

THE OPERA “MULAN PSALM” BY GUAN XIA IN THE MODERN MUSICAL CULTURE OF CHINA

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Ding Boyu. The opera “Mulan psalm” by Guan Xia in the modern musical culture of China

The purpose of the article is to identify and systematize a complex of historical, cultural and musical factors that caused the great popularity of the opera “Mulan Psalm” in China and the interest in this work of viewers from many countries on different continents.

The methodology combines elements of the musicological complex (music-historical, music-performance methods) with historical, cultural and comparative methods, which allows us to analyze and compare the ancient text with the opera libretto, characterize the main means of expression used by the composer, define the historical and cultural background on which the opera was created, and describe the specifics of the opera’s portrayal of the main character, around whose fate the entire plot of the work is built.

The results. Even the initial analysis of the opera by the prominent contemporary artist Guan Xia shows the multivariate interpretation of the image of the main character — one of the most famous characters of the ancient folk epic, as well as the possibility of finding hidden meaning in this masterpiece of modern Chinese opera, because with each new viewing or with each new production of “Mulan Psalm” and new actors performing the main roles, in particular, the three leading singers performing the role of Mulan, different facets of this heroine and the deeper meaning of the opera, which quickly crossed national borders and gained universal significance due to the involvement of its authors, directors and performers in the values that are eternally important to humanity, are revealed: patriotism, sacrifice for the sake of the homeland, and at the same time, sincere love, natural feelings, love for family, brothers in arms, and a loved one. Almost all of the characters are endowed with all of these traits, as there are virtually no negative characters in the opera, since the image of the enemy as such, as well as the enemy army, is not individualized but presented as a common evil that the characters fight and defeat.

The practical significance of the article consists in understanding the significance of the opera “Mulan Psalm” in the operatic art of modern China and identifying the prospects of presenting the best achievements of Chinese artists in this genre on the world academic concert stage.

Keywords: *musical art of China, opera “Mulan Psalm” by Guan Xia, modern opera culture of China, traditions of opera productions, image of a warrior woman, opera performances, leading Chinese opera singers, stage transformations.*

Дін Боюй. Опера Гуань Ся «Мулань Псалом» у музичній культурі сучасного Китаю

Надається аналіз значення опери Гуань Ся «Мулань Псалом» у музичній культурі сучасного Китаю, наводяться міста і країни, в яких ця опера презентувалася, а також визначаються особливості деяких з цих постановок. Простежується феномен жінки-воїна у всесвітній історії, вивчається питання звернення до теми жінок-войовниць, зокрема до історичного персонажа Мулань, у китайському мистецтві. Розглядається проблема трактування сценічного образу головної героїні опери, виявляються характерні особливості музичного письма Гуань Ся, наголошується на поєднанні національних і західних засобів музичної виражальності в оперній партитурі, окреслюються перспективи подальших музикознавчих досліджень цього сучасного китайського оперного шедевру.

Ключові слова: *музичне мистецтво Китаю, опера «Мулань Псалом» Гуань Ся, сучасна оперна культура Китаю, традиції оперних постановок, образ жінки-воїна, оперні вистави, провідні китайські оперні співачки, сценічні перевтілення.*

The relevance of the article. One of the most famous operas by Chinese composers of the early XXI century is the work “Mulan Psalm” by Guan Xia based on the script written by Liu Lin, which tells

the story of a young girl from a noble feudal family who decided, instead of her sick elderly father, who was called to wage war with the enemy, to dress in military men's clothing and command the army that used to be subordinate to her father.

This ancient story, which has attracted many generations of Chinese, is now known in many countries around the world thanks to Guan Xia's successful contemporary music that has transcended national boundaries, the bright cast of singers and the skill and perfect work of the entire production team. However, the phenomenon of this success of the opera, despite the emergence of a number of studies by Chinese scholars on this issue in recent years, has not yet been sufficiently studied. This explains the relevance of this study.

The purpose of the article is to identify and systematize a complex of historical, cultural and musical factors that caused the great popularity of the opera "Mulan Psalm" in China and the interest in this work of viewers from many countries on different continents.

An analysis of recent research and publications. In the less than twenty years since its creation, "Mulan Psalm" has become a fertile ground for Chinese musicologists to become interested in various aspects of this work and, as a result, numerous musicological studies have appeared on various aspects of «Mulan Psalm» (the plot, the importance of the opera in contemporary Chinese musical culture, the peculiarities of the opera's stage presentation, the importance of the orchestra in the opera, the specifics of the vocal performance of the main part of the opera, etc.) Thus, a number of master's theses by young Chinese researchers have already been defended in various Chinese higher education institutions on the above-mentioned issues. Here are just a few of them:

- "The opera "Mulan Psalm" "Mulan" singing art" by Zheng Zuo from the Wuhan Conservatory of Music (Zheng Zuo, 2012);
- "Introduction to Peng Liyuan Opera Art" by Wei Rong from Sichuan Normal University (Wei Rong, 2013);
- "Scenario Symphonic Opera "Mulan Psalm". Actress Aria Analysis and Research" by Li Yang of Xi'an Conservatory of Music (Li Yang, 2013);
- "Scenario symphonic opera", by Pei Zuo Ping

from the Nanjing Institute of Arts (Pei Zuo Ping, 2011);

- "Analysis of the Mulan's Aria Singing Style of Opera "Mulan Psalms"" by Yang Su Jun from the South China University of Technology (Yang Su Jun, 2012);
- "Large scale scene Symphony "Mulan Psalm" artistic characteristics and the characters of Mulan — the musical troupe premiere version as an example", by Li Meng Jiao from Shanghai Normal University (Li Meng Jiao, 2012).

Some master's theses by young Chinese scholars deal with more general, but directly related to the opera "Mulan Psalm" issues, in particular:

- "Impression of Chinese Opera Feminist" by Cai Zuo Zuo from Hunan Normal University (Cai Zuo Zuo, 2011);
- "Research on the Cross-cultural Comparison between Chinese Peking Opera and Western Opera" by Chen Chong from Northwest Minzu University (Chen Chong, 2011).

The titles of each of these master's theses eloquently reflect their content.

The article "Hybridizing the cultural identity of Mulan from a Chinese ballad to American films" by Chinese researchers Meijuan Zhao and Lay Hoon Ang (Meijuan Zhao, Lay Hoon Ang, 2022) is important in the context of studying the semantic content of the image of the main character of the opera "Mulan Psalm" and its interpretation in contemporary American culture. This paper addresses the issue of hybridizing Mulan cultural identity in the understanding of Chinese folklore in America, when there is a certain conflict during Sino-Western transcultural clashes. In particular, the authors analyze the transformation of Mulan cultural identity in the original Ballad of Mulan, the Walt Disney animated film *Mulan* (1998, sequel — 2004) and the American film version of the same name (2020).

Thus, **the purpose of the article** is to identify and systematize a set of historical, cultural, and musical factors that have led to the great popularity of the opera "Mulan Psalm" in China and the interest of audiences in many countries on different continents in this work.

The main objectives of the study are:

- to characterize the work of the composer Guan Xia;

- to comprehend the historical phenomenon of women warriors from different eras and cultures;
- to trace the chronology of productions of the opera “Mulan Psalm” on Chinese and foreign stages;
- to identify the peculiarities of the interpretation of the ancient Chinese ballad by modern musical and stage means;
- to comprehend the composer’s and leading Chinese singers’ interpretation of the opera’s protagonist.

The methodology combines elements of the musicological complex (music-historical, music-performance methods) with historical, cultural and comparative methods, which allows us to analyze and compare the ancient text with the opera libretto, characterize the main means of expression used by the composer, define the historical and cultural background on which the opera was created, and describe the specifics of the opera’s portrayal of the main character, around whose fate the entire plot of the work is built.

Summary of the main research material. Created in the early 2000s, “Mulan Psalm” was first performed in 2004 in Beijing, the following year it was staged at the prestigious Lincoln Center in New York, and in 2008 it was presented with great success at the Vienna State Opera, perhaps the most famous opera house in the world, becoming the first Chinese musical and stage work to be performed on this Viennese stage in its 139-year (at the time) history. In 2009, this opera was first performed at the Yuen Long Theater in Hong Kong. In the same year, at the invitation of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra of Japan, a Chinese performing company under the direction of Peng Liyuan presented “Mulan Psalm” in Japan (four performances in Tokyo and Sapporo). One of the performances in Tokyo was attended by Japan’s Crown Prince Naruhito (since 2019, the Emperor), who spoke enthusiastically about the opera and, in particular, about the young singer Lei Jia, who played the role of the main character Hua Mulan. The following year, in 2010, the opera was presented on several Chinese stages: at the People’s House in Beijing, at the Shanghai Grand Theater during the World Expo season, at the Guangzhou Grand Theater, as well as on the stages of Russian theaters, and in 2011 at the Xi’an International

Horticultural Exhibition. In the following years, the opera was successfully presented on the stages of other centers of Chinese provinces.

An extraordinary event was the production of the opera in 2015 at the Shi Guangnan Grand Theater in Chongqing. This production was a tribute to Shi Guangnan (1940–1990), one of the most popular composers in modern China, and was dedicated to the 75th anniversary of his birth. This event also marked the opening of the Shi Guangnan Theater, located in the municipal district of Nan’an, where he was born. As one of the most prolific songwriters in the country, Shi Guangnan wrote a number of songs that have captured the hearts of millions of Chinese. His works, including “In the Field of Hope”, “Ripe Grapes at Turpan”, and “Toast Song”, have become popular among different age and social strata of the Chinese population due to their vivid author’s and folk melodies. The author of “Mulan Psalm” Guan Xia, who was the head of the orchestra that participated in this production at the time, characterized the importance of the compositional and folklore activities of his senior colleague, under whose creative influence he was: “What makes Shi’s songs so popular among different generations is his combination of folk music, such as Tibetan and Uyghur. He has absorbed various musical elements by working for years in remote villages across China and creating his own composition based on local folk music... I hope that young Chinese composers can learn from him” (cited in Chen Nan, 2015).

Similar to Shi Guangnan, Guan Xia also makes extensive use of folk music sources in his own works. This creative method is perhaps most clearly manifested in the opera “Mulan Psalm”, in which the artist borrowed traditional folk song melodies from Henan Province in Central China. There is an assumption that the main character of the opera hailed from this province. He presented these folk melodies accompanied by a large western-style symphony orchestra, using the entire kaleidoscope of modern orchestral means. Describing Shi Guangnan’s work, Guan Xia noted that the best reward for a composer is when his music is enjoyed by a large number of people, and Shi has succeeded in doing so. The same characterization certainly applies to the work of the author of the Mulan opera himself. Among other audiences, the Chongqing

performance of the opera was honored by a visit from Shi Guangnan's widow, who praised the music of her late husband's younger follower.

Finally, two years later, at the end of 2017, the opera was staged at the newly opened Jiangsu Center for the Performing Arts (JSCPA) in Nanjing as part of the Third China Opera Festival. As noted by Rudolf Tang, a well-known Chinese writer and expert on the classical music industry in China, a journalist for "Musical America", a member of the Society of Music Critics of China, and a translator of the "Mulan Psalm" libretto into English, Nanjing was the first real full-fledged opera production of the opera, which was conducted by the Finnish conductor and composer of Swedish origin Leif Segerstam. All previous productions, from the very first one in Beijing to the subsequent touring versions, were performed in a semi-stage and semi-concert version. The orchestra, unlike all previous productions, finally moved from the stage to the orchestra pit, and the entire stage was filled with scenery and characters. In this form, the opera was called "Mulan Psalm" instead of "Mulan".

According to the tradition established in China, only officially approved singers could sing the main roles in the most recognized, so to speak "sacred" operas for the Chinese audience, and everything in the staging of such operas remains unchanged or almost unchanged from their first performance. This, in particular, was true of the operas "The Gray Girl", "Sister Jiang", and others. The same happened with the opera "Mulan Psalm". Thus, such operas became and are still becoming a kind of museum exhibits, which are highly revered in China as a national cultural heritage and well protected by vigilant ideological cadres. That is why it took thirteen years for the semi-concert version of the opera to finally turn into a full stage production in Nanjing, starring soprano Lei Jia (Mulan), a student and follower of Peng Liyuan, and tenor Zhang Yingxi (General Liu).

At the same time, R. Tang notes that since the beginning of the XXI century, about twenty new operas have been commissioned annually by various opera companies, municipalities, powerful oligarchs, and ministries in China. And this is the basis of China's soft power cultural policy, especially with regard to artistic, including musical, heritage. A vivid demonstration of this process is the triennial

Chinese Opera Festivals, initiated at the highest level since 2011, which present about twenty operas each time. Despite the fact that most of these operas, after their premiere performances, are never performed anywhere else, a kind of selection of the best newest works takes place, which enter the national cultural treasury and remain in the repertoire (Tang, 2018). The Mulan opera undoubtedly belongs to such works.

The enormous success of this work in China and in many countries around the world was due to several important components. Let us list the main ones.

1) Known throughout modern China, one of the most iconic ancient stories in Chinese culture is the anonymous "Ballad of Mulan" ("Mulan Shi"), a female warrior who lived in the Northern Dynasties (V–VI centuries AD). This folklore work was first recorded, among others, in Yuefu Shiji, a collection of Yuefu poems compiled by the scholar Guo Maoqiang in the XI century, and during the XX and early XXI centuries it was repeatedly filmed (feature films, animated feature films, including the Hong Kong musical film "Lady General Hua Mulan" (1964), the Sino-American film "Hua Mulan" (2009), the aforementioned animated film "Mulan" by Walt Disney (1998, sequel — 2004) and the American film of the same name (2020), etc. It is also noteworthy that a crater on Venus is named after Mulan, and the 2007 FIFA Women's World Cup in China chose Mulan as its mascot.

It is worth noting that in the original text of the ballad, only a few lines almost in passing mention military action, but it is to this that the most vivid and important scenes of the opera are devoted. The love story, which is one of the main themes of the opera, is practically absent in the ballad. However, it is thanks to the introduction of battle and lyrical episodes in the libretto that the image of the protagonist is presented in a full and multifaceted way.

2) The music is composed by Guan Xia, one of China's leading contemporary composers, long-time president of the National Symphony Orchestra of China, author of another brilliant opera, "Mournful Dawn", composed in 1997–2001, which premiered in Beijing in 2001, two symphonies, the first of which was written in the mid-1980s, and the

second — “Hope” — has gained great popularity in China since its first performance in 1999, a large-scale “Requiem for the Earth” in memory of the victims of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake for quartet of soloists, choir, orchestra and organ with the inclusion of the ancient Chinese flute Qiang. The composer also has a Symphonic Ballad (Overture) based on the music of the opera “Mournful Dawn”, soundtracks to a number of popular television series (some of which were later turned into independent concert pieces by the author).

3) The priority of female characters in traditional Peking opera is a national cultural heritage that has been actualized in most operas by Chinese artists of the European model since the mid-twentieth century. In fact, from the very first opera of this type, “The Gray Girl” (1945), composed by a group of Chinese artists, to one of the most recent operas, “Sunrise” (2015), by Jin Xiang, despite the diversity of their plot content and their reference to either fantastic or mythical stories from ancient times or the modern history of China.

4) Perhaps the most important component is the music of this opera with a clearly defined national flavor of all vocal — solo, ensemble and choral numbers in their masterful combination by the composer with a juicy modern score by a full Western-style symphony orchestra, which is a full participant in the stage action, emotionally stimulating both the audience and the singers of the vocal parts.

5) A separate, far from being a passing factor in the wide recognition of the opera “Mulan Psalm” immediately after its premiere was the constant, during the first four years, performance of the main part of this work by the famous performer of Chinese folk songs, winner of numerous awards of national song competitions Peng Liyuan, now better known as the First Lady of China (married to Xi Jinping since 1987), one of the first singers of the opera, was one of the first singers in China to receive a master’s degree in traditional music after the introduction of the master’s degree system in Chinese higher education institutions in the 1980s (1990), and was directly related to the traditional music, and was directly close to army life, having served for many years in the Chinese National Liberation Army (during the performance of the

main role in the opera, she was a member of the Song and Dance Troupe of the General Political Department, and later headed various military creative structures, including the Song and Dance Ensemble of the Political Work Department of the Central Military Commission of the Communist Party of China (2008–2012), the Academy of Arts of the People’s Liberation Army of China (2012–2017, holds the rank of major general). In the following years, the *Mulan* Parties were performed with great success by representatives of the next generation of vocalists, famous Chinese opera singers: Tan Jing, a deputy civilian officer of a division of the People’s Liberation Army of China, and Peng Liyuan, the head of the general political department of the Lei Jia Song and Dance Ensemble, the only doctoral student. All of these factors, woven together, have guaranteed the work’s enduring popularity.

It should be noted that there are many examples in human history of women taking up arms and fighting alongside men or even instead of them. We can name a number of warriors from different nations and times. In particular, this is the subject of a publication by the Ukrainian author O. Kozubenko (Kozubenko, February 11, 2021), which provides a historical retrospective of the outstanding women who led the army and won convincing victories in battles from ancient times to the present. In particular, the author notes that among the Sarmatians who lived on the territory of modern Ukraine 2–3 thousand years ago, “women warriors could be found quite often, they had a high social status” (Kozubenko, February 11, 2021). Since ancient times, specific names of women warriors have been known: the third mythical ruler of Britain, Gwendolen (turn of the XII and XI centuries BC), Queen Zabibe of Kedar (VII century BC), the Arabian Queen Shamsi (VII century BC), the Queen of the Masageti Sakas, Tomiris (IV century BC), the Carian rulers, the Carian rulers Artemisia I and Artemisia II (respectively V and IV centuries BC), the participant of Spartacus’ revolt Gerardesca Manutius (I century BC), the Vietnamese warriors Ching sisters (I century), the Celtic national heroine of England Bowdick (I century), the Queen of Palmyra Zenobia (III century), the Chinese Princess Pingyang (VII century), the military leader of the Arabian tribe of Banu Tamim Sajah bint al-Gharis

(VII century), Ethelfleda of Mercia (turn of the IX–X centuries), Matilda of Tuscany (XI century), Japanese women Tomoe Gozen — a senior officer in the army of the head of the Minamoto clan and Hangaku Gozen — the head of a three-thousand army (late XII century — early XIII century), Chinese women commanders Mu Guiying (XII–XIII centuries) and Fu Hao (XIII century), the legendary Frenchwoman Joan of Arc (XV century), Muslim Princess Amina, the leader of the Hausa people in Nigeria (XV century), the Italian Caterina Sforza (late XV — early XVI centuries), the Mongolian princess Mandugai the Wise (late XV — early XVI centuries), and the Pashtun folk heroine Malalai (XIX century). World history has also preserved many examples of specially organized military units composed of women from ancient times to the present: the Amazons, Viking women, samurai women, the thousands-strong women's army of the Dahomey Kingdom on the coast of West Africa (XVIII and XIX centuries), women's death strike battalions of the First World War and women's flying squadrons of the Second World War, etc.

In the mid-1970s, women in many NATO countries (Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States) were able to obtain military status. Countries without conscription, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, have achieved the highest levels of female military presence. In the XXI century, girls are conscripted for military service in China, Eritrea, Israel, Libya, Malaysia, North Korea, Peru, and Taiwan. Among the NATO member states, Norway was the first to officially recruit women on the same terms as men in 2013; in 2017 and 2018, Sweden and the Netherlands began to recruit women for military service under similar conditions (Women in the Armed Forces, 2023).

In the People's Liberation Army of China, until recently, women were employed in logistics and paperwork, but in 2013, the first special forces unit was created exclusively of women to conduct reconnaissance and participate in raids. This unit consists mainly of highly educated girls with university degrees who have undergone mandatory high-quality training in hand-to-hand combat, shooting, and parachuting. According to the

Chinese military, "...the lack of physical strength is more than compensated for by the scrupulousness of the approach, patience and sense of duty" (cited in: Zadvernyak, January 9, 2022). In the first ten years since its foundation, the women who make up some units of the Special Operations Forces of the People's Liberation Army of China have proven themselves worldwide as first-class fighters capable of performing tasks at the limits of human capabilities. The army of Chinese Amazons surpasses in training even the best similar male units of the world's leading armies (Zadvernyak, January 9, 2022).

This, by no means exhaustive, list of examples confirms that the participation of women (often young girls) in military battles, often as leaders of the army, is not a phenomenon peculiar to any one nation or continent. As for ancient times, such facts were overlaid with numerous later folklore layers, so it is sometimes impossible to determine whether these warriors were real or fictional characters. The legendary Mulan is just such a character.

Depending on the traditions, historical, cultural, moral and ethical norms of a given society and the period of development of a given state, two opposite forms of behavior and self-identification of women warriors have developed: 1) their participation in hostilities without concealing their gender, and 2) the need to disguise themselves as men. Mulan, like a number of other historical, mythical, and literary characters, belongs to this second group, because until the end of her service in the army, which, according to legend, lasted ten years, and her return home, no one in her circle realized that she was a woman. This is emphasized in several lines of the ballad recorded in the XII century:

"...Warriors, know that you are instead of a brother
Were your sister's companions.
The hare's paw is strong and furry,
And the hare's eyes are wet.

If two hares are running next to each other

Can you tell them apart?" (出自南北朝乐府诗集的《木兰诗》, 2012).

Only in one scene, in the playful duet "I Want to Share the Sky with You", does Hua Mulan, who is in love with the hero of her feelings, General Liu Shuang, who, like everyone else, believes that Mulan is a man, reveal her secret dreams to him:

“They say that when you drink, you can express your true feelings...

Today I don't drink wine, but I am also in love.

After our triumph, we will go our separate ways.

Perhaps we will never meet again in this life.

If I were a woman,

I'd like to fix your lapels.

If I were a woman,

Your pain would be my pain.

Your joy would be my joy.

Your sadness would be my sadness.

Your happiness would be my happiness.

If I were a woman,

My life would be bound up with you.

If I were a woman,

I would share my life with you.

I would live and die with you and never leave you” (惠萃, 2021).

It should be noted that there are many examples of women impersonating men in Chinese opera culture. And this metamorphosis is not always tied to the need for opera heroines to pretend to be warriors. Let us recall, for example, the image of the Old Drunkard from the mythological opera “Butterfly” by San Bo, behind whom the Old Woman, the mother of the main character of the opera, hides for most of the stage action. Ye Xianwei's dissertation study (Ye Xianwei, 2019) is devoted to a detailed analysis of this opera. In particular, the scholar emphasizes that “the change of the hero's hypostases, reflected in the appearance of his new names, is due to the change in the structure of the hero's personality, the nature of his participation in the drama of redemption, and involves the introduction of a new corresponding appeal (for example, Old Drunkard — Old Woman — Mother of Qiu Yintei)” (Ye Xianwei, 2019, p. 172).

In contrast to this trend, we can cite an example of a vivid Chinese traditional opera “Lady General Mu Takes Command”, where the gender of the heroine is clearly defined from the beginning to the end of the performance (China National Tourist Office, London, 2020).

