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INAUDIBLE SOUNDS AND NONHUMAN HARMONY: ON DAOIST MYSTICISM OF MUSIC

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Abstract: The paper theoretically reconstructs the Daoist conception of music and musical experience based on the writings ascribed to Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Xi Kang. It is shown that in the eyes of the Daoists the experience of musical harmony is ineffable and non-representational, transcending the limits of the human realm and requiring the emptying of one's mind and its inner feelings. This absolute Harmony, sometimes referred to as the directly inaudible Great Sound, was treated as another name for Dao – the Way things truly and spontaneously are. For Laozi, the Great Sound exists in all sounds as their totality, while for Zhuangzi thus understood "Heavenly music" consists in an endless harmony of the different tones spontaneously produced by all beings in the universe. Developing these approaches, Xi Kang argues against attributing human emotions to music and finally for the "categorial" separation between heart-mind and its feelings, which are released when stimulated by music, and the absolute Great Harmony. Xi Kang's arguments were also targeted at the Confucian view of music as representing the feelings of the people, but his elaboration on the non-representational nature of harmony and the non-intentional character of musical experience shows that these polemics were rooted in a positive standpoint, which, just as in the case of Laozi and Zhuangzi, successfully meets the definition of mystical experience.

Key words: Daoism, Xi Kang, Laozi, Zhuangzi, harmony, Chinese music, mysticism, Dao, musical experience

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1. Introduction

The Daoist conception of music has recently become the subject of intense debates and fresh reinterpretations, following the period during which it was misrepresented and reduced to the privative dismissal of the Confucian view of music, namely a rejection of the social function of music and its accompanying ideology. Certainly, criticism of Confucian understandings is a significant part of the Daoist approach to music. Its importance, however, does not stem from a mere skeptical rebuttal or ironic self-distancing, but rather from a fundamental discrepancy between these two outlooks on music and their underlying premises. Some recent studies (Rošker 2014; Chai 2017; Chinn 2021) paid attention to the epistemological and metaphysical assumptions of the Daoist view of music, thereby showing that these views cannot be treated as a relatively independent, aesