical styles (p. 6). This lends the work a distinctive, practical and reformist scope.

Methodology and Research Approach

The author observes that the study employs "the historical method; comparative analysis; and the empirical method," supplemented by a review of the specialised literature (p. 6). As delineated in the more detailed methodological exposition, the subject is divided into four subsections: first, historical study; second, analysis of musical examples; third, method of performance technique; and finally, methods for citing literature (pp. 9–12). The utilisation of the historical method is evident in the initial two chapters. The author elucidates that through this medium, one can trace the instrument's trajectory from Europe to China, as well as comprehend its position within various musical systems (p. 9). The utilisation of a historical approach facilitates the examination of cultural transfer and regional differences. In this case, there is demonstrable methodological applicability.

The analysis of musical examples constitutes a rational choice of topic for a study related to the following areas: repertoire, style, and pedagogy. The author emphasises that by comparing works from different regions and genres, characteristics of melody, rhythm, timbre, and technique can be identified, and from there, pedagogical strategies (p. 10). The present section is of particular interest as it demonstrates an interconnection between musical analysis and pedagogy, thus transcending the conventional boundaries of analytical discourse.

In the third chapter, the author asserts that performance technique plays a pivotal role in the transmission of musical composition and emotional response. They further emphasise that instructional methodologies must prioritise rhythm, dynamics, musical lines, breathing techniques, and articulation, among other technical aspects pertinent to emotional expression (p. 11). This robust methodological assertion serves to transition the analysis from the domain of general aesthetic assertions to that of specific performance parameters. Literary analysis is presented as a methodological approach for constructing a "comprehensive theoretical framework" and providing a foundation for empirical research (pp. 11–12).

Characteristics and Evaluation of the Dissertation and Its Contributions

The dissertation comprises **136 pages**, of which **130 pages are main text**, and is structured into **an abstract, introduction, four chapters, conclusions, a list of contributions, a summary of the main results, references, and an appendix**. It is also noted that the bibliography includes **26 titles**, of which **2 are in Bulgarian, 19 are in foreign languages, and 5 are online sources** (p. 2). The compositional logic is evident from the outset: the author progresses from the historical genesis of the saxophone, through its localisation in China, to pedagogical issues, and finally to programmatic conclusions and recommendations.

The first chapter is characterised by its clearly delineated objective: to furnish a *systematic overview of the development of the saxophone in three distinct cultural contexts: Europe, America, and China* (p. 12). This assertion serves as a robust initial point of departure, as it demonstrates that the author's perspective on the saxophone transcends its perception as a Western instrument, instead acknowledging its historical mobility and cultural adaptability as a mediator. The European section of the text provides a detailed historical account of the instrument's provenance, its association with Adolphe Sax, the early institutionalisation of the instrument, and its association with Romantic aesthetics (pp. 12–13). The section on jazz is of particular significance, as it demonstrates the instrument's transition from the classical world to modern popular and improvisational culture. The author highlights New Orleans, swing, big bands, bebop, and the role of figures such as Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker (p. 13). This section is more synthetic in nature than original, yet it serves as an effective conduit to the Chinese context. The section devoted to China is the most substantial. In this section, the author provides a historical account of the saxophone's introduction through military bands, its early limited presence, and the subsequent professionalisation of training (pp. 13–14).

The central argument of this study is that *the saxophone in China has undergone a historical transformation, from being perceived as a foreign instrument to becoming an integral part of Chinese musical expression* (p. 14). This statement is compelling, encapsulating the dissertation's primary argument. A notable aspect of this phenomenon pertains to the regional diversification observed within China. The eastern regions are characterised by a strong association with jazz and popular music, while the central regions exhibit a pronounced inclination towards classical and Western forms. In contrast, the western and northern regions exhibit a deeper integration of

elements from folk music (p. 14). The initial chapter offers a comprehensive historical framework and introduces the thesis that the saxophone serves as a conduit for cultural exchange.

The **second chapter** constitutes the true analytical core of the work. The presentation of the saxophone's development following its introduction to China is provided in the form of an overview, with particular emphasis placed on its integration into folk music and popular culture, and on the formation of "*unique 'Sinicised' styles and schools*" (p. 14). In this context, the emphasis shifts from the mere reception of a Western instrument to its local transformation and stylistic production. In the section on the classical saxophone and Chinese folk music, the author poses the central question of how a Western instrument can be "deeply integrated" with Chinese tradition to form a new style with a national character (p. 15). Of particular importance in this context is the figure of Professor Li Manlong, who has been described as "*the founder of classical saxophone education in China*" (p. 15).

