

Gabe Ratcliffe

Professor An

April 13, 2023

PHIL 3120

Music and ritual are two extremely important concepts within Chinese philosophy. For centuries, different Chinese philosophers have sought to examine the meaning and the importance of ritual and music within their society, as well as the role they play. Confucius and Mozi have two competing views on the matter. In this paper, I will compare the two philosophers' ideas of the principles of music and ritual. In doing so, I will give context to the philosophers' respective views on other philosophical matters, such as Confucius' view of Dao, The Mandate of Heaven, and Mozi's belief of universal love and mutual benefit. After comparing both philosophers' different views on ritual and music, I will then answer the question of what is the importance of ritual and music in Chinese philosophy.

To begin, the concept of yin 阴 and yang 阳 in Chinese philosophy is essential to the understanding of the two philosophers. Yin and yang is the concept of balance in the world. The two characters individually represent the sun and the moon, and in a broader context represent perfect opposites and balance within the forces of nature. They can also be looked at as water and fire, male and female, passiveness and force, etc. When discussing these two philosophers, one can describe them as being yin and yang with each other, balancing each other out. The greatest difference between the two is that Confucius placed greater emphasis on “filial piety, the principle that governed the land under Heaven, and therefore [it] was more concerned with people's emotions than with reaping material benefits” (Interpretations of Mohism's “Impartial Love” in the Republic of China: A Comparative Approach to Confucianism and Mohism).

Confucius based many of his teachings around being a moral model and a virtuous man who would attract others to do the same. Mozi, on the other hand, was the only ancient Chinese philosopher to regard heaven as being an anthropomorphic deity, and so he did not have the same emotional appeal to human feelings as Confucius. Thus, I believe that these two philosophers can be looked at as a yin and yang to one another; one emphasizing the individual, and the other focusing on the benefit for society as a whole.

Because Confucius and Mozi had very different views on the importance of music and ritual in society, it is important to have background on their individual philosophical beliefs. The golden rule of Confucianism is to do unto others what you would have them do unto you. Along with this, Confucius taught extensively on love, as well as virtue and how to live in a harmonious society. Confucius was a religious skeptic, meaning he believed that there was a limit to men's understanding, especially regarding death and spirits. For example, he famously and rhetorically asked, "until you know about living, then how can you know about death?" On the other hand, Mozi can be regarded as somewhat of a cynic. He did not believe in extravagance or fatalistic thinking as Confucius did. Mozi believed in connecting back with the common folk, honoring the worthy, and restoring peace and order. Thus, while there are similar goals between Confucius and Mozi, such as honoring the worthy and having a peaceful and orderly society, there are key fundamental differences in their teachings, of which music and ritual are the focus of this paper.

### **Confucius**

"Music is that which moves man from the internal; rites are that which affects man on the external. Music brings about harmony. Rites ensure obedience." This quote by Confucius is one of his fundamental philosophical ideas, that music and ritual are connected with heaven and

earth, and that the two of them together create harmony. There are two different interpretations of music and ritual within Confucius' thought; there is a narrow sense and a broad sense. The narrow sense of music is that in ceremonies or processions, there is always music assigned to it. For instance, if we go into a Christian church on Christmas, we will hear Christian hymns. During a wedding ceremony, we will hear wedding music, etc. In the broad sense, however, Confucius' philosophy of music is the concept of freedom and having free will. Confucian narrow sense of ritual is the situation assigned to you for a ceremony, such as a wedding or a funeral. Breaking this ritual or position that you are assigned to is looked at as an extremely negative thing. In the broad sense, ritual is the social or societal role or responsibility that someone plays. Music and ritual are used in accordance, meaning they are not mutually exclusive from one another. When Confucius talks about music and ritual he presents his idea for a harmonious society. By pairing together the fulfillment of a social role and balancing it with freedom, thus is created what Confucius believed to be the recipe for a harmonious society.

Furthermore, Confucius also talks about the concept of Dao, or the way. The way, according to Confucius, is the proper course of human interaction and the organization of government. If freedom and ritual paired together create the ideal harmonious society in which a government is to be organized, then we can also deduce that music and ritual can be looked at as the relationship between heaven and earth. German philosopher Max Muller, in regard to Confucian music and ritual stated, "To go to the very root (of our feelings) and know the changes (which they undergo) is the province of music; to display sincerity and put away all that is hypocritical is the grand law of ceremonies. Ceremonies and music resemble the nature of Heaven and Earth, penetrate to the virtues of the spiritual Intelligences, bring down the spirits from above, and raise up those whose seat is below. They give a sort of substantial embodiment

of what is most subtle as well as material, and regulate the duties between father and son, ruler and subject” (Sacred Books of the East, 114-115). Muller prescribed music and rituals as having two different elements: music in relation to feelings, and ritual relating to overall change. In other words, music relates to feelings and the expression of our feelings, whereas ceremonies (ritual) are referred to as experiencing the changes they undergo. Muller expresses that when we are able to know the changes of our feelings and rid ourselves of biases which we have in relation to ceremonies, then this concept is the same as the relationship between Heaven and Earth.

Additionally, to understand the divine relationship between music and ritual and how it relates to the relationship between heaven and earth, we must understand the process of music. Confucius served in government courts both as a governor of a small court, as well as an advisor to top officials. Because of this, he had special regulations and requirements for performing music and rituals. These performances were often lengthy processes that took up a large amount of time. “Hence the bell, the drum, the flute, and the sounding-stone; the plume, the fife, the shield, and the axe are the instruments (qi) of music; the curvings and stretchings (of the body), the bending down and lifting up (of the head); and the evolutions and numbers (of the performers), with the slowness and rapidity (of their movements), are its elegant accomplishments (wen). The dishes, round and square, the stands, the standing dishes, the prescribed rules and their elegant variations (zhidu wenzhang), are the instruments of ceremonies; the ascending and descending, the positions high and low, the wheelings about, and the changing of robes, are their elegant accomplishments. Therefore they who knew the essential nature of ceremonies and music could frame them; and they who had learned their elegant accomplishments could hand them down. The framers may be pronounced sage; the transmitters,

intelligent. Intelligence and sagehood are other names for transmitting and inventing” (Steben). Confucius placed massive value on the importance of music and ritual, so naturally, the steps to perform the music were extremely complicated. The performance of music was a ritual in itself, from the specific movements of the body to the tempo of the bodily movements, and lastly to the changing of the performers’ clothes.

When we observe the Mandate of Heaven, we notice a similarity to Confucian music and ritual and that of Christian music. The Mandate of Heaven is a triangular relationship between Heaven, ruler or recipient of the mandate, and the ordinary person being governed by the ruler. The ruler that receives the mandate from Heaven is often referred to as the Son of Heaven and has been deemed a virtuous man and fit to rule over the nation. Thus there is a dual relationship that is presented. The emperor not only has political autonomy but also has divine authority over the nation. Similarly, there is a parallel to the music and performance that we can see with Western religions. When a Christian goes to church, there is time spent worshiping God with music. Confucius has these long processes of music and ritual, reflecting Heaven and Earth, because in the same way that Western religions praise their God with music and performance, the Son of Heaven who has received the mandate is to also be honored through music and performance. In summary of Confucian music and ritual, we have to look at the representations of music and ritual. First is the individual context, promoting a humane government and a harmonious society, and the fulfillment of one's societal role. When mixing the broad sense of music and ritual together, Confucius believed that there is an interconnection between heaven and earth. Lastly, we can observe this belief by looking at the Mandate of Heaven. Because the Son of Heaven has both political sovereignty as well as divine acclaim, Confucius instilled the

ritualistic musical performance, which takes a lot of time and resources to complete, in order to honor the relationship that is created between heaven and earth through music and ritual.

### **Mozi**

To better understand Mozi's belief about ritual and music, we must first become familiar with his views on happiness and love. Although their views on ritual and music are a major difference between Confucius and Mozi, another view of theirs that is very different is their concepts of love. Confucius subscribed to the notion of graded love, which is a hierarchical system of love. In Confucius's graded love, he calls for there to be an order of love. First is to love your family, then your friends and neighbors, those who reside in your city or county, your countrymen, and then lastly the world. Furthermore, Confucius believed that love comes from eye contact or human interaction. The love that a parent and child have, Confucius would argue, comes from repeated eye contact. Because of this idea that love comes from family and human interaction, Confucius did not believe in the idea of universal love, meaning because one person cannot be the father of everyone, and one person does not have unlimited resources, there has to be a hierarchical system to this love. Mozi on the other hand preached the opposite of this. He believed in universal love, equal love to everybody with no distinction between family, neighbor, countrymen, etc. Mozi believed that if everyone practiced universal love, then this would be to the benefit of society. This principle of universal love that Mozi supported can also be transferred over to Mozi's idea of happiness. "Happiness principle is the same as the principle of universal love which is to be regarded as the peace of the state and of the world as well as the happiness of an individual and a society" (Augustine and Mozi on Happiness and Education Jeong-Kyu Lee, Ph.D. pp23). Therefore, Mozi had a very distinct definition of happiness, which derived from his philosophy of universal love. Mozi believed in universal love, and through it, mutual benefit for

all of society. When neighbors and coworkers can love each other as the family does, then this is when society becomes most well off, and every individual member of society gets to reap the rewards of happiness.

There is a large commonality between Mozi and Confucius, namely the rebellion against the aristocratic class. Although both philosophers shared this common goal, they differed on much. Mozi was born just a few years after the death of Confucius and thus grew up influenced by Confucian ideology. However, that being said, Mozi is regarded as one of the first intellectual rivals to Confucius wherein he criticized Confucian beliefs on lengths of mourning time, fatalism, and of course ritual music.

A common misconception that many have about Mozi is that Mozi declared ritual to be worthless. This, however, is not true. Mozi never condemned ritual, but instead was concerned with the absence of ritual within the courts. Mozi's criticism of Confucian ritual was Confucian ritual with regards to ghosts. Confucius was a religious skeptic, and could neither support the existence nor the lack of existence of spirits and ghosts. Nevertheless, Confucian ritual placed great importance on performance. Mozi felt the Confucians were sacrificing and performing rituals for something of which they could not identify the existence. Mozi, while criticizing the Confucian use of ritual with regard to spirits and ghosts, actually does endorse ritual practices within the court.

Mozi's main criticism of music in Confucian philosophy was the musical connection to pleasure. The Mandate of Heaven bestows a ruler's right to rule over his people. However, this Mandate also permits the people to revolt if their needs are not being met. Mozi constantly berated the Confucians for spending years mourning the deaths of loved ones and spending large amounts of resources on funerals. Mozi questioned the ability of a governor to govern if he is

spending his time deriving pleasure from elaborate musical displays, or spending years mourning the death of a loved one. Mozi refused to believe that someone who had been put in a position of power, could perform his duties unto the state if he was busy mourning the death of a loved one, or in this case, enjoying the elaborate musical displays. Thus, keeping in mind Mozi's support of ritual within government, but not of that within music, we can observe him saying, "With his music and dancing he attracts followers; with his multitude of ritual prescriptions to be observed in ascending and descending stairs he propounds his ceremonies; with his emphasis upon the rules for hastening and scurrying about court he impresses the multitude. His broad learning is of no use in deciding what is right for the age; his labored thinking does nothing to aid the people. One could live a couple of life-times and still not master all the learning of the Confucians; in all those years one could not succeed in carrying out all of their rites; while the largest fortune would not be sufficient to cover the expenses of their music" (Basic Writings of MoZi 132-133). Mozi's criticism of music is that of court music. When politicians spend the money that the state has collected on lavish performances for personal pleasure, this is what sets Mozi off. Mozi hated that instead of focusing on affairs of the state, the politicians spent their time and money enjoying showy musical displays.

Mozi faced significant backlash from Confucian thinkers for his stance on music. Mozi believed that both old music from the era of the Sage Kings, as well as modern ritualistic music, were all created to give people pleasure. During the height of Confucianism, Mozi argued that those who subscribed to Confucious beliefs were inept at solving the issues that were presented to the state. Mozi drew a correlation between these two things and infamously stated that he thought music should be completely eliminated from society.



Mozi's idea of the happiness of an individual directly correlates to the prosperity of the nation. Through universal love and the practice of extending familial love to those outside of the family, society as a collective will benefit. Through this universal love and mutual benefit, the will of Heaven can be executed better, which in turn, is essential for human happiness. Mozi regarded Confucius's ritualistic music as a selfish, pleasure-seeking endeavor, which interferes with the happiness and well-being of society. Therein lies Mozi's dispute with the Confucian ritualistic music.

Finally, what is the importance of ritual and music in Chinese philosophy? Confucius used ritual and music to bring about a harmonious society. Ritual and music must be used together, because in doing so they not only create a harmonious society, but they also honor the Mandate of Heaven. Mozi, while agreeing with the importance of ritual in court proceedings, disagreed with the notion of having music altogether because it distracts from getting things done in a timely manner. When music was exalted, the result was that the needs of the society were less likely to be met due to the pursuit of pleasure, which was a fact Mozi could not abide by. Confucius said in the *Analects*, "Arouse yourself through poetry, establish yourself through ritualized action, and complete yourself with music... When Confucius was in Qi, he heard the Shao music, and for three months he did not know the taste of meat." Music and ritualistic music dates back to the time of the Sage Kings, albeit they did have simple music. However, it was music nonetheless. Thus, the importance and the role of music within Chinese philosophy is to bring pleasure. Because of Mozi's philosophy of universal love, he believed this was the only way for society to be best off and for the individual to achieve true happiness. Mozi had an innate distrust of music because of the pleasure and joy it brings, which is the primary reason why Confucius recognized its importance. Not only did Confucius believe in the importance of

ritual and music for a free and harmonious society, but he also used it as a means to praise The Heaven. Mozi's disdain towards music because of its bringing about pleasure is the very reason that Confucius celebrated and placed massive importance on music. Thus, the role of music and ritual within ancient Chinese philosophy, regardless of its simplicity or its extravagance, is to bring about pleasure to the listener, a fact that was met with divergent responses by both Confucius and Mozi.