

Discourse on Music

5 Music is joy, an unavoidable human disposition. So, people cannot be without music; if they feel joy, they must express it in sound and give it shape in movement. The way of human beings is such that changes in the motions of their nature are completely contained in these sounds and movements. So, people cannot be without joy, and their joy cannot be without shape, but if it takes shape and does not accord with the Way, then there will inevitably be chaos. The former kings hated such chaos, and therefore they established the sounds of the *Ya* and the *Song*¹ in order to guide them. They caused the sounds to be enjoyable without becoming dissolute. They caused the patterns to be distinctive without becoming degenerate. They caused the progression, complexity, intensity, and rhythm of the music to be sufficient to move the goodness in people's hearts. They caused perverse and corrupt *qi* to have no place to attach itself to them. This is the manner in which the former kings created music, and so what is Mozi doing denouncing it?

10 And so, when music is performed in the ancestral temple and the ruler and ministers, superiors and inferiors, listen to it together, none fail to become harmoniously respectful. When it is performed within the home and father and sons, elder and younger brothers listen to it together, none fail to become harmoniously affectionate. And when it is performed in the village, and old and young people listen to it together, none fail to become harmoniously cooperative. Thus, music observes a single standard in order to fix its harmony, it brings together different instruments in order to ornament its rhythm, and it combines their playing in order to achieve a beautiful pattern. It is sufficient to lead people in a single, unified way, and is sufficient to bring order to the myriad changes within them. This is the method by which the former kings created music, and so what is Mozi doing denouncing it?²

25 Thus, in listening to the sounds of the *Ya* and *Song*, people's thoughts and intentions are broadened. In taking up the shield and axe of the war dance and rehearsing its motions, their appearance becomes majestic. In proceeding according to the markings and boundaries of the dance stage and conforming to the rhythm of the accompaniment,

¹ These are names of sections of the *Odes*.

² The repetition of this sentence here and throughout may be meant to mock Mozi's own repetitive style.

their ranks and formations become ordered, and their advances and retreats become uniform. And so, music is something one uses to conduct punitive military expeditions abroad, and it is something one uses to practice courteous deference and yielding at home. Conducting punitive military expeditions and practicing courteous deference and yielding have one and the same purpose. If one uses music to conduct punitive military expeditions abroad, then there will be none who do not submit. If one uses it to practice courteous deference and yielding at home, then there will be none who do not comply. Hence music brings great uniformity to all under Heaven. It is the key to balance and harmony and something that the dispositions of human beings cannot avoid. This is the method by which the former kings created their music, and so what is Mozi doing denouncing it?

Moreover, music is the means by which the former kings adorned their happiness. Military campaigns and armaments are the means by which the former kings adorned their anger. The happiness and anger of the former kings achieved a uniform measure in these things. Therefore, when they were happy, all under Heaven harmonized with them, and when they were angry, then violent and disorderly people feared them. Ritual and music are precisely the height of the way followed by the former kings, and so what is Mozi doing denouncing them? Thus I say: Mozi's understanding of the Way is like that of a blind person toward black and white, or like that of a deaf person toward high and low sounds, or like someone who wants to go to Chu but seeks it by going north.³

Sounds and music enter into people deeply and transform people quickly. Therefore, the former kings carefully made for these things a proper pattern. If music is balanced and peaceful, then the people will be harmonious and not dissolute. If music is solemn and majestic, then the people will be uniformly ordered and not cause chaos. When the people are harmonious and uniformly ordered, then the state's soldiers will be vigorous and its fortifications will be solid, and rival states will not dare to touch it.⁴ When the situation is like this, then the common people will all rest secure in their dwellings and delight in their villages, such as to provide sufficiently for their superior. Then their superior's fame will be clear, his glory will be great, and all the people within the four seas will want to have him as their governor. This is the beginning of being a true king.

If music is dissolute and dangerous, then the people will be dissolute, arrogant, vulgar, and base. If they are dissolute and arrogant then they will cause chaos. If they are vulgar and base then they will struggle with each other. If they cause chaos and struggle with each

³ Chu was on the southern end of the Chinese cultural sphere at this time.

⁴ See the similar wording at 16.10–12.

other, then the state's soldiers will be weak and its fortifications vulnerable, and rival states will put them in danger. When the situation is like this, then the common people will not rest secure in their dwellings and not delight in their villages, and will not provide sufficiently for their superior. And so, when ritual and music are discarded and deviant tunes arise, this is the root cause for the superior being endangered, disgraced, and having his territory diminished. Thus, the former kings valued ritual and music and considered deviant tunes base. As I have already said in "The Proper Order for Officials": The work of the Music Master is to cultivate government regulations and orders, to keep watch over poetry and artistic form, to prohibit perverse music, and to smoothly cultivate these tasks at the appropriate times, so as to prevent barbarian, vulgar, and deviant tunes from daring to disorder the refined pieces.⁵

Mozi says: "Music is something that the sage kings denounced. The *ru* practice it, and this is an error on their part." The gentleman does not agree. Music is something in which the sages delighted, for it has the power to make good the hearts of the people, to influence men deeply, and to reform their manners and customs with facility. Therefore, the former kings guided the people with ritual and music, and the people became harmonious and congenial. For the people have dispositions to like and dislike things, but if they are allowed no happy or angry reactions, then there will be chaos. The former kings hated this chaos, and so they cultivated their conduct and set in order their music, and all under Heaven became peacefully compliant by these things.

Thus, the mourning garments and the sounds of weeping make people's hearts sad. To strap on armor, don a helmet, and sing in the ranks makes people's hearts emboldened. Dissolute customs and the tunes of Zheng and Wey make people's hearts licentious. Putting on the ritual belt, robes, and cap, and dancing the *Shao* and singing the *Wu* make people's hearts invigorated. And so, the gentleman's ears will not listen to licentious sounds. His eyes will not look upon seductive sights. His mouth will not issue foul doctrines. These three are things that the gentleman is careful about.

Whenever wanton sounds arouse a person, a perverse *qi* responds to them from within. When this perverse *qi* takes form, then chaos results from it. But when proper sounds arouse a person, a compliant *qi* responds to them from within. When this compliant *qi* takes form, then good order results from it. Those singing the lead and those chiming in match each other, and goodness and badness in people both resemble this. Therefore, the gentleman is careful about what he rejects and what he draws near to.

⁵ See 9.385–89.

The gentleman guides his intentions with bells and drums. He delights his heart with the *qin* and *se*.⁶ He moves with shield and spear. He decorates his dance with feathers and plumes. He follows it up with stone chimes and pipes. And so, his purity resembles Heaven, his broadness resembles the Earth, and the way he postures and revolves has resemblance to the four seasons. 125

Thus:

When music is played, intentions gain purity.
 When rites are studied, conduct turns out perfectly.
 They make one's ears acute and they make one's eyes sharp; 130
 They give one's blood and *qi* balance and harmony;
 They modify customs and they alter habits,
 So all the people in the world live peaceably,

—and those who are good and fine delight in each other.

And so I say: Music is joy. The gentleman takes joy in attaining the Way. The petty man takes joy in attaining the object of his desires. If one takes the Way to regulate one's desires, then one will be happy and not disordered. If one forgets the Way for the sake of one's desires, then one will be confused and unhappy. And so music is the means to guide one's joy. The instruments made of metal, stone, silk string, and bamboo are the means to guide one's virtue. When music proceeds, then the people will turn toward what is correct. Thus, music is the height of ordering people, but Mozi denounces it! 140

Music, moreover, is unchanging harmony, and ritual is unalterable order. Music unites that which is the same, and ritual distinguishes that which is different. Together the combination of ritual and music governs the human heart. 145

To penetrate to the root and encompass all change—this is the essential disposition of music.⁷ To make clear sincerity and do away with pretense—this is the guiding principle of ritual. Mozi denounces these things, and so is deserving of punishment. However, the enlightened kings have passed away, and so no one corrects him. Foolish people study his ways and so endanger themselves. The gentleman clearly understands the value of music, and this is his virtue. Yet, a chaotic age hates what is good, and so will not heed him. Alas, how sad! He cannot succeed. You disciples must work hard at your studies and not be confused. 155

⁶ These are two types of zithers.

⁷ From here to the end of the paragraph, the original text is rhymed.

160 The phenomena of sounds and music are these:⁸ The drum is great and magnificent. The bell is expansive and full. The stone chimes are restrained and orderly. The *yu*, *sheng*, *xiao*, *he*, *guan*, and *yue*⁹ are energetic and vibrant. The *xun* and *chi*¹⁰ are rolling and undulating. The *se* is serene and relaxed. The *qin* is soft and gentle. Song is pure and penetrating.

165 On the meaning of the dance: The way of Heaven is all-encompassing.^a The drum is the lord of the music, is it not? Thus, the drum resembles Heaven. The bell resembles Earth. The stone chimes resemble water. The *yu*, *sheng*, *xiao*, *he*, *guan*, and *yue* resemble the sun, moon, and stars. The *tao*, *zhu*, *fu*, *ge*, *qiang*, and *qia*¹¹ resemble the
170 myriad creatures. How does one know the meaning of the dance? I say: The eyes do not themselves see it, and the ears do not themselves hear it. Nevertheless, it controls their postures, gestures, directions, and speed. When all the dancers are restrained and orderly, exerting to the utmost the strength of their bones and sinews to match the
175 rhythm of drum and bell sounding together, and no one is out of step, then how easy it is to tell the meaning of this group gathering!¹²

When I observe the village drinking ceremony, I know how easy and carefree the way of a true king is. The host personally goes to greet the guest of honor and the guests of second rank, and all the
180 other guests follow them. When they come to just outside the gate, the host bows to welcome the guest of honor and the guests of second rank, and then all the other guests enter on their own. Thus, what is *yi* for the noble and the lowly is properly differentiated.

As the host thrice gestures politely, they come to the stairs. After
185 the host thrice offers to yield the way, he ascends with the guest of honor. The host bows to him upon arriving at the hall and offers him wine, to which the guest of honor responds with a toast, and here the regulations for deferring and yielding are elaborate, but they are abbreviated for the guests of second rank. When it comes
190 to the rest of the guests, they ascend and receive wine. They sit to offer a sacrifice from it, but stand to drink it. Then, without offering a toast, they descend. Thus, what is *yi* for the exalted and the lesser is distinguished.

⁸ The Chinese text for this paragraph and the next is somewhat obscure and appears corrupted, so the translation here is tentative.

⁹ These are names of wind instruments made of one or more pipes.

¹⁰ The *xun* is a clay, egg-shaped wind instrument (an ocarina). The *chi* is a flute-like instrument.

¹¹ These are names of various percussion instruments.

¹² I.e., the true meaning of dance lies in the order it brings to a group of people, and this order is not itself a visible object or audible sound, but is nonetheless readily apparent from the performance.

The singers enter, ascend, and sing three songs, and the host offers them wine. The *sheng* players enter, play three pieces, and the host offers them wine. The singers and musicians take turns performing separately three times and then perform together three times. Then, the singers announce that the musical performance is complete, and they depart. Two assistants raise a goblet in toast, and then the Overseer of Decorum is established.¹³ From this I know that it is possible to gather in harmony and joy without becoming dissolute.

The guest of honor offers a toast to the host, the host offers a toast to the guests of second rank, the guests of second rank offer toasts to the rest of the guests, and the young and the seniors each drink in turn according to their rank in age, ending with the servants carrying the wash water. From this I know that it is possible to treat appropriately those junior and senior without leaving anyone out.

They descend to remove their shoes and ascend again to sit. Then, the cups are hoisted in toast without counting the rounds, but the regulations for drinking wine are that, if done in the morning, it does not waste the whole morning, and if done in the evening, it does not waste the whole night. When the guest of honor departs, the host bows in sending him off, and then proper regulation and good form have been brought to completion. From this I know that it is possible to enjoy comfort and relaxation without becoming disorderly.

These five kinds of conduct—differentiating noble and lowly, distinguishing exalted and lesser, gathering in harmony and joy without becoming dissolute, treating appropriately junior and senior without leaving anyone out, and enjoying comfort and relaxation without becoming disorderly—these are sufficient to rectify one's person and to settle the state. And when the state is settled, then all under Heaven will become settled. Hence I say: when I observe the village drinking ceremony, I know how easy and carefree the way of a true king is.

The signs of a disordered age are these: Men's clothing is elaborately woven. Their appearances are womanish. Their customs are licentious. Their intentions are set on profit. Their conduct is irregular. Their sounds and music are dangerous. Their emblems and insignias are deviant and ostentatious. The way they nurture the living lacks all proper measure. The way they send off the dead is stingy and Mohist.¹⁴ They denigrate ritual and *yi*, while valuing boldness and strength. When impoverished, they rob others. When wealthy, they become utter villains.

An ordered age is the opposite of all this.

¹³ The Overseer of Decorum was assigned temporarily as part of the ritual and had the task of presiding over the drinking among the various guests to ensure that no one drank too much or became unruly.

¹⁴ Compare 19.206–12 and 19.441.

Xunzi

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THE COMPLETE TEXT

TRANSLATED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

Eric L. Hutton

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