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Political and Musical Change in Early China: The Case of Chu

Summary

Eastern Zhou (770–221 BCE) to Han (206 BCE–220 CE) was a period of great social, cultural and political change in China. During this transitional time, China went from a land ruled by rivaling states to one dominated by a single emperor. Archaeological evidence of the 7th and 6th centuries BCE suggests that the rival states largely adhered to Zhou musical traditions. The abundance of bells and chime stones, associated with Zhou state ceremonies and ancestral rituals, serves as key evidence of this influence. Material evidence from the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, however, suggests great musical and cultural change, especially in the increasingly powerful Chu state. Despite the political demise of Chu in the 3rd century BCE, its musical and cultural impact continued well into the Han.

Keywords: China; Chu state; lacquer; musical instruments; Eastern Zhou; Han dynasty

Die östliche Zhou- (770–221 v. Chr.) und die Han-Dynastie (206 v. Chr.–220 n. Chr.) waren Perioden sozialer, kultureller und politischer Umwälzungen in China. In dieser Übergangszeit hat sich China von einem durch rivalisierende Staaten beherrschten zu einem unter einem einzigen Herrscher vereinten Land gewandelt. Archäologische Funde aus dem 7. und 6. Jh. v. Chr. legen nahe, dass sich die rivalisierenden Staaten größtenteils der musikalischen Tradition des Zhou-Staats angepasst haben. Die Fülle an Glocken und Klangsteinspielen, die bisher mit Zhou-staatlichen Zeremonien und Ahnenritualen verbunden werden, zeugen von diesem Einfluss. Jedoch implizieren materielle Belege aus dem 5. und 4. Jh. v. Chr. einen weitgreifenden Wandel auf der kulturellen und musikalischen Ebene, vor allem im zunehmend an Macht gewinnenden Chu-Staat. Trotz des politischen Niedergangs der Chu im 3. Jh. v. Chr. hielten sich die musikalischen und kulturellen Einflüsse bis in die Han-Dynastie.

Keywords: China; Chu (Staat); Lack; Musikinstrumente; östliche Zhou-Dynastie; Han-Dynastie

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I Introduction

Beginning in the 3rd century BCE, Chinese scholars perceived the shift towards *xinyue* 新樂 (New Music), possibly relying on sounds produced by strings, winds, and drums, as a sign of social and political decline. The growing absence of bells and chime stones in Chu and other states, even those located in the north, certainly reflected political change, specifically the decline of the Zhou state and the prestige associated with its ritual and musical practices (Figs. 1–2). However, could people really hear ‘decline’ in the music itself? Lü Buwei 呂不韋, the 3rd-century Qin 秦 statesman, certainly seemed to think so. He believed that the condition of a state was reflected in its music, and that an examination of the ‘tones’ of a particular state would reveal whether it was flourishing or in decline.¹ He argued that when Chu was in decline, it began to produce *wuyin* 巫音 (Shamanic tones), which he perceived as *chi* 侈 (extravagant).² He seemed to believe that the development of such music was both evidence for, and a predictor of, the imminent demise of the Chu state. Such theories were perhaps more reflective of political rhetoric than reality; many late Zhou and Han reformists adhered to the idea that governments could only survive if they maintained, or returned to, the ‘tried and true’ traditions of the Zhou state. They felt threatened by political and social change, and Chu was a prime example of such change. Thus, musical change in Chu might well have reflected political change, but not necessarily in the way that Lü Buwei suggested. Instead of focusing on Chu music as evidence for decline, this paper will argue that musical change in Chu was a reflection of that state’s increased power and prestige in the 4th century BCE.³ Although Chu was defeated by the Qin state in 223 BCE, its music and culture continued to flourish in subsequent periods, especially during the Han dynasty. Rather than reflecting decline, Chu culture and music invoked political, social, and cultural prestige at the Han imperial court, especially that of Gaozu 高祖 (reigned 202 to 195 BCE) and Emperor Wu 武帝 (reigned 141 to 81 BCE).

1 Knoblock and Riegel 2000, 145; *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 5/4.4B.

2 Knoblock and Riegel 2000, 141; *Lüshi chunqiu* 5/3.2. Little is known about the nature of Chu’s “shamanic tones”.

3 This paper expands on Jenny So’s theory that Chu’s

return to its native traditions in the 4th century BCE, particularly evidenced by its increased production of lacquers and silks as opposed to bronzes, was a result of its growing political confidence, So 1999, 36.

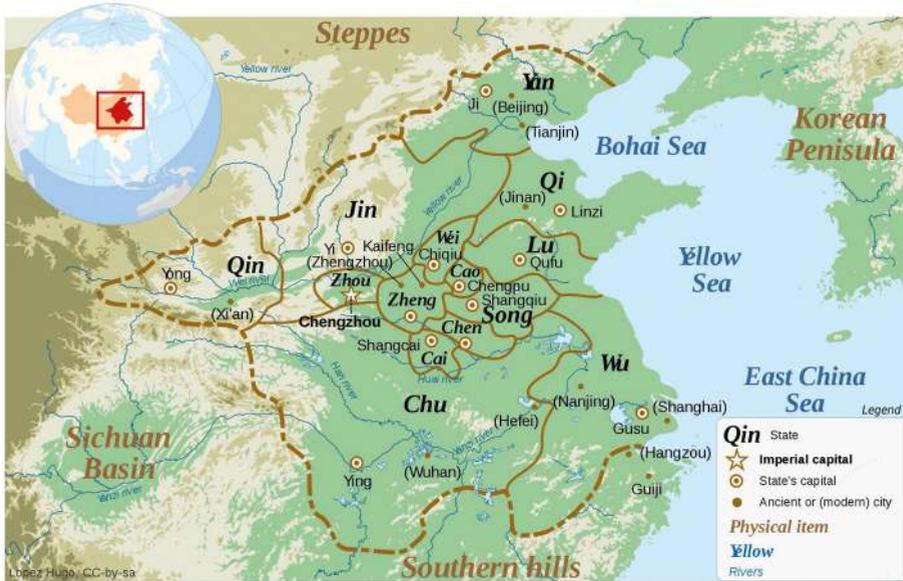


Fig. 1 Map showing the Chinese plain, Warring States Period, 5th century BCE.

2 The lacquer industry in early Chinese history

Before discussing the music and musical instruments of Chu and its vassal states, it is important to review the early history of lacquer itself and its possible connection to the south, especially during Eastern Zhou (770 to 221 BCE). Lacquer is produced from the sap of a tree indigenous to south and central China, *Rhus verniciflua*. After being heated and purified, color is added and the mixture is then applied in multiple layers, each being allowed to dry before the next is added, to a prepared wooden surface or cloth core. This process is very time-consuming, taking days to months to complete. The lacquer not only serves to decorate the object, producing a glossy surface with a variety of designs, but it is also highly durable and impervious to liquids.

Lacquer has a very long history in China. The earliest extant piece, dating to the first half of the 5th millennium BCE, is a red-lacquered wooden bowl from the Neolithic site, Hemudu 河姆渡, located in the Jiangnan 江南 region of southeast China.⁴ This region, which later was dominated by the Chu state, has a consistently warm and humid climate during the summer months, a key requirement for both the growth of *Rhus verniciflua*, and the craft of lacquer production. *Rhus verniciflua*, a deciduous tree growing up to 15 meters in height, grows wild in southern parts of China; it was only

4 Rawson et al. 2012. "Jiangnan" refers to the region south of the lower reaches of the Yangzi River.



Fig. 2 Map showing Chu and its neighboring states in 260 BCE.

during the Han period and later that it was cultivated more widely.⁵ Traces of lacquer objects, some dating as early as the first half of the 2nd millennium BCE, however, have been found outside the region where the tree would naturally have grown.⁶ It seems reasonable to suppose that either these objects were produced in workshops in the south and shipped to the north, or that the raw material itself was shipped to the north and worked by local woodworkers. Despite a dearth of material evidence in the north, Colin Mackenzie believes that a thriving wood carving, and presumably lacquer, tradition did exist there during the Shang 商 dynasty (ca. 1600 to ca. 1050 BCE).⁷ Alain Thote suggests

5 Zhou 1988, 74.

6 Robert Bagley discusses lacquered wood fragments of various objects, including coffins and small articles from Erlitou 二里头 (first half of the 2nd millennium BCE), as well as coffins and chariots from

the Anyang region, the final capital of the Shang dynasty, dating to the late 2nd millennium BCE. Bagley 1999, 160, 195, 205.

7 Mackenzie 1987, 82.

that Western Zhou (ca. 1050 to 771 BCE) rulers also maintained palace workshops for the production of lacquer objects in Chang'an (modern Xi'an).⁸ During Eastern Zhou, however, the northern lacquer industry seems to have declined. According to Mackenzie, the decline of these woodworking traditions in the north likely was due to the "gradual deforestation that took place there, either as a result of climatic desiccation or [as a result of] the impact of an expanding population and its insatiable demand for fuel."⁹ By the time of Eastern Zhou, he adds, "wood was a much more important [prestigious] material in the cultures of the Yangzi region [the south] than it was further north."¹⁰ The availability of materials and climate made the south a natural center for lacquer production as well.¹¹ Application and drying of lacquer requires a narrow range of temperature (25–30 degrees Celsius, 77–86 degrees Fahrenheit) and humidity (75–85%). Such conditions were far easier to attain year-round in the warm sub-tropical climate of southern China than they were in northern parts, where both tend to fluctuate more drastically.

By the late 4th and 3rd centuries BCE, Chu and Qin 秦 were the two major centers for lacquer production.¹² In 316 BCE, the state of Qin annexed the southern state of Shu 蜀 (located in modern-day Sichuan), and it appears to have taken control of pre-existing lacquer workshops in that region.¹³ The Qin produced objects of exceptionally high quality, many apparently rivaling the quality of Chu products, but their workshops cannot simply have appeared out of thin air. Archaeological evidence from tombs near Chengdu indicate that Shu and its neighbor Ba 巴, also in Sichuan, had well-developed lacquer traditions long before the Qin takeover.¹⁴ Workshops near Chengdu are known to have produced lacquer objects of very high quality as early as the 5th century BCE.¹⁵ Thote argues, however, that "lacquer craftsmanship in the Sichuan Basin may have been stimulated by imported objects," specifically from Chu.¹⁶

The Chu and Qin workshops in Shu seem to have produced very different products. Thote suggests that Chu lacquer sets tended to be much richer and more diverse.¹⁷ In addition to a greater variety of dishes, he also points to the abundance of lacquer musical instruments, tomb guardians (hybrid animal figures placed in tombs to protect them from malevolent spirits), pieces of furniture, chests, and weapons.¹⁸ As far as I can tell, no lacquer musical instruments – or artistic objects depicting them – survive in tombs associated with the Qin or former Shu states until the early imperial period, ca. 3rd century BCE, and later. The following passage from the Qin statesman Li Si's 李斯

8 Thote 2003, 341.

9 Mackenzie 1987, 83.

10 Mackenzie 1987, 83.

11 The Han historian Ban Gu 班固 (32 to 92 CE) described the region of Chu as a heavily forested, mountainous region fed by the Yangzi and Han rivers. See Hawkes 1985, 18.

12 Thote 2003.

13 Thote 2003, 338.

14 Thote 2003, 338–339.

15 Thote 2003, 340.

16 Thote 2003, 340.

17 Thote 2003, 352.

18 Thote 2003, 352–353.

biography in the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian) suggests that this might be due in part to preservation bias, discussed in more detail below:

Beating on earthen jars, tapping on earthen crocks, plucking the *zheng*-zither, and striking the thigh while singing and crying ‘Wu! Wu!’ to please the ear, this is the true music of Qin.

夫擊甕叩缶彈箏搏髀，而歌呼嗚嗚快耳（目）者，真秦之聲也。

This passage indicates that the *zheng*-zither, seemingly unknown in Chu during this time, was the favored instrument in traditional Qin music. Unfortunately, no archaeological evidence for the *zheng* survives in the area associated with the Qin state.¹⁹ The above passage leaves little doubt that wooden musical instruments – lacquered or not – were produced in, or for, the Qin state. Judging from the lacquer objects that survive from the Qin workshops at Shu, however, we can surmise nonetheless that production of lacquered musical instruments did not take the same precedence as it did in Chu during Eastern Zhou.

3 Lacquer musical instruments in the Chu region

Nearly all surviving wooden or gourd-bodied instruments were excavated from the south-east (particularly Hubei, Hunan, and southern Henan provinces), an area that was dominated primarily by Chu. This may be due in large part to preservation bias, organic materials surviving much better in the climate of south-eastern China. This region does not see the broad fluctuations of temperature and inconsistent rainfall of the north; the climate in the southeast is consistently damp and warm. In the northeast, “variable temperatures and fluctuating precipitation combine to accelerate the processes of decay.”²⁰ The unique matrix of south-eastern tombs also contributes to ideal preservation conditions for organic materials. Beginning around the 5th century BCE, “south-eastern builders surrounded many tombs with a layer of charcoal and then a lining of clay containing high alkaline levels. This material helped to seal the tomb, thereby producing an atmosphere in which bacteria were unable to thrive.”²¹ Conditions for the preservation of wooden and gourd-bodied musical instruments in the Chu region are ideal, while they are not in the northeast. Bells and chime stones, on the other hand, survive well in

19 The earliest surviving examples of thirteen-string zithers, identified in some sources as *zheng*, were excavated from a group of early Warring States tombs (ca. 5th century BCE) in Jiangxi Guixi Shuiyan (see Jiangxi sheng lishi bowuguan and Guixi xian wen-

hua guan 1980). This region was associated with the Yue 越 state in the 5th century BCE.

20 Renfrew and Bahn 1991, 51.

21 Furniss 2008, 12.

the climate of the northeast *and* the south, and we would expect to find them in tombs of both regions had they been buried there.

Although archaeological evidence for wooden and gourd-bodied instruments in the north is sparse, surviving northern texts suggest that they were used together with bells and chime stones in rituals as early as the 11th century BCE. In fact, many of the instruments unearthed in Chu may have existed in the north during the Shang dynasty, as suggested by Tong Kin-woon's study of Shang oracle-bone inscriptions, most dating no earlier than ca. 1200 BCE.²² If any of these wooden or gourd-bodied instruments were buried in northern tombs, most traces of them have disappeared.²³ Little is also known about northern lacquer industries, as suggested above, and the items they might have produced. Did they produce musical instruments, or were these items supplied from the south? I have suggested above the possibility that lacquer production was better suited to the climate and materials available in the south, particularly in the Chu region, and that such production was especially prevalent during Eastern Zhou. Production of some lacquer instruments – especially string instruments – may well have been Chu specialties, as reflected in the following passage from the ode, “Ding Zhi Fang Zhong” 定之方中 (‘When Ding Was in the Middle of the Sky’) in the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Songs), possibly dating to the 8th or 7th century BCE:

When Ding was in the middle of the sky;
 We begin to build the palace at Chu.
 Orientating them using the sun (as our guide)
 We start to build the houses of Chu.
 We planted the hazelnut and chestnut trees,
 The *yi* and *tong* (both Wutong?), the *zi* (Catalpa), and the *qi* (Lacquer tree),
 In order to make the *qin* and *se*.

定之方中，作于楚宮。揆之以日，作于楚室。樹之榛栗，椅桐梓漆，爰伐琴瑟。

Wutong and catalpa wood were common materials for the construction of zithers, both *qin* 琴 and *se* 瑟. The Wutong, *Firmiana simplex*, is native to central and southern China, while the catalpa is hardier and grows more widely throughout China. Both materials

22 See Tong 1982–1984.

23 While the wooden bodies of the *se* and *qin* would have deteriorated quickly in the fluctuating climate of the north, bronze tuning keys for *qin* have survived there from as early as the 5th century BCE. Such keys were needed to reach tuning pegs located on the underside of the *qin*. See Lawergren 2000, 75–79. Southern tombs and texts show a strong pref-

erence for the *se*; the *qin*, on the other hand, rarely appears there, Lawergren 2003b, 94. Drawing on organological and archaeological evidence, such as the bronze tuning keys, Lawergren 2003b provides strong evidence for the northern affinity of the *qin*, as well as possible western influences on its construction and tuning mechanisms.

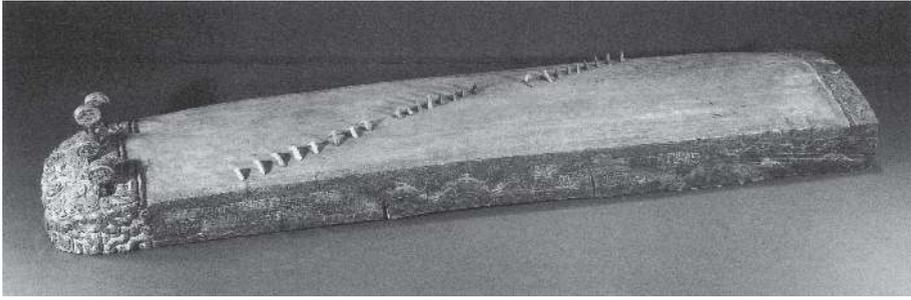


Fig. 3 Example of a *se*, from the tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng (d. 433 BCE), Hubei Suizhou Leigudun M1. Carved lacquered wood.

for the production of string instruments were abundant in the southeast, especially after the deforestation of much of northeast China by the 6th century BCE. At that time, northern states seem to have imported even the hardiest of these woods, catalpa, from Chu.²⁴

Beginning as early as the 7th century BCE, string instruments played key roles in Chu formal ensembles with bells and chime stones. In the 4th century BCE, however, they were used primarily to accompany smaller ensembles with drums and/or winds. More than 120 string instruments have been excavated from Eastern Zhou tombs, almost all located in the Chu region.²⁵ The *se*, a large zither with 19 to 26 strings, seems to have been favored over other string instruments in this area (Fig. 3). Of the 120-plus excavated examples, at least 106 are *se*.²⁶ The earliest surviving example comes from a tomb in the Chu region, Hubei Dangyang Zhaoxiang M4, dating to the 7th or 6th century BCE.²⁷ A second example from a tomb in the same region, Hubei Dangyang Caojiagang M5, dates to the 6th or 5th century BCE.²⁸ Six 19-stringed *se* of high quality were excavated from Henan Gushi Hougudui M1 (ca. 6th and early 5th centuries BCE), possibly belonging to the Wu 吳 or Fan states neighboring Chu.²⁹ These lacquered and engraved instruments were decorated with snakes and masks, very much like the motifs appearing on the *se* from the tomb found at Suizhou, Hubei, of Marquis Yi 乙 (d. 433 BCE), ruler of the Chu vassal state Zeng 曾. Two other string instruments, the *qin* (a 7- to 10-stringed zither) and the ‘five-string zither’, appear only occasionally in south-eastern tombs (Figs. 4–5).³⁰ The earliest surviving examples of both were found in the tomb of Marquis Yi.

24 Elvin 2004, 50, suggests that Chu was well-recognized for its thriving forests by late archaic times (ca. 6th century BCE). He cites a passage from the *Zuozhuan* about a 6th-century BCE diplomat, Shengzi, who suggests that the northern state of Jin imported much of its raw materials, including evergreen oak and catalpa, from Chu, but that Jin

workers used those materials to make their own products.

25 Furniss 2008, 288.

26 Furniss 2008, 288.

27 Yichang diqu bowuguan 1990.

28 Yichang diqu bowuguan 1988; Furniss 2008, 250.

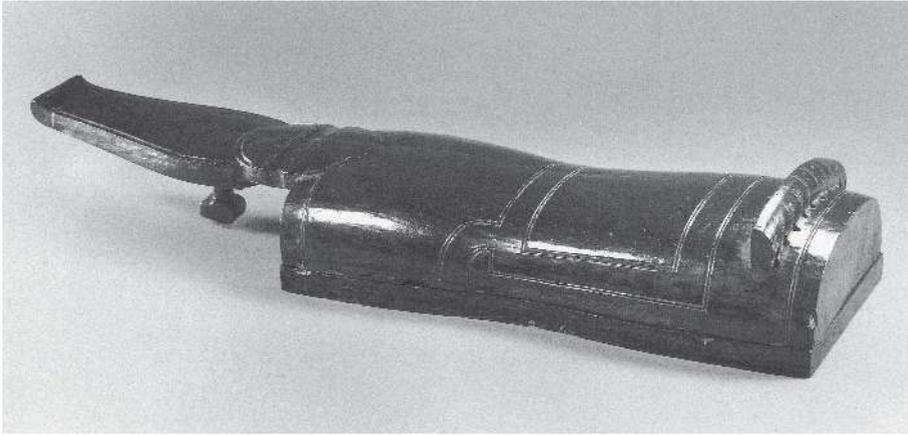


Fig. 4 *Qin* from Marquis Yi's tomb. Carved lacquered wood. Length: 67 cm.

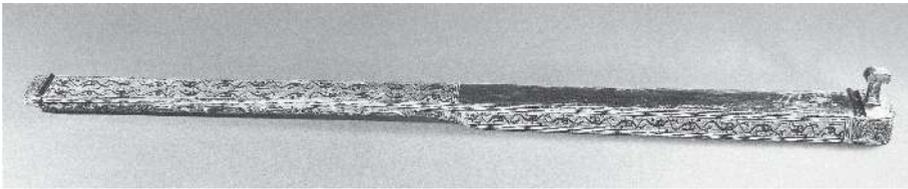


Fig. 5 Five-string zither from Marquis Yi's tomb. Carved lacquered wood. Length: 115 cm.

Drums are the second most common wooden instrument type in tombs of the Chu region; 118 examples dating to Eastern Zhou have been excavated.³¹ Although over 53 of these were buried alone or with other drum types, over 65 were excavated with assemblages of musical instruments.³² Nearly every excavated musical ensemble was accompanied by at least one drum.³³ This evidence suggests that drums served an essential role in Chu musical ensembles.

Li Chunyi distinguishes two primary drum types: the long-barreled and the short-barreled.³⁴ Barrel drums seem to have existed as early as the Shang dynasty in the north and southeast, as suggested by ceramic and bronze replicas of their wooden forms. The earliest example survives from a Neolithic tomb in northern China, Shanxi Xiangfen Taosi M3015.³⁵ Although long-barreled drums appear occasionally in Eastern Zhou tombs of the Chu region, short-barreled drums are far more numerous. Many of these

29 Furniss 2008, 238–241; Nomen Nescio 1981.

30 Furniss 2008, 67–71.

31 Furniss 2008, 288.

32 Furniss 2008, 288.

33 Furniss 2008, 288.

34 C. Li 1996, 2; Furniss 2008, 26.

35 C. Li 1996, 2–4; Furniss 2008, 26.

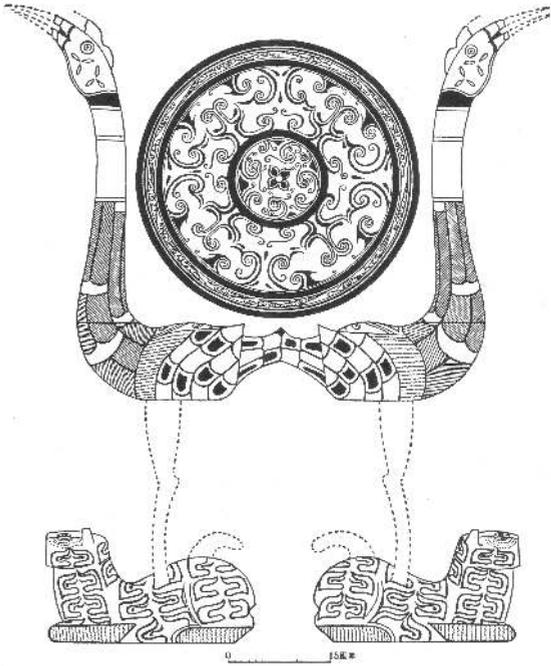


Fig. 6 Bird-and-tiger stand from Yutaishan M354.

drums are small and hand-held, but other short-barreled drums are quite large. Some of the larger examples were suspended from bird-and-tiger stands, consisting of two adorsed birds – possibly cranes – standing on tigers (Fig. 6). This type of drum stand seems to have been a Chu specialty. The deer drum, consisting of a carved wooden figure in the shape of a deer with a wooden striking surface attached to its rump, was also associated with Chu. Although the bird-and-tiger stand and deer drum did not survive the fall of the Chu state, possible evidence for their influence can be seen in depictions of *jiangu* 建鼓 (pole drums) in Han representational art.³⁶ Han stone engravings from the northeast typically depict pole drums mounted on a single- or double-animal base, usually taking the form of a tiger and, less often, a ram or deer.³⁷ These animal bases suggest a possible relationship with bird-and-tiger and deer drums in the south.

Short-barreled drums were not limited to the south, as they are mentioned in conjunction with large ritual ensembles in Zhou texts, such as the *Shijing*'s 'You Gu' 有瞽 (Blind Musicians).³⁸ Archaeological and visual evidence from the 5th century BCE and

36 The pole drum consists of a large long-barreled drum mounted on a tall pole set in a base.

37 Furniss 2008, 41.

38 Waley 1996, 297.

later, however, suggests that short-barreled drums were used infrequently in ritual ensembles of bells and chime stones; the larger and louder pole drums were favored in such ensembles. By Han times, short- and long-barreled drums are depicted frequently in funerary art of the north and south, but rarely in association with bells and chime stones. Instead, both drum types, shown singly or together with other wooden and gourd-bodied instruments, are connected to processions (military or funerary), lively entertainments, and banquets. This evidence once again points to the demise of traditional Zhou ritual music, performed with bells and chime stones, and a growing preference for smaller ensembles of drums, strings, and winds like those seen in the Chu region.

Wind instruments excavated from Eastern Zhou tombs total 51 or more examples; most again were located in the Chu region.³⁹ The mouth organ, a type of free-reed instrument played by blowing through a mouthpiece at the instrument's side, appears most frequently. At least thirty-nine examples are known.⁴⁰ Nearly all of these instruments appear together with ensembles of strings, drums, bells and/or chime stones.

Mouth organs were not limited, however, to the south during the Zhou period. As suggested by northern texts, such as the *Shijing*, mouth organs were also incorporated into Zhou ritual ensembles. Drawing on this textual evidence, Alan Thrasher regards the instrument as indigenous and more closely connected to historical traditions in northern and central-eastern China.⁴¹ Indeed, as he and Tong Kin-woon both have argued, Shang oracle bone inscriptions (ca. 1200 BCE) seem to mention two mouth organ types: the *he* 和 and *yu* 竽.⁴² The *sheng* 笙, the smaller and more common mouth organ type during Eastern Zhou and Han, first appears in the poem 'Luming' 鹿鳴 (The Deer Call) in the *Shijing*; this poem is said to date to the 7th century BCE and belongs to the northern textual tradition.⁴³ This evidence firmly places mouth organs in the tradition of the north.

Basing their claims on the material construction of mouth organs, several scholars assign a southern origin for the instrument. The body of the *sheng* was originally constructed using a bottle gourd, *Lagenaria siceraria*, which is frost tender and thrives in tropical and subtropical climates, while the pipes projecting from the gourd body are bamboo (Fig. 7; Mouth organs with bodies made of wood first appeared in tombs during the 4th century BCE, bronze examples that maintain the shape of bottle gourds survive from as early as the 3rd or 2nd century BCE⁴⁴). Arguing that bamboo is not native to northern China, Guo Moruo suggests a possible origin of the mouth organ amongst

39 Furniss 2008, 288.

40 Furniss 2008, 288.

41 Thrasher 1996, 1.

42 Thrasher 1996, 3; Tong 1982–1984, 41, 52.

43 Thrasher 1996, 4.

44 Several examples of bronze *sheng* have been found in Yunnan province. See Furniss 2008, 104–105; Guangsheng 2000, 96.

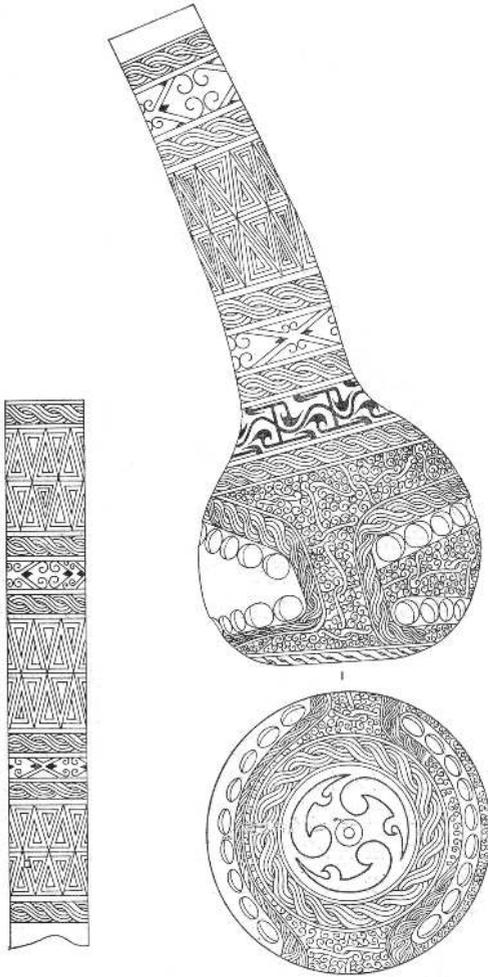


Fig. 7 *Sheng* from eastern compartment of Marquis Yi's tomb. Lacquered gourd with bamboo pipes (not shown). Height of gourd body: 22 cm.