Through this medium, the author imbues the process of institutionalisation, composition, adaptation, and pedagogical support for the Chinese classical saxophone with a personal dimension. In this chapter, the author discusses integration not only in abstract terms but through techniques and works. The erhu, dizi, and suona are imitated in terms of timbres and techniques, pentatonic scales and folk melodies are utilised, and an analysis of "*Tongjin Theme and Variations*" is conducted, with the "*innovative concept of 'the fusion of East and West'*" being emphasised (pp. 15–16). The section dedicated to jazz and popular music is also of significance. The author discusses the "*Shanghai Jazz School*" (p. 16), the localisation of jazz in Shanghai, Jimmy King, songs such as "*Night Shanghai*" and "*Rose, Rose, I Love You*," as well as the use of pentatonic scales and folk melodies in jazz improvisation (pp. 16–17). The author effectively highlights that the integration of the saxophone in China is not limited to the academic scene but also has a strong urban-popular dimension. In the section on improvisation, the author defines it as the spontaneous creation of music, which nevertheless relies on "*a solid foundation of music theory, technical skills, and an awareness of stylistic conventions*" (p. 17). The citation of Charlie Parker, which states that "*Improvisation is composed music at high speed, and composition is improvisation at a slower tempo*" (p. 17), has been selected with great precision, as it effectively transitions improvisation from its mythologised conception of unrestrained liberty to its manifestation as disciplined creativity.

Chapter Three constitutes the pedagogical section of the work and is arguably the most original in terms of its practical application. From the outset, the author sets out their central thesis: "*Saxophone instruction must go beyond the scope of ordinary technical training and embrace innovation, placing 'emotional expression and perception' as the primary goal of instruction*" (p. 18). This statement is both unambiguous and compelling. The author examines control over timbre, dynamics, pitch, and rhythm, as well as techniques such as throat sound, glissando, and flexible articulation (pp. 18–19), "*transforming abstract emotions into concrete, applicable playing techniques,*" with melancholy, passion, and warmth linked to specific timbral, articulatory, and rhythmic choices (p. 19). This constitutes a bona fide methodological contribution. The section on teaching styles in Europe, the U.S., and China is also of significance. Europe is characterised as systematic and strong in its fundamentals; America is described as more personalised, practical, and creative; and China is portrayed as rapidly developing, but with an imbalance of resources and a lack of sufficiently innovative teaching materials, especially for intermediate and advanced levels, including traditional Chinese music (p. 20).

This is a sober and useful comparative analysis. In this section, the author puts forward a series of strategies to facilitate the development of core competencies. These strategies encompass systematic training in core skills, participation in group and ensemble classes, integration of diverse styles, augmented stage practice, multimedia, and the promotion of creativity (pp. 20–21). The two models presented—ensemble training through the cycle "*observation → discussion → rehearsal → performance → peer assessment*" and project-based solo composition and performance—are good examples of thinking beyond the traditional individual lesson (p. 21). The author also proposes a multidimensional assessment system in which not only skills are evaluated, but also expressiveness, attitude toward learning, progress, creativity, self-assessment, and feedback from peers and experts (p. 21). This is in line with contemporary pedagogical models.

Chapter Four synthesises the extant literature on the development of the saxophone in China, addressing such themes as educational initiatives, promotion, talent development, original compositions, performance opportunities, and genre integration. The chapter then offers a prospective vision of the saxophone's future in China (pp. 22–24). A notable strength of this chapter is that the author considers development not only in terms of repertoire but also in institutional and cultural terms. The forward-looking section of this publication sets out several key directions for

future development. These include specialisation in classical, jazz, and pop training; the use of virtual reality and artificial intelligence; deepening cultural integration; interdisciplinary collaboration with dance, theatre, and multimedia; and exploring the fusion of the saxophone with electronic music and digital technologies (p. 24). A pivotal conclusion of this study is that the saxophone is not merely an instrument, but a "*vital bridge between Chinese and Western musical traditions*" (p. 24). This constitutes the apogee of the dissertation concept, situating it within a comprehensive framework of cultural communication and symbolic mediation.

Significant Contributions of the Study

The work makes **historical-synthesis, cultural, repertoire, and pedagogical contributions**. It examines the saxophone not only within its European and American context, but also in its Chinese adaptation. The author asserts that in China, the saxophone was not simply imported but reworked through folk, classical, jazz, and pop mechanisms. The thesis regarding the formation of "*Sinicised*" styles and schools (pp. 14, 18) is significant and potentially productive for future research. The doctoral candidate does not merely summarise foreign models but proposes his own framework in which emotional expression is a central component of instruction, termed "*individualised teaching*," "interdisciplinary teaching system," and the integration of improvisation, the European systemic model, and the unique style of Chinese folk music (pp. 25–26). The work also contributes to **emotional expression** in performance. The author discusses "a series of innovative strategies, such as '*learning through experience*,' '*project-based learning*,' '*interdisciplinary integration*, and '*modern technological support for learning*'" (p. 26). Here, the contribution is more applied than purely theoretical, but it is real. The dissertation also makes an intercultural contribution, viewing the saxophone as a means of exchange and mutual influence rather than a one-way import. In this sense, the claim that the study "contributes to the expansion of artistic horizons" and to "the permanent establishment of the saxophone's presence on an international scale" (p. 26) is understandable.

I congratulate PhD candidate Wang Jiaxin and Assoc. Prof. Dr Rositsa Becheva on the results of this research. I give my high and **positive evaluation and propose that the esteemed academic jury award him the educational and scientific degree of "DOCTOR"** in the professional field 8.3 "Music and Dance Arts."

April 13, 2026 Prof. Dr Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak