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Confucius' Opposition to the "New Music"

Kathleen Higgins [1]

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Abstract Confucius condemned Zheng 鄭 and Wei 衛 music, which had widespread popular appeal. He may have expected music to display fundamental patterns in the natural world and thriving human relationships, tasks that could be compromised by irregular and relatively complicated music like that of Zheng and Wei. He was also convinced that Zheng and Wei music would motivate undisciplined behavior in listeners. A third consideration may have been that even if some benefits of participation would derive from music that included innovations, traditional forms should be preferred because they would further bonds between generations and encourage a sense of community by emphasizing shared inheritance. Confucius seems unaware that innovation can help keep musical traditions alive, but he may have recognized that well-known music facilitates kinds of engagement that novel music cannot. Such engagement was key to what Confucius sought from music and would be reason enough for his judgment.

Keywords Confucius · Ethics · Music · Ritual · Tradition

1 Against the Music of the Zheng and the Wei

The idea that Confucius was an archconservative is an exaggerated caricature, but his comments on musical innovation lend some credence to this image. Twice in the *Lun Yu* 論語 (the *Analects*), he objects to what, according to Arthur Waley, was "often referred to as 'the new music' or 'the common music of the world,'" specifically the music of the Zheng 鄭 and Wei 衛 (Waley 1938/1989: 250n on *Lun Yu* 15.10). In *Lun Yu* 15.11, having been asked to describe what policies would make the state viable, Confucius remarks, "... as for music, play the *shao* and *wu*. Abolish the 'music' from the state of Zheng, ... for Zheng music is lewd ..." (Ames and Rosemont 1998:

✉ Kathleen Higgins
kmhiggins@austin.utexas.edu

[1] Department of Philosophy, University of Texas at Austin, 2210 Speedway, Stop 3500, Austin, Texas 78712-1737, USA

187). The *shao* 韶 was the Succession Dance (later regarded as the music used for the ascension of the Sage King Shun 舜 to the throne) and the *wu* 舞 made reference to King Wu's military endeavors. Both are classified as "elegant music" (*ya yue* 雅樂) performed in ceremonial court rituals during the Zhou 周 dynasty, which continued to rule in Confucius' day but whose political control by that point had been declining for several centuries (Waley 1938/1989: 59).

In *Lun Yu* 17.18 Confucius asserts, "I detest the fact that purple has stolen the place of red in noble dress; I detest the fact that the sounds of Zheng are corrupting our classical court music; I detest the fact that glib-tongued talkers bring down states and families" (Ames and Rosemont 1998: 208). His denunciation of Zheng and Wei music was reiterated by his intellectual descendants. His complaints are echoed, for instance, in the *Yue Ji* 樂記, the *Record of Music*, often attributed to second generation Confucian Gongsun Ni Zi 公孫尼子: "The music of Zheng and Wei is the music of a chaotic age. It borders on dissoluteness" (Cook 1995: 1.5/32).[1]

In championing the court music handed down from the Zhou dynasty, Confucius was defending a type of music that was becoming increasingly passé. In fact, Zhou ceremonial music had completely perished by the time the Qin 秦 empire began in 221 BCE (cf. Wong 2012: 244). This may be due in part to its relative blandness. Lothar von Falkenhausen characterizes Zhou ritual music as "quite uniform" by comparison to folk music and the music used for the entertainment of the aristocracy. Folk music by the time of Confucius' death emphasized a "quicker pace, jaunty rhythms, and ever-changing variety" (von Falkenhausen 2000: 102). Zhou ritual music, by contrast, became "increasingly staid and sterile," and by the Han 漢 dynasty, in efforts to follow Confucian precepts regarding ritual, court experts had to reconstruct Zhou ritual music entirely (von Falkenhausen 2000: 103). A similar project of complete reconstruction occurred during the Song 宋 dynasty as part of the neo-Confucian efforts to revive the tradition. It is fair to say that Confucius' efforts to preserve Zhou ritual music failed utterly. Meanwhile, the music of the Zheng and the Wei were extremely popular, and entertainments catered to this taste, often involving music from many states (von Falkenhausen 1993: 53–54). The Marquis of Wen seems to be describing a common view when he is portrayed in the *Yue Ji* as saying, "When I put on my official robe and black hat and listen to ancient Music (*yue* [樂]), I only feel I will keel over [from boredom]. When I listen to the music (*yin* [音]) of Zheng and Wei, I do not know what it means to be tired" (Cook 1995: 8.1/61).

My aim here is to consider some of the reasons Confucius had for rejecting the new music. I will argue that several possible reasons may have converged in motivating this view, all of which connect with his ethical program for restoring social order. While one might criticize his views for contributing to the demise of the very traditions he sought to rehabilitate, one might also defend him by arguing that traditional forms can themselves facilitate a sense of vitality in music and ritual. I conclude that contemporary concerns are sufficiently different from those of Confucius to encourage a very different view of musical innovations, especially those from diverse cultural origins.

[1] Cook considers the debate over the authorship of the text, and concludes that even if the text we have was compiled in the Han 漢 dynasty, the evidence suggests "most, if not all, of the material contained in the work was originally a product of the Warring States Period" (Cook 1995: 7). The translated work will hereafter be indicated by passage numbers as well as page numbers.

Yet Confucius' objections to Zheng and Wei music are quite consistent with his ethical and political program and should be assessed accordingly.

2 Confucius' Context

In order to determine what considerations may have led Confucius to reject the new music, we should make note of his cultural and musical context. In Confucius' China, warlords in various states were attempting to annex territory by waging war upon each other. In this unstable context, people could not be confident that prevailing political arrangements would last, and they were often uncertain as to whom they could trust. Indeed, *Lun Yu* 13.3, where Confucius discusses the importance of people playing out their ostensible roles, indicates the dire conditions of living without certitude about who was actually ruling. *Lun Yu* 12.11 ends with his interlocutor responding, "Indeed if the ruler does not rule, the minister not minister, the father not father, and the son not son, even if there were grain, would I get to eat of it?" (Ames and Rosemont 1998: 156).[2]

Confucius' program was a response to this situation. He aimed to restore order to society at a time when civility and trust were in short supply, and he saw ritual as a means to restore a sense of participation in a community. He considered ritual, along with the moral example set by the ruler, as a means of promoting social harmony, for ritual encourages people to cooperate through their own volition. As reported in *Lun Yu* 2.3,

> The Master said: "Lead the people with administrative injunctions (*zheng* 政) and keep them orderly with penal law (*xing* 刑), and they will avoid punishments but with be without a sense of shame. Lead them with excellence (*de* 德) and keep them orderly through observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮) and they will develop a sense of shame, and moreover, will order themselves." (Ames and Rosemont 1998: 76)

Force had led society to its current dismal situation. An illusion of social harmony might be secured through coercive means, but only so long as people were convinced that they were under surveillance. The value of ritual practices stressed here is that people embrace them themselves, joining with other members of their society to accomplish something together.

Ritual, for Confucius, includes everyday civilities. Once everyday rituals have become established as the proper way of doing things, people employ them as a way of assuming their roles as participants in society. *Lun Yu* 20.3 quotes Confucius as saying, "someone who does not understand the observance of ritual propriety (*li* 禮) has no way of knowing where to stand; a person who does not understand words has no way of knowing others" (Ames and Rosemont 1998: 229). Ritual is comparable to language as the means by which people communicate and coordinate their efforts.

Confucius also emphasized the importance of grand ritual ceremonies involving the whole community, the kinds of rituals that impressed the audience with the respective

[2] Waley's translation makes the point even more strongly: under these conditions "one may have a dish of millet in front of one and yet not know if one will live to eat it" (Waley 1938/1989: 166).

roles of different community members and the harmony that ideally obtains among them. Music was an essential complement to such rituals. As the *Yue Ji* describes the relationship, "Music (*yue*) serves to unite (*tong* 同); Ritual serves to differentiate (*yi* 異). With uniting there is mutual closeness; with differentiation there is mutual respect" (Cook 1995: 2.1/42). Music had a particularly important role in harmonizing the community. Indeed, as Scott Cook observes, music's role in enabling the feeling of harmony among participants ensured that the emphasis on differential hierarchical roles made evident in ritual did not become alienating (Cook 1995: 14; see also Cook 1995: 1.6/34).

The musical context in which Confucius lived was related to the political context in a straightforward way: foreign musical influences on the music of the Han people (Confucius' own group) derived from the interactions of populations that had developed during the Zhou. Robert Mok points out that during that dynasty nomadic peoples from four groups "intruded on the settlements of the Han people" and with this came the influence of foreign music on the rather "sedate" music of the Han. The nomadic groups in time assimilated into the agrarian lifestyle, and musical hybridization occurred. Mok describes the musical result as "music for feasting" and characterizes it more broadly as "music for entertainment" (Mok 1978: 40–41). Such music contrasts with music for ritual ceremonies, the *ya yue* 雅樂 that most concerned Confucius.

As to precisely what music in Confucius' time was like, we must rely on inference to a large degree, for we have no notation from that era.[3] The pentatonic scale predominated (hence the identification of five distinct tones within the *Yue Ji*), but certain instruments with a greater number of tonal possibilities may have added ornamental embellishments from outside it (see Cook 1995: 1.4/30–31, 8.5/62; see also von Falkenhausen 2000: 109). Scholars currently infer on the basis of textual evidence that instruments mostly played melodies in unison or at the octave, with different instrument combinations performing repetitions. *Lun Yu* 3.23 shows Confucius taking unison followed by some degree of variation to be the appropriate sequence.

> The Master talked to the Grand Music Master of Lu [魯] about music, and said: Much can be realized with music if one begins by playing in unison and then goes on to improvise with purity of tone and distinctness and flow, thereby bringing all to completion. (Ames and Rosemont 1998: 88)

A degree of interpretive latitude seems to have been granted to performers, if only because the notation system of the time (assuming one existed) was probably not more detailed than later ones. Later notation systems, for example, do not give rhythmic indications, and while established conventions may have provided fairly definite constraints, performers or their directors would have needed to specify exactly how rhythm was handled (von Falkenhausen 2000: 110). The art of performing certain of the instruments utilized in Confucius' time also depended on control of articulation, something that does not admit of strict specification to the same degree as pitch. This is notably true of stringed instruments, and particularly of the *qin* 琴, an unfretted zither

[3] Notation might have existed, for inscriptions on recently excavated sets of bells from a tomb dated to less than fifty years after Confucius' death show precise indications of relative intervallic relationships and indicate connections with an absolute pitch system, but we do not know whether notation existed at that time.

that is highly responsive to nuances of touch, an instrument which Confucius himself allegedly played.[4] The instrumentalist has considerable control and freedom in the way pitches are produced, and specific articulations would vary from performance to performance. If mastery of the music of the zithers of Confucius' time already involved the kind of manipulation of musical nuances that *qin* performance required in later times, this too would involve some interpretive discretion (Latartara 2005: 233).[5]

Confucius thus cannot be demanding the absolute repetition of the thick details of musical works as they have previously been performed.[6] He allows for a degree of performative latitude even while he objects to what he considers departures from tradition. Confucius was a connoisseur of music as well as a practitioner of music himself. Comments in the *Lun Yu* reveal that he paid attention to excellence in performance. It is said that Confucius "did not know the taste of meat" for three months after hearing the *shao* 韶 music performed in the state of Qi 齊, and he is reported to have said, "I had no idea that music could achieve such heights!" (*Lun Yu* 7.14; Ames and Rosemont 1998: 113–114). One of the relatively few times in the *Lun Yu* when Confucius introduces a note of levity occurs when he pokes fun at someone's inexpert music making:

> The Master, on traveling to the walled town of Wu [武], heard the sounds of stringed instruments and singing. He smiled, saying, "Why would one use an ox cleaver to kill a chicken?"
>
> Ziyou [子游] responded, "In the past I have heard you, Master, say 'Exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子) who study the way (*dao* 道) love others; petty persons who study the way are easier to employ.'"
>
> The Master replied, "My young friends, what Ziyou has said is right. What I was saying was just in fun." (*Lun Yu* 17.4; Ames and Rosemont 1998: 203)

The music of the Zheng and the Wei contrasted with *ya yue* not only in being livelier, but also in being more complicated. The *Yue Ji*, as Cook points out, emphasizes the importance of relatively simple musical structure, while Zheng and Wei music appears to have been considerably more elaborate, including both "complex rhythms and an expanded scale structure" (Cook 1995: 23; cf. de Woskin 1982: 92).[7] The expansion of scale structure was made possible through the use of tones interpolated between those of the pentatonic scale. Zheng music may also made use of more irregular lines than did traditional *ya yue*.

[4] The extent to which Confucius' zither was like the *qin* that was later developed is not an answerable question in the absence of any zither surviving from his lifetime.

[5] Even the surviving *qin* handbooks, which provide symbols indicating plucking manner, placement of the two hands, manner, and when to stop, are ambiguous on rhythmic matters. There is evidence, however, that although such notation is not clear regarding precise pitch, there was already interest in exact pitch in the Warring States period. See Chou 1976: 224.

[6] For a consideration of "thickness" in relation to musical works, see Stephen Davies's comment: "Thinner works determine less of the fine detail of their performances than do thicker ones, but performances are always thicker than the works they are of" (Davies 2001: 1).

[7] In the Confucian tradition that followed, de Woskin observes, "The music of Cheng became a metaphor in all of the arts for vulgarization and degeneration" (de Woskin 1982: 94).

We should recall that although Confucius appears to disapprove of Zheng music full stop, in that he calls for banning it to make the state viable, he is primarily concerned with the music of ritual ceremonies (cf. Graham 1989: 11).[8] He does not think that ritual music is the only kind of music that should be enjoyed, and he has no complaint about informal music practices. He apparently embraces the pleasures of music in casual and more intimate contexts (though presumably these would not be settings in which a temptation to complicate the music would commonly hold sway). *Lun Yu* 7.32 refers to his practice of joining in with such singing on those occasions when he liked a song, though he politely let those who started the song sing two repetitions before singing along (Waley 1989: 130 [passage no. 7.31]; or Ames and Rosemont 1998: 118). Popularity as such was not his basis for objecting to Zheng and Wei music; his objection was that it intruded upon ritual practice.

3 Confucius' Possible Motivations

Confucius' objection to Zheng and Wei music may be associated with multiple motives, all of which have an ethical aspect. The first of these concerns music's manifestation of the basic patterns in nature. This idea seems to have been part of the worldview of ancient China. By the time of the Han dynasty, elaborate cosmological correlation schemes linked the five tones of the pentatonic scale with the five aspects, as well as many other quintuplets spanning the range of human experience. Although the cosmological theorizing on which such schemes were based was consolidated and given transformed significance during the Han, as Erica Brindley demonstrates, speculations about music and cosmology trace to a much earlier stage in Chinese history (see Brindley 2007: 8–9).[9] Brindley herself points to a passage in the *Zuo Zhuan* 左傳 (*Commentary of Zuo*), a text some date to the 4th century BCE, that refers to the Six *Qi* 氣 of the Heavens as links "to the fundamentals of music, the Five Tones and Five Modes, thereby grounding music essentially in the meteorological and seasonal aspects of the cosmos" (Brindley 2012: 15). This indicates that an appreciation of the connections between patterns in music, patterns in natural phenomena, and patterns within the cosmos itself, was operative long before the Han.

If this is so, it seems plausible to attribute to Confucius the view that "good" music manifests fundamental patterns in nature. This is certainly the position advanced in the *Yue Ji*: "Music is the harmony of Heaven and Earth" (Cook 1995: 2.5/46). The *Yue Ji* takes the orderly patterns evident in nature and the cosmos to be the model for organizing human relationships as well (cf. Cook 1995: 49; see also Brindley 2012: 14). For example, "Heaven is honorable and Earth is lowly; and [the relationship of] the ruler and ministers has [thereby] been

[8] Confucius' objection to Zheng music altogether is suggested by his inclusion in his list of what should be done to make a viable state the admonition "Abolish the 'music' from the state of Zheng" (*Lun Yu* 12.11; Ames and Rosemont 1998: 187).

[9] Brindley notes that Sima Qian's 司馬遷 *Shi Ji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*) claims that the use of pitch-pipes in military intelligence had gone on for hundreds of generations and included a story of King Wu engaged in such a practice that explicitly connects the tones of music with months of the year.

fixed. When the low and the high have been set forth, the noble and the plebeian have been put in place" (Cook 1995: 3.3/52). The relationships between the five tones of the pentatonic scale in particular are presented in the text as manifesting the relationships between persons and things and to serve as symptoms when these relationships are out of order (Cook 1995: 1.4/30).[10] Such associations may have motivated Confucius in faulting Zheng and Wei music for deviating from the purity of the pentatonic scale and thus preventing music from revealing the optimal order of things, including human relationships. The *Yue Ji* takes the "transgressing" of the five tones of the pentatonic scale on each other to be the recipe for musical dissoluteness:

> If these five are all chaotic, and transgress upon each other in turn, this is called "man" (dissolute) [music]. If it is like this, then the extermination and passing away of the state will occur in no time at all. (Cook 1995: 1.4/31)

The suggestion here that Zheng and Wei music are a prognosticator of the society's dissolution points to another of Confucius' concerns, that of music as an ethical influence as well as a reflection of moral character.[11]

The idea that music affects a society's moral condition was entrenched in ancient Chinese thought before Confucius' time (cf. de Woskin 1982: 30). The *Shu Jing* 書經 (*Canon of Documents*), some of which may date to the 6th century BCE, reports Music Master Kui describing his music as making "all the governors ... truly harmonious" (Karlgren 1950: 12). Westerners have often compared Confucius to Plato in this respect. Both were convinced that music could educate, and that the right kind of music could help develop ethical human beings, while the wrong kind could result in ethical harm. As Xunzi 荀子, a 3rd-century Confucian, puts the point, "Music enters deeply into men and transforms them rapidly.

[10] See also Legge 1885: 2.11/109: "They gave laws for the great and small note according to their names, and harmonized the order of the beginning and the end, to represent the doing of things. Thus they made the underlying principles of the relations between the near and distant relatives, the noble and mean, the old and young, males and females, all to appear manifestly in the music."

[11] According to the Confucian tradition, the discerning student of music could come to recognize even the individual character of the person who devised a particular song. SIMA Qian reports the following story of Confucius in Book 47 of his *Shi Ji*:

> Confucius practiced playing the lute for ten days without attempting anything new. Shih Hsiang [師襄], his tutor, said, "You can go ahead now."
>
> "I have learned the tune but not the technique," said Confucius.
>
> After some time Shih Hsiang said, "You have mastered the measure now, you can go on."
>
> But Confucius replied, "I have not yet caught the spirit."
>
> Some time later the other said, "Now you have caught the spirit, you can go on."
>
> "I cannot yet visualize the man behind it," answered Confucius. Later he observed, "This is the work of a man who thought deeply and seriously, one who saw far ahead and had a calm, lofty outlook." He continued, "I see him now. He is dark and tall, with far-seeing eyes that seem to command all the kingdoms around. No one but King Wen could have composed this music."
>
> Shih Hsiang rose from his seat and bowed as he rejoined, "Yes, this is the *Lute-song of King Wen."* (H. Yang and G. Yang 1979: 14–15)

Therefore, the former kings were careful to give it the proper form" (Watson 1963: 114). The *Yue Ji* makes the same points:

> Music—it is what sages delight in, and it can be used to make better the hearts of the people. Its effect on people is deep; it can alter habits and change customs. Thus the former kings made manifest their teachings therein. (Cook 1995: 4.6/57)

Confucius was concerned that music promotes what is ethically good.[12] Music of the wrong sort, however, could encourage vice, and Confucius had this in view in his objection to Zheng and Wei, as his references in the *Lun Yu* to the "lewd" character of Zheng music and the "corrupting" features of both make clear. The *Yue Ji* similarly emphasizes the bad influence of Zheng and Wei music. Zheng music is also said to show "a liking for the overstepping of bounds and [leads toward] a licentious volition," while Wei music "is frantic and hurried, and [makes one's] volition troubled" (Cook 1995: 8.7/62–63).

Dissolute music has a direct influence on the behavior of those who experience it, as well. Zi Xia 子夏, responding to the previously cited remark of Marquis Wen of Wei (Wei Wen Hou 魏文侯) on his interest in the new music, itemizes its faults:

> Now with the new Music, [the dancers] advance and retreat in contracted movements, and [the music] overflows with lascivious sounds. It entrances [the listener] and does not cease. It reaches the point of clowns and dwarfs, and boys and girls frolicking together like monkeys, and [the distinction between] father and son is not known. At the end of the Music, no discussion can be done, and the ancient cannot be talked about. This is the issuing forth of the new Music. (Cook 1995: 8.3/61; cf. de Woskin 1982: 94)

The power of the right sort of music toward good ethical ends, however, was considerable. Music, as we have noted, was essential to Confucius' program of implementing ritual ceremonies to develop good moral habits. Michael Puett has persuasively argued that rituals in ancient China were aimed at replacing uneducated, often morally undesirable habits with cultivated ones. The importance of ritual space in the context of large-scale ritual ceremonies was that it enabled participants to enact and reiterate ethically valuable practices that contrasted with many of their entrenched routines outside ritual. In order for the more desirable behaviors and attitudes exemplified in ritual to translate to life outside of ritual, it was important to reiterate them over and over (Puett 2015: 550).[13]

Music affects participants' willingness to engage in rituals repeatedly. If participants experience rituals as aesthetically pleasing and emotionally engaging, they can become

[12] Cook notes that the *Yue Ji* restricts the term *yue* to virtuous music. *Yin* refers to an "ordered group of sounds," and this is the term used to refer to "music of a licentious or otherwise depraved nature" (Cook 1995: 21–22). This follows Confucius' association of music and virtue in the *Lun Yu* 3.3 when he asks what a person who is not *ren* 仁 can have to do with music.

[13] The passage is as follows: "Rituals are best thought of as patterned set of responses operating in tension with the patterned set of responses that usually govern our lives. And norms should rather be thought of as more generalized (and often quite ill-defined) concepts such as caring. Rituals are then, in a sense, a way of training ourselves to break from those patterns that usually prevent us from being caring toward others" (Puett 2015: 550).

self-sustaining. Music itself is pleasurable. Xunzi begins his "Discourse on Music" ("Yue Lun 樂論") with the comment, "Music is joy," a pun based on the fact that the common character used to communicate both "music" (樂 *yue*) and "joy" (樂 *le*). Music is pleasant in itself, and it also serves as a channel through which emotions can be expressed in a way that is socially harmonious. The *Yue Ji* describes music as a heightened mode of emotional expression:

> Thus the way in which song acts as speech is to draw out that speech. One delights in something, thus he speaks it. To speak it is not enough, thus he draws his speech out. To draw his speech out is not enough, thus he gives it [expressive] sighs. To give it [expressive] sighs is not enough, thus, without his knowing it, he expresses it through his hands, body, and feet in dance. (Cook 1995: 11.1/69: cf. Legge 1935/1960: 34)

Besides providing an acceptable outlet for emotional expression, music encourages a feeling of affinity with others because it causes those who hear it to share the emotions expressed. The *Yue Ji* 10.11 describes the former kings as expressing their joy through music, saying that "all under Heaven would join in their harmony" (Cook 1995: 10.11/68).

This socially bonding aspect of music suggests a third possible motivation for Confucius' view of Zheng and Wei music. Herbert Fingarette proposes that traditional forms were the most suitable resources for Confucius' purposes of using ritual to restore social harmony.[14] The invention of new rituals will never have the power of traditional ones as means for asserting collective identity, Fingarette argues. By using rituals that were already part of the community's past, by contrast, Confucius made use of something that the members of his society could recognize and embrace as already "theirs," collectively.

"This is who we are" is an important subtext of rituals employing traditional forms.[15] They represent and are part of the society's collective heritage, and as such they provide the participant with a convincing means of asserting full membership in the community and accepting responsibility for carrying forward the legacy of its ancestors (Hall and Ames 1998: 32, 271). This could not be accomplished by newly devised rituals or by music whose fashionability distracted attention from this connection with the past.

Retaining the tradition of the Zhou dynasty, then, was conducive to the Confucian agenda. Traditional rituals and the traditional music they involved enabled participants to affirm their collective identity. By assuming roles within a traditional ritual, participants assert themselves as those to whom the society has been entrusted. The rituals also link them directly with the ancestors, which is pertinent in that many of the large-scale rituals we are considering were focused on connection with the ancestors. Using forms inherited from their ancestors themselves, those engaged in ritual could performatively express their deference to them, while also solidifying their bonds with

[14] This analysis in general is heavily indebted to Fingarette 1972.

[15] Along these lines, Mark Slobin has analyzed the contemporary appeal of "heritage music," such as klezmer, as drawing in part from its suitability for expressing a sense of identity with a tradition (Slobin 2000: 11–14).

them and with each other. These large-scale rituals amount to gestures of accepting the responsibility for maintaining what has been inherited from the ancestors by utilizing forms that the ancestors themselves had devised.

This reinforcement of connections with the society's past also served to consolidate its members in the present. This is the vision that Xunzi defends in his characterization of music's power to link listeners:

> When music is performed in the ancestral temple of the ruler, and the ruler and his ministers, superiors and inferiors, listen to it together, there are none who are not filled with a spirit of harmonious reverence. When it is performed within the household, and father and sons, elder and younger brothers listen to it together, there are none who are not filled with a spirit of harmonious kinship. And when it is performed in the community, and old people and young together listen to it, there are none who are not filled with a spirit of harmonious obedience. (Watson 1963: 113)

What Fingarette says about the value of tradition in ritual holds especially strongly for music. Music is emotional glue, and reiterated music absorbs affectively powerful memories and associations from previous encounters with the same work or piece. The emotional power of music stems in part from its ability to tap into a texture of meanings that have been acquired over the course of one's musical life (Juslin and Västfjäll 2008; Higgins 1997). The enrichment of particular pieces of music by these developed layers of meaning is perhaps the strongest reason that "old favorites" and standard repertoires have the following they do in virtually all cultures (Davies 2001: 22 n11). These layers of meaning reinforce connections between the community's past and its present.

Foreign elements inserted into court music diminished its potential to make participants in civic ceremonies feel affiliated with their ancestors and with the society inherited from them. Thus, they would not contribute to the Confucian project of restoring social harmony through this means. Music's contribution to the project of restoring community spirit to society could not be furthered by novel elements grafted from foreign music, which could only distract from attention to their own specific intergenerational bonds. This, too, provided a reason for Confucius to reject Zheng and Wei music as having no place in the ceremonial music of the court.

4 Was Confucius Right?

Was Confucius' objection to Zheng and Wei music in ritual excessive? Certainly, such music did not seem as conducive to furthering his agenda as did the music that Confucius defended instead, the traditional music from Zhou rituals. Nevertheless, would the incorporation of Zheng and Wei elements necessarily detract from his purposes? An argument can be made to the contrary, that by shunning the new music, Confucius limited the appeal of his proposal for restoring social harmony.

Specifically, one might think that Confucius underestimates the extent to which too many constraints on novelty undermine participants' interest, which may be a precondition for their giving themselves over to the musical present. Ritual and music can

only do the work Confucius wants them to do if people are actually engaged in them and not just going through the motions. Confucius may be right to think that excessive complication obstructs clear perception of musical relationships, but perhaps excessive simplicity can be too straightforward to hold most people's attention, particularly when the simple pattern has been frequently repeated.

Peter Wong suggests that music adds liveliness to traditional rituals, which might otherwise seem overly redundant. However, repetition of the same music performed repeatedly in the same way can result in that music losing its vitality (Wong 2012: 246–247).[16] In the present era, many have had the experience of hearing the same recorded music (in the same performance) repeated so many times that what was once enjoyed becomes uninteresting or irritating. The problem of musical exhaustion would be much less acute in Confucius' time, when seemingly endless re-hearings of the same recorded performance was not possible. Confucius and his era would not have been as likely as those in this era to consider music as primarily for passive consumption. All music was of necessity "live" music, and the experience of making music together, if only by singing with others, was probably a much more common experience than it is for those currently alive. Nevertheless, there was obviously a marked taste for innovation in the music performed in ritual, given the need Confucius felt to deplore it.

One might also object to Confucius' views on the ground that some amount of innovation is compatible with music serving the functions that he envisages for it. Especially when a musical structure has been impressed on the public's mind by being performed repeatedly over time, embellishments that are not part of it are likely to be heard as decoration rather than substance. In fact, the basic structure may be all the more noticeable when contrasted with ornamentation.

Perhaps, in fact, Confucius would allow some decorative innovations in music, even *ya yue*. He was willing to accept certain innovations in connection with ritual, as when he said that he goes with the common practice in substituting a less expensive form of material for the one that had been originally required for the ritual ceremonial cap (*Lun Yu* 9.3; Ames and Rosemont 1998: 126). This is not, however, an innovation in procedure, and Confucius seems to take the important thing to be wearing the designated cap, though what it was made of might change over time. Along these lines, he might not have objected to technical transformations in particular musical instruments used in ritual, although this is not something that he discusses. Perhaps he would even have accepted some transformation in performance practice within ceremonial music, at least if it maintained the music's noble character. Shifts in performance practice tend to be gradual, however, and for this reason they are unlikely to be seen as "innovations" or "new," if they are noticed at all. In any case, even if Confucius were accepting of a degree of evolution in musical practice, he clearly rejected musical novelties that obscured basic forms that the ancestral kings who devised them had made salient, and he saw Zheng and Wei music as doing that, not simply adding decorative flourishes.

Can Confucius counter the argument that repetition of simple structures in music undercuts the life of the ritual? Certainly, Confucius was concerned that music and

[16] Wong's article offers a defense of considering the musical features of ritual. In effect, I am reversing the comparison by suggesting that we take note of the ritual value of ceremonial music from Confucius' point of view.

ritual were experienced as fresh. Some of his comments in the *Lun Yu*'s second chapter regarding *xiao* 孝 (filial piety)—that it is more than external deference and requires the proper countenance (*Lun Yu* 2.8; Ames and Rosemont 1998: 78)—indicate that he considered simple adherence to established procedures as deficient. Confucius also comments, "If I myself do not participate in the sacrifice, it is as though I have not sacrificed at all" (*Lun Yu* 3.12; Ames and Rosemont 1998: 85). Being personally invested is essential. Too much repetition of the same thing may interfere with this. However, a case can be made for Confucius' position that music's being from the tradition can contribute to the experience of its freshness and that musical novelty is not necessarily helpful toward this end.

Although it may seem counterintuitive, music that draws on the tradition can in practice gain its freshness from sources unavailable to completely novel music. One of these sources is the interplay between well-known music and the performance nuances that make each performance subtly different. Music that derives its interest from novelty does not focus the listener on the details, which admit of subtle differences between one performance and another. Such differences stand out particularly when one knows a musical work extremely well, so that one is aware down to very fine details. The actual execution of these details may subtly deviate from one's expectations, or one may have vague anticipations because one is aware of many possible ways of realizing them. In either case, one's attention is focused on how, precisely, the performer will interpret the details of the work. Because of the background of many prior experiences of the music, these subtleties can strike listeners as captivating, never quite as expected.

Routines that have become well-known enable those involved to communicate much with small nuances of gesture, and these become the focus of interest for connoisseurs. This is the case, I suspect, with all habitual practices, and it is particularly the case in the context of music. Those who are enthralled by performances of our Western classical repertoire often have exactly this response to performative nuances. The ideal is for both performer and listener to be in the present of the music, and this requires that the work performed not be experienced as dulled through too much previous exposure. Through the artful performance of an accustomed work, the listener feels as though one has never heard precisely "this" before.