southern Chinese peoples, particularly the Miao, who continue to use a six-piped example to this day.⁴⁵ Although Li Chunyi negates Guo's claim about the absence of bamboo in the north, he agrees that the mouth organ may be intimately linked to China's southern peoples.⁴⁶ Victor Mair has also provided some tantalizing evidence for the instrument having a southern source, and even perhaps for it not being indigenous at all.⁴⁷ Mair suggests that the original 'botanical home' for the bottle gourd was India, from which it spread to southern China and became intimately connected to the cosmological and origin myths of many southern Chinese cultures.⁴⁸ One myth, believed to be of

45 Guo 1949, 60; cited in C. Li 1996, 422.

46 C. Li 1996, 422.

47 Mair 1996.

48 Mair 1996, 198.



Fig. 8 *Chi* (transverse flute) from the central compartment of Marquis Yi's tomb. Lacquered bamboo.

southern origin and later adopted into northern Chinese culture, involves the primeval ancestress, Nü Wa 女媧, who is also the mythical inventor of the *sheng*.⁴⁹ Mair believes that the *sheng* is an “elaborated, refined, and sophisticated adaptation of the *khaen*,” a free-reed mouth organ prevalent throughout Southeast Asia.⁵⁰ Describing Chu culture as “transitional between north and south,” he implies that the *sheng* was transmitted to the north via Chu, which he describes as the “cradle of early Daoist thought” – offering further explanation as to why the instrument became intimately attached to early Daoist myths and stories.⁵¹ Indeed, the earliest surviving *sheng* was recovered from a 6th-century BCE Chu tomb in Hubei Danyang Zhaoxiang.⁵² Although the earliest history of the *sheng* is still a point of great contention, archaeological evidence strongly suggests that the instrument, appearing more often than any other winds, played a very important role in ensemble music of the Chu region. During the Han period, they continued to be used frequently in ensemble performances, usually without the accompaniment of bells and chime stones.

While mouth organs are the most common wind instruments appearing in Chu tombs, bamboo flutes and *paixiao* 排簫 (panpipes) also appear occasionally (Figs. 8–9). Of the 51 or so surviving wind instruments from Eastern Zhou tombs in the southeast, 5 were bamboo flutes and 7 were *paixiao*.⁵³ Although these instruments were constructed using bamboo of the species *Pleioblastus maculatus*, which is moderately hardy and can survive in the warm temperate climate of central and east China, the plant appears to

49 Mair cites a study by Hong Liu stressing the role that mouth organs continued to play in Miao 苗 moon dancing, which is said to resemble yearly sacrificial ceremonies to the goddess of marriage. Mair 1996, 199.

50 Mair 1996, 200.

51 Mair 1996, 200.

52 Yichang diqu bowuguan 1990. Xiangpeng 1996 (Hubei juan), fig. 1.14.5.

53 Furniss 2008, 288.

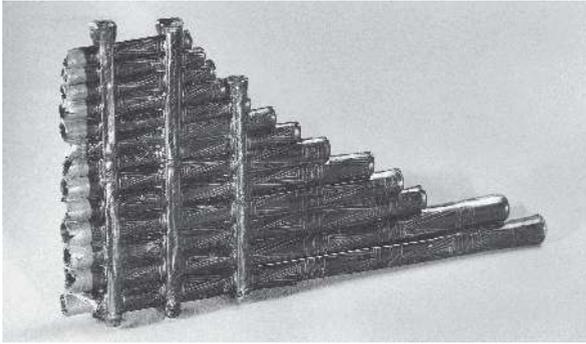


Fig. 9 *Paixiao* (panpipes) from Marquis Yi's tomb. Lacquered bamboo. L: 22.8 cm; W (max.): 11.7 cm.

have been especially abundant in southern China. The following passage from the *Xiang Shui* 湘水 (Xiang River) chapter of *Shuijingzhu* 水經注 (Commentary on the Waterways Classic), a 6th century CE text discussing ancient geography, suggests that materials for the *chi* 篪 (transverse flute) were gathered in the mountainous areas near the Xiang River: the northeast (of Mt. Jun) faces Mt. Bian. The mountain abounds with *chi* bamboo. 東北對編山，山多篪竹。

The region associated with the Xiang River, located in modern Hunan Province, was dominated by Chu during Eastern Zhou. A chapter in the *Biographies of Fan Ju and Cai Ze* 范雎蔡澤列傳 of the *Shiji* also associates the *chi* with a well-known 3rd-century BCE militarist from Chu, Wu Zixu 伍子胥.⁵⁴ *Chi*-flutes are not mentioned in northern texts until late Eastern Zhou and early Han, suggesting that they might not have been known there previously.⁵⁵

Archaeological evidence suggests that production of lacquered objects was a Chu specialty. Wooden and gourd-bodied instruments seem to have been key products of this native industry. Although we may never know for certain, Chu might well have been a major supplier of lacquer instruments to the north during Eastern Zhou, and it might have led the shift toward ensembles of such instruments.

4 The shifting instrumentation of Chu ensembles in the 5th to 3rd centuries BCE

Two musical ensemble types are evident in tombs associated with Chu and its vassal states: (1) ensembles of bells and chime stones accompanied by drums, strings and/or

54 *Shiji* 79; Watson 1993, 137; Guangsheng 2000, 91.

55 The earliest datable references to the *chi* are found in the *Chu Ci* 楚辭 (ca. 3rd century BCE to 2nd century CE), *Lüshi chunqiu* (3rd century BCE), and *Guanzi* 管子

(compiled as late as the 1st century BCE). As its name suggests, the *Chu Ci* (Songs of Chu) is a Chu text.

winds; and (2) ensembles of lacquered wooden and gourd-bodied instruments. Most ensembles of Type 1, totaling just over 20 extant examples, dated to the 5th century BCE and before.⁵⁶ Ensembles of Type 2 totaled more than 30 examples, most dating to the 4th century BCE and later.⁵⁷ Tombs with only one or more example of a string, drum, or wind instrument, and no other musical accompaniment, totaled well over 70 examples; drums and strings appeared most often.⁵⁸ This evidence attests to the decline of bells and chime stones and the increasing prestige of wooden and gourd-bodied instruments in the Chu region between the 5th and 4th centuries BCE.

Ensembles of Type 1 were traditionally associated with Zhou ritual music, possibly dating as early as the 11th century BCE. Early Zhou texts, such as the *Shijing*,⁵⁹ mention ensembles of bells, chime stones, and wooden and gourd-bodied musical instruments – such as zithers, flutes, and mouth organs – that would accompany Zhou ritual ceremonies. The following passage from the Gu Zhong 鼓鐘 (Strike the Bells) ode in the *Shijing* shows this clearly:

Strike the bells, *qin*, *qin*.
Strike the *se*-zither, strike the *qin*-zither.
The *sheng* and chime stones together sound.
With them (they perform) the *ya* and *nan*.
They use the *yue*-flute without error.

鼓鐘欽欽，鼓瑟鼓琴，笙磬同音。
以雅以南，以籥不僭。

The configuration of instruments in this passage closely parallels the types of instruments present in the central chamber of the tomb of Marquis Yi (died 433 BCE). These instruments included a set of sixty-five bronze bells, a large pole drum, a bronze stand for thirty-two chime stones, two smaller drums, seven *se*, four mouth organs, two panpipes, and two transverse flutes.⁶⁰

56 See Furniss 2008, 330–343; tables 6–7. These numbers do not take into account tombs with bells and/or chime stones found without additional accompaniment. Wooden and gourd-bodied instruments may well have accompanied these ensembles, but if so, traces of them have since disappeared. Nevertheless, like ensembles of bells, chime stones, and wooden and gourd-bodied instruments, tombs with only bells and/or chime stones largely date to the 5th century BCE and before.

57 See Furniss 2008, 314–329; tables 4–5.

58 See Furniss 2008, 296–313; tables 1–3.

59 Poems in the *Shijing* are believed to date between ca.

1000 and ca. 600 BCE; see Loewe 1993.

60 Major and So 2000, 14. For a general overview of the musical instruments discovered in the tomb of Marquis Yi, see Major and So 2000; C. Chen 1994 discusses the two-tone bells found in the tomb; see Shao 2010 for a broad discussion of Chu bells and the research that has been done on this subject. For a general overview of Chu music and musical artifacts, see Y. Li 1990; Y. Li 1991; Tang 2002; Huang 2011. Much has been written about Chinese music archaeology by Chinese scholars; just a few examples that were consulted for this study are Fang

Marquis Yi's tomb is thought to be laid out like a palace with tomb furnishings divided by function into four separate compartments.⁶¹ The central chamber may well represent an audience hall, where formal rituals of state would have taken place.⁶² Most of the instruments found in this chamber are described in connection with Zhou ritual music (*yayue* 雅樂), and it is possible that they would have been used to perform such music. In the 5th century BCE, Zhou ritual music may still have been regarded as the music of power and prestige. Marquis Yi's 'formal' ensemble may also have performed less formal music, however.⁶³ The following passage from the *Zhaohun* 招魂 (Summons of the Soul) song of the *Chu Ci* 楚辭 (Songs of Chu), a classic Chu prose text dating from as early as the 3rd century BCE, suggests that Chu people used bells and chime stones for entertainments, not just rituals:

Before the dainties have left the tables, girl musicians take up their places.
They set up the bells and fasten the drums and sing the latest songs: [...]
The lovely girls are drunk with wine, their faces are flushed.
With amorous glances and flirting looks, their eyes like wavelets sparkle;
Dressed in embroideries, clad in finest silks, splendid but not showy;
Their long hair falling from high chignons, hangs low in lovely tresses.
Two rows of eight, in perfect time, perform a dance of Zheng;
Their xi-bi buckles of Jin workmanship glitter like bright suns.
Bells clash in their swaying frames; the catalpa-wood zither's strings are swept.
Their sleeves rise like crossed bamboo stems, then slowly shimmer downwards.
Pipes and zithers rise in wild harmonies, the sounding drums thunderously roll;
And the courts of the palace quake and tremble as they throw themselves into
the Whirling Chu.
Then they sing songs of Wu and ballads of Cai and play the Da-lü music
Men and women now sit together, mingling freely without distinction
Hat-strings and fastenings come untied: the revel turns to wild disorder.
The singing-girls of Zheng and Wei come to take their places among the guests;
But the dancers of the Whirling Chu find favour over all the others.⁶⁴

餽羞未通，女樂羅些。陳鍾按鼓，造新歌些。涉江採菱，發揚荷些。美人既醉，朱顏酡些。嬉光眇視，目曾波些。被文服纖，麗而不奇些。長髮曼髻，艷陸離些。二八齊容，起鄭舞些。衽若交竿，撫案下些。竽瑟狂會，攄鳴鼓些。宮庭震驚，發激楚些。吳歎蔡謳，

2011; Fang 2006; and Wang 2006.

61 Major and So 2000, 14.

62 Major and So 2000, 14.

63 Major and So 2000, 19–20.

64 Hawkes 1985, 228–229. For a general overview of Chu music and musical instruments as informed by the *Chu Ci*, see Zhang 2013; A. Chen 2011; Jin 2011; and Jiao 2008.

奏大呂些。士女雜坐，亂而不分些。放陳組纓，班其相紛些。鄭衛妖玩，來雜陳些。激楚之結，獨秀先些。

This famous passage, believed to date between 277 and 248 BCE, describes a wild scene of dancing and singing accompanied by a wealth of musical instruments, including strings, drums, winds, bells, and chime stones. The vivid scene takes place in a palace, clearly belonging to a wealthy person and probably one of high status, possibly even Chu king Qingxiang 頃襄 (reigned 298 to 263 BCE).⁶⁵ The passage is very different from those associated with the Zhou state, in which the same musical instruments, especially bells and chime stones, are connected with what some late Eastern Zhou and Han élites described as staid, boring rituals.

Although the above passage indicates that Chu rulers continued to use bells and chime stones on some occasions until the 3rd century BCE, very few examples of bells and chime stones actually survive after the 5th century BCE. The absence of these instruments from Chu tombs may be due in part to changing burial practices; bells and chime stones may have been regarded as too valuable to bury in tombs. Jenny So, however, argues that bronze objects in general had fallen out of fashion in Chu by the 4th century BCE.⁶⁶ She suggests a political motivation behind this shift: “The greatly diminished role of ritual bronzes in Chu burials signals a shift in Chu loyalties. In their quest for power and peer recognition, the early Chu rulers subscribed to traditional Zhou values and rituals as signs of their power and status. Confident in their political and territorial success, later Chu rulers returned to native customs as symbols of their unique tradition and achievements. Local products of the Chu domain – the multicolored lacquers and luxurious silks – flourished under royal patronage as they came to replace bronze as prized items in burials.”⁶⁷

Additional evidence pointing to the decline of bronze bells (and chime stones) is also present in Han representations of musical performances, which rarely depict these instruments. By Han times, musical performances consisted largely of wooden and gourd-bodied instruments, including winds, strings, and/or drums.⁶⁸

The growing popularity of such instruments is clearly attested in Chu and its vassal states in the late 5th and 4th centuries BCE. The most famous example of an ensemble of strings, winds and drums (Type 2) was also unearthed from Marquis Yi’s tomb. This ensemble contained eight or nine instruments, including three *se*, one *qin*, one five-stringed zither (identified as a *zhu* 筑 by some scholars),⁶⁹ two mouth organs, and

65 Hawkes 1985, 228–229.

66 So 1999, 36.

67 So 1999, 37.

68 I discuss these ensembles at length in Furniss 2008, 157–188.

69 *Zhongguo wenwu bao* (28 July 1996), 3; Lawergren 2000, 79; Major and So 2000, 21. I have debated the accuracy of this identification in Furniss 2008, 71–73.

one small drum suspended between the antlers of a fantastic bronze bird stand inlaid with gold and turquoise. A wooden deer with a hole in its rump may well have been a deer drum. Scholars have suggested that this secondary ensemble, located in the burial chamber of the marquis and thereby representing his “residential” chamber, performed music of a less formal nature, more likely for the marquis’s personal pleasure and entertainment.⁷⁰ During the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, the same instrument types that appear in this ‘informal’ ensemble – strings, winds, and drums – appear with increasing frequency in Chu tombs, and they are the dominant instruments in depictions of musical performance throughout the Han period.

In addition to a resurgence of Chu’s native traditions, especially its lacquer industry, there are several possible reasons for the increasing popularity of lacquer musical instruments in Chu and their continued esteem in Han times. It is likely that production of lacquer instruments was less costly in terms of materials and labor than bronze bells, and affordability may therefore have been a key factor. Another likely reason for the growing popularity of lacquer instruments, especially those with strings, was their versatility. Although bells and chime stones were capable of considerably louder tones than strings, the “lingering sounds of (the) bells made them unsuited to follow the fastest melodies.”⁷¹ And, fast music seems to have been the trend of the time, as I will discuss further below. Unlike bells, stringed instruments have the potential to play melodies with fast tempos and long *portamenti* (sliding finger-movements).⁷² Stringed instruments are also capable of a higher level of expressiveness in musical performance. For instance, vibrato, a subtle pitch-altering technique often used on stringed instruments to add tone color, is not possible on bells.⁷³

Wind instruments, such as flutes and panpipes, were also capable of playing faster melodies. Along with strings, these instruments probably provided melodies, while mouth organs accompanied them with harmonizing notes.⁷⁴ Interestingly, in the tomb of Marquis Yi, panpipes and transverse flutes only appear in the large ensemble of the central chamber, while mouth organs accompany both ensembles. Panpipes and flutes

70 Major and So 2000, 21.

71 Bagley 2000, 35.

72 Lawergren has suggested that the distance between the string and fingerboard was not small enough to permit *portamento* or *glissando* playing at this time, suggesting perhaps that “only open strings could have been played”; Lawergren 2003a, 35–36. In my opinion, it might have been possible to play harmonic pitches.

73 If vibrato was employed on the ancient *se*, it might have resembled vibrato on a modern Japanese *koto*,

believed to be a later relative of the *se*. *Koto* vibrato requires the finger of the left hand to push down and release the string several times with varying speed to produce slight variations in pitch.

74 Judging from archaeological finds, the *sheng* was almost exclusively an accompanying instrument in ensembles. In the 1980 edition of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Colin Mackerras suggests that the ancient *sheng* could only produce simple chords, consisting of open 4ths or 5ths; Mackerras 1980, 278.

seem to have been used primarily for formal court music, while mouth organs were employed for both formal and informal music. By Han times, the function of panpipes and flutes seems to have changed; they, too, were used in small ensembles for entertainment purposes, not just for formal music.

Although the musical instruments in the central chamber were without a doubt more costly to produce, those of the residential chamber seem to exhibit a preference for the more intimate musical styles of the small ensemble. This is attested by the proximity of the small ensemble to Marquis Yi's coffin and by the presence of female attendants, many of whom likely served as musicians, in the same compartment.⁷⁵ Small ensembles of strings, winds, and drums like Marquis Yi's, gradually took the place of Zhou ritual orchestras, and were increasingly connected to entertainment into Han times. Such ensembles may well have performed what was then known as 'New Music'.

5 New music and Chu melodies

Late Zhou and Han texts, most dating to the 3rd century BCE and later, make frequent reference to new forms of secular entertainment music, known as *xinyue* 新樂 (New Music) or *Zheng Wei zhi yin* 鄭微之音 (the Tones of Zheng and Wei),⁷⁶ which were gaining popularity at the time. The *Analects*,⁷⁷ for example, describe Confucius' views (551 to 549 BCE) on the music of Zheng, which he regarded as a degenerate state: "Abolish the 'music' from the state of Zheng and keep glib talkers at a distance, for the Zheng music is lewd and glib talkers are dangerous."⁷⁸ In another passage, he laments that the sounds of Zheng have led to the "corruption" of *yayue*.⁷⁹ Lü Buwei discusses the development of *chiyue* 侈樂 (extravagant music) in several declining states, such as that of Chu, Qi 齊, and Song 宋 (see Fig. 1). As indicated in the following passage from the *Lüshi chunqiu*, he suggests that such music only brought further decline: "Thus, the more extravagant is the music, the gloomier are the people, the more disordered the state, and the more debased its ruler."⁸⁰ Later texts, such as the *Yueji* 樂記 and *Shiji* (ca. 2nd to 1st centuries

75 Marquis Yi's tomb contained the bodies of twenty-one females, ranging in age from 13 to 25. Their bodies were distributed in two compartments: thirteen were buried in the western chamber, identified by Major and So as corresponding to the "women's quarters" of a palace, and the other eight were buried in the marquis's burial chamber. Major and So suggest that the women in the western chamber may have served as the court ensemble's musicians; Major and So 2000, 14. It is likely that the women buried in Marquis Yi's "residential chamber" were

favorite concubines and personal musicians.

76 Zheng and Wei were feudal states during the Zhou dynasty; see Fig. 1. See Feng 1984 for a discussion of the tones of Zheng and Wei.

77 Although attributed to Confucius, the text is a composite work by various hands. It is believed to date to the 3rd century BCE or later.

78 Ames and Rosemont 1998, 187.

79 Ames and Rosemont 1998, 208.

80 Knoblock and Riegel 2000, 140; *Lüshi chunqiu* 5/3.1.

BCE), also describe new forms of music as demoralizing and reflective of the inevitable decline of a ruling state and of the social mores of its rulers and its citizens.

New Music was everything that *yayue* was not, and was regarded as aesthetically non-Confucian. Since no examples of New Music survive, we must rely on written accounts for our information. Unfortunately, the descriptions are vague. Nevertheless, we can get some sense of its characteristics by looking at the following discussion between Confucius' disciple Zi Xia 子夏 and Marquis Wen of Wei 魏文侯, in the *Yueji*:⁸¹

Marquis Wen of Wei asked a question of Zi Xia: "When I put on my official robe and black hat and listen to ancient Music (*yue*), I only feel I will keel over (from boredom). When I listen to the music (*yin* [i. e. tones]) of Zheng and Wei, I do not know what it means to be tired. May I ask, why is ancient Music like this and new music like that?"⁸²

魏文侯問於子夏曰：“吾端冕而聽古樂，則唯恐臥；聽鄭衛之音，則不知倦。敢問：古樂之如彼何也？新樂之如此何也？”

After discussing the ordered nature of the ancient Music, Zixia responds to Marquis Wen's question by discussing the faults of the new music:

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 [...].⁸³

今夫新樂，進俯退俯，奸聲以濫，溺而不止；及優侏儒，糝雜子女，不知父子。

The music of Zheng shows a liking for the overstepping of bounds and (leads toward) a licentious volition [intention]. The music of Song takes its pleasure in women and (inspires) an indulgent volition [intention]. The music of Wei is frantic and hurried, and (makes one's) volition troubled. The music of Qi is haughty and transgressing [defiant], and leads to an arrogant volition [intention]. These four all transgress in sensual pleasures and do harm to virtue.⁸⁴

81 Although Zi Xia is said to have lived in the 6th and 5th centuries BCE, Kern believes that this passage dates to late Western Han (ca. 1st century BCE), not Eastern Zhou. He suggests that the text was composed by Han ritual classicists, who were criticizing Han emperor Wu's preference for the use of

"new sounds" in his state sacrificial hymns. See Kern 1999, 677.

82 Cook 1995, 61; *Yueji* 8.1.

83 Cook 1995, 61; *Yueji* 8.3.

84 Cook 1995, 62–63; *Yueji* 8.7. See Fig. 1 for the location of the states mentioned in this passage.

鄭音好濫淫志，宋音燕女溺志，衛音趨數煩志，齊音敖辟喬志；此四者皆淫於色而害於德。

New Music thus appears to have been fast-paced and exciting, and it permitted men and women to “frolic” and “mix” together. It was also free of traditional rhythms and melodies, whereas *yayue* reused and recycled classical sounds and rhythms associated with ancient Zhou rulers. All of these characteristics supposedly led to excitement and profane acts on the part of the listener. According to Confucian ideology, it was important not to excite the mind unduly. If the mind became excited, it would begin to form new and potentially discordant ideas.

New Music also seems to have been popular in Chu. In the passage from the *Chu Ci* above, we see reference to performances of “the latest songs,” “a dance of Zheng,” and “singing-girls of Zheng and Wei,” all of which were seen as abhorrent by Confucian theorists. The wild abandon of the performance and the licentiousness of the participants also point to non-Confucian behaviors associated with the New Music. Chu’s extravagant “Shamanic tones,” as described by Lü Buwei, might also have been categorized as New Music.⁸⁵ Native Chu music still was classified as New Music in Han times, as indicated by a reference in the *Hanshu* 漢書 to the dismissal of Chu musicians from the Han Office of Music in 7 BCE.⁸⁶ In that year, Han ritual classicists convinced Emperor Ai 哀帝 (reigned 7 to 1 BCE) to abolish the Office of Music, which had been established by Emperor Wu 武帝 (reigned 141 to 87 BCE). They claimed that the “sounds of Zheng,” apparently synonymous with any form of regional music and song used for court entertainments, had become too popular at the court and that they would lead to the dissolution of the Han empire. The *Hanshu* passage equates the music of Chu, as well as that of several other states like Qi, Cai 蔡, and Ba, to the “sounds of Zheng,” likely because of their ‘barbarian’ non-Zhou origins and disassociation with *yayue*.⁸⁷

Chu music appears to have been very popular at the Han court, beginning under Han emperor Gaozu (reigned 202 to 195 BCE).⁸⁸ Gaozu had grown up in Pei 沛 (modern Xuzhou), a region that had gradually fallen under Chu political control and cultural influence in the 5th and 4th centuries BCE. Emperor Gaozu had a deep fondness for Chu, as reflected in his biography in the *Shiji*. One passage describes Gaozu’s final visit in 195 BCE to his old home in Pei, where he held a grand feast and summoned his old friends, elders, young men, and even a group of 120 children, whom he “taught to sing.”⁸⁹ At this feast, he is said to have struck a *zhu*, a kind of string instrument played

85 *Lüshi chunqiu* 5/3.2; Knoblock and Riegel 2000, 141.

86 *Hanshu* 22 (Treatise on Ritual and Music).

87 *Hanshu* 22 (Treatise on Ritual and Music).

88 For a discussion of Chu music during the Han dy-

nasty, see R. Li 2012.

89 *Shiji* 8 (Annals of Gaozu 高祖本紀). Watson 1993, 81–82.

with a stick,⁹⁰ and to have sung a deeply nostalgic song, with tears streaming down his face, about his beloved homeland. Indeed, so great was his love for Chu that he promoted the use of “Chu melodies” at his court, as reflected in the following references from the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*:

1. In 202 BCE, Xiang Yu 項羽 realized that he was surrounded by Liu Bang’s [Gaozu’s] troops when he heard “Chu Songs” sung from all directions.⁹¹
2. Gaozu’s *Fangzhong yue* 房中樂 (Music for the Inner Chamber), apparently used for imperial ancestral sacrifices, was “composed of ‘Chu melodies’ to honor the southern origins of the imperial house.”⁹² This passage also seems to associate wind instruments, including *xiao* 簫 (panpipes) and *guan* 管 (pipes), with *Fangzhong yue*.⁹³ One hymn of this genre, *Anshi Fangzhong* 安世房中 (Bedroom Divinity Who Brings Security to the Generations), is said to have been performed by women to the accompaniment of strings.⁹⁴
3. According to the *Hanshu*, Gaozu asked his consort Lady Qi to perform a Chu dance, while he sang a Chu song. The song that he sang, *Song on the Swan* (*Honghu ge* 鴻鵠歌), explained to Lady Qi why he could not replace the heir apparent with their son, Liu Ruyi.⁹⁵

These passages reflect the continuing impact that Chu had in the Han court, as well as to the enduring importance of wooden instruments in Chu music. They also show the diverse roles that this music (and dance) played in Han military, ritual, and daily life at the court. As Kern argues, Chu songs also had a “strong influence on Western Han imperial literature culture, especially in the main poetic genre of the Han, the *fu* [賦]”; as well as in songs composed during Emperor Wu’s reign, some even by that emperor

90 As discussed earlier in this paper, some scholars believe that the five-stringed instrument in Marquis Yi’s tomb is a *zhu*. The earliest *zhu* identified by a tomb inventory was excavated from an early Han tomb, Hunan Changsha Mawangdui M3, deep in former Chu territory. The instrument, an unplayable replica made for burial purposes, has holes for five strings, a single string anchor for attaching and tightening the strings, and a graduated fingerboard. Though smaller in size, its construction is very similar to the instrument in Marquis Yi’s tomb. See Furniss 2008, 71–73.

91 Kern 2004, 38; *Shiji* 7 (Annals of Xiang Yu); *Hanshu* 31 (Biographies of Chen Sheng and Xiang Ji 陳勝

項籍傳). Liu Bang 劉邦 was the given name for Emperor Gaozu.

92 Kern 2004, 38. *Hanshu* 22 (Treatise on Ritual and Music).

93 Jenny So suggests that the small ensemble in Marquis Yi’s tomb may well have performed *fangzhong yue*, which she takes to be chamber or entertainment music, see So 2000, 30. The ritual role of *fangzhong yue*, however, is suggested by the above mentioned passage in the *Hanshu*.

94 Major 1999, 151.

95 Kern 2004, 39. *Shiji* 55 (The Hereditary House of Marquis of Liu 留侯世家); *Hanshu* 40 (Biographies of Zhang, Chen, Wang, and Zhou 張陳王周傳).

himself.⁹⁶ John Major also argues for a “definite and growing fad for Chu culture in fashionable Han social and intellectual circles”, a trend that he claims accelerated during the reign of Emperor Wu.⁹⁷ The Han admiration for things Chu also is suggested by the emergence of Huang-Lao Daoism,⁹⁸ the popularity of Chu shamanic practices and texts (for example, the *Chu Ci*),⁹⁹ and the continuity of Chu lacquer and woodworking traditions.¹⁰⁰

6 Conclusion

Despite the destruction of Chu by Qin in 223 BCE, Chu’s political and cultural legacy, especially in the form of music, thrived during the Han dynasty. This is not perhaps what Lü Buwei might have expected when he suggested that the decline of a state could be seen in its choice of music. Chu music and the musical instruments associated with it were clearly favored at the Han court well into the 1st century BCE under Emperor Wu, arguably the most powerful and successful ruler of the Han dynasty. Did such music reflect any weakness in the power or confidence of his state? Considering that the Han dynasty survived until the 3rd century CE, I would argue that it did not. Far from associating Chu music with notions of failure, Han rulers relied on Chu music as an element, even a weapon, in their imperial propaganda, displaying their own power by affiliating themselves with the cultural traditions of the once powerful Chu. These rulers, it seems, had little interest in traditional Zhou music and culture, which had been connected to prestige and power up to the 5th century BCE. Up until that time, Chu had tried to define and express its own political power and status in terms of earlier Zhou standards. However, with increasing confidence in its own power and prestige, Chu began to focus on its native traditions and crafts, including the increased production and use of lacquered musical instruments. As Chu rulers and élites had once done with Zhou traditions, Han rulers and élites now turned to Chu to define and proclaim their own power and status.

96 Kern 2004, 38.

97 Major 1999, 140.

98 Major 1999, 140–141. Major describes Huang-Lao 黄老 as a ‘school’ or intellectual trend that was closely linked to the origins of early Daoism. Based on tex-

tual and iconographical evidence, he argues that Huang-Lao was strongly linked to the Chu intellectual tradition.

99 Sukhu 1999.

100 So 1999, 37.

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6 Jingzhou bowuguan 1984, fig. 82. 7 Hubei sheng bowuguan 1989, vol. 1, fig. 79; measurement from Guangsheng 2000, 89, fig. 4.3. 8 Hubei sheng bowuguan 1989, pl. 113. 9 Hubei sheng bowuguan 1989, pl. 114; measurements from Guangsheng 2000, 88, fig. 4.2.

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