Such examples of musical and stage performances dedicated to relatively recent events, where the gender of the warriors is clearly defined from the beginning of the action, include the colorful ballet “Red Women's Squad” created in 1964 by a group

of Chinese artists (composers Wu Qiuqiang, Du Mingxin, Dai Hongwei, Shi Wanchun, Wang Yanchao, choreographers Li Chengxiang, Jiang Zuhu, director and art designer Ma Yunhong) based on the events of the first stage (1927–1936) of the Chinese Civil War. The first night of the ballet, which took place in September 1964 in Beijing, was preceded by a two-week internship of 120 dancers in the People's Liberation Army of China. Before the public performance, the choreographers invited the head of the Beijing Military District to the last rehearsal, who noted that the dancers looked more like ordinary girls than heroic soldiers, so the experience, albeit short-term, of the ballerinas' direct stay in the army proved to be very important and useful in the subsequent change of the choreography of this work. After returning from this practice to the theater, the participants of the “Red Women's Detachment” took up not only bayonets, but also rifles and pistols, supplementing the classical dance with purely military movements and techniques of the national battle dance. It is in this form that this ballet performance has been performed with great success for almost 60 years not only in China, but also in America, England, Denmark, Israel, France, and many other countries, proving that its artistic value far exceeds the limitations imposed by time and ideology, allowing the originally ideologized ballet to become part of the universal cultural heritage (红色娘子军, 2022).

Along with the numerous musical characteristics of Mulan as a woman warrior, a woman national heroine, the composer repeatedly endows this main character of the opera with tenderly lyrical, purely feminine traits. An example of this state of mind of Mulan is her aria “My Love Will Remain with You for Life”, in which, behind the mask of a stern warrior, the girl's longing for her native land, her parents, and her entire family, from whom she had been cut off for many years in the army, breaks through. After the victory, the heroine of the war refuses honors as a military commander, the prospects of further career advancement in government positions at the imperial court, and valuable gifts for the sake of the opportunity to return to her family, whom she has not seen for ten years, and finally to transform into a woman again.

Thus, it is obvious that the composer, librettist, and opera directors present the protagonist as a complex multifaceted character who, despite the extreme circumstances in which she finds herself, year after year pretending to be a male warrior, remains tender, loving, and sincere in her natural, female dreams and manifestations.

The results. Even the initial analysis of the opera by the prominent contemporary artist Guan Xia shows the multifaceted interpretation of the image of the main character — one of the most famous characters of the ancient folk epic, as well as the possibility of finding hidden meaning in this masterpiece of modern Chinese opera, because with each new viewing or with each new production of “Mulan Psalm” and new actors performing the main roles, in particular, the three leading singers performing the role of Mulan, different facets of this heroine and the deeper meaning of the opera, which quickly crossed national borders and gained universal significance due to the involvement of its authors, directors and performers in the values that are eternally important to humanity, are revealed: patriotism, sacrifice for the sake of the homeland, and at the same time, sincere love, natural feelings, love for family, brothers in arms, and a loved one. Almost all of the characters are endowed with all of these traits, as there are virtually no negative characters in the opera, since the image of the enemy as such, as well as the enemy army, is not individualized but presented as a common evil that the characters fight and defeat.

Prospects for further research. In our opinion, it is important for a more detailed analysis of the opera “Mulan Psalm” to conduct a detailed comparative analysis of the opera’s productions on the Beijing (2006) and Vienna (2008) stages, the recordings of which are available on YouTube, because in the first version, the choreographic group is actively involved in the singing of soloists, chorus, orchestra and the peculiarities of the stage lighting design, which is a full participant in the general stage action (Amy Luong, 2019), while the rejection of the choreographic component in the second version is very successfully compensated by video projection of battle shots, images of fire, characteristic Chinese landscapes, certain symbols of the time, etc. on the background of the stage. In addition, the presence of the orchestra on the stage and the emotional figure of the conductor, who, in fact, in the absence of choreographic episodes, is the main focus of the audience’s attention, are of greater visual importance for the overall perception of the opera’s drama (Art Music Asia, 2014).

It would also be advisable, given the opportunity to review other versions of the opera, to compare the performance of the role of Mulan by three leading Chinese singers and to focus more closely on the means of stage and vocal expression used by these singers. Special attention may also be paid to identifying the peculiarities of Guan Xia’s orchestral style.

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