The defender of Confucius can argue that the performance of canonical rituals and associated music allow for precisely this kind of detailed engagement, while musical novelty's charm is relatively superficial. In this connection, one might consider Richard Taruskin's suggestion that the main achievement that can be accomplished by those engaged in attempting "authentic performance" of Western classical music is to make the music sound new:

> Experiments based on historical research serve the same purpose for the performer: they open the mind and ear to new experiences, and enable him to transcend his habitual, and therefore unconsidered, ways of hearing and thinking about the music.... The object is not to duplicate the sounds of the past, for if that were our aim we would never know whether we had succeeded. What we are aiming at, rather, is the startling shock of newness, of immediacy, the sense of rightness that occurs when after countless frustrating experiments we feel as though we have achieved the identification of performance style with the demands of the music ... as the hallmark of a living tradition. (Taruskin 1984: 12)

Another potential source of freshness is the act of musical participation itself. Both music and ritual are alive to the extent that participants (both performers and listeners) are live to it. This depends on their deploying their attention so as to be present for each musical event as it occurs. One can do this even in the case of forms that are exceedingly familiar (cf. Higgins 1997). Participants must be willing to give the music life in this way for this to contribute to the experience of freshness in music. However, they have motive to do so in that this approach to music will heighten their enjoyment.

A third basis on which the music remains fresh is the changing cast of participants. Works that have been performed over long spans of time are given new life by virtue of being taken up by younger generations, who relate the work to the world in its current state. We might compare the ceremonial music that concerns Confucius to a traditional wedding ceremony in our own experience. A traditional wedding is charged by virtue of being the occasion in which the particular people involved take this well-trodden step, not because of the novelty of the ceremony. So too, the Zhou ceremony is freshened by its occurrence in somewhat different circumstances than before, often with some new parties involved. This can add poignancy to the later ceremony for the person who has experienced the same ritual before with other individuals assuming focal roles, as is commonly the case for older participants at funeral rituals.

The very fact that music, when repeated, occurs in a new set of circumstances contributes to its freshness. As Steven Feld points out, music has meaning because groups of people employ a variety of "interpretive moves" that relate it to what matters to them. They link the patterns of the music with locations, associations, categories, evaluations, and reflections they take to be of relevance (Feld 1984: 8). The participants necessarily bring to the musical experience a longer stream of background from which to draw on than ever before. The dynamic process of engaging the music from the vantage of current concerns will make every new experience of the same music different, so long as one is attending to it. Confucians can make strong arguments that traditional music can be fresh and powerfully affecting for those who are willing to attend to the meanings that have accumulated as a result of its reiterations.

5 Conclusion

The Confucian proscription of foreign elements in music was not aimed at ossifying musical forms but at reviving the health of society. Confucius' rejection of the music of the Zheng and the Wei does not represent musical conservatism for its own sake. The several ethical considerations discussed would converge in motivating this judgment and each seems to have had some weight for Confucius. His defense of not incorporating elements of the new music into ritual ceremonies is further supported by the consideration that traditional forms can help create circumstances in which music and ritual will be experienced as optimally alive, though this depends on the participant's willingness to be "live" to them. Precisely because well-known musical patterns acquire layers of meaning as they are repeated, the interaction between present awareness and the accumulated meaning makes possible a much richer experience than that provided by musical novelty, however refreshing the latter might be. The depth of such experience helps explain our toleration (even enthusiasm for) repetition on all structural levels in music. The repetition is never absolute because it involves ever-changing

participants (whether performers or listeners) whose attentional focus varies and whose current basis for interpretation will somewhat differ from what it was when they last heard the same piece. Confucius' vision is thus consistent with an appreciation of the potential vitality of reiterated music.

Nevertheless, Confucius' vision is blind to the way that certain changes over time can help musical traditions maintain themselves. They do so by being renewed by succeeding generations, who each do this by making the tradition their own, sometimes by adding innovations. This need not involve the extreme modifications that are possible in our era, when sound engineering studios, recordings with worldwide circulation, and individualized uses of music make startling appropriations and radical hybridizations something of a norm. However, making music one's own involves incorporating personalized touches or the generational equivalent, whether these are subtle shadings of interpretation in performance or more dramatic innovations and modifications.

Confucius' aim of uniting society by appeal to its specific traditions is also more appropriate to his circumstances than it may be to the present. He did not foresee a context in which the community that we might want to unite is global in its scope. A global community might derive a sense of "our heritage" from particular locations but change their meaning by resituating them, as Beethoven's melody is used in the European Union's anthem. Alternatively, it also might express its common purpose by hybridizing elements from multiple places, conveying the message that all of human history is our common inheritance.

In these respects, Confucius' vision may be unsuited to certain important contemporary goals. Nevertheless, we should be fair in assessing the role of his resistance to the new music of his time in the context of his larger ethical and political concerns. We should also recognize that his goal was anything but a staid, boring music. For music to function as he hoped it would, he needed a living form of music, music that delighted its participants and would help bring joy to the social world. That was what he wanted from revived Zhou ceremonial music, but in this, as in so much, Confucius was disappointed.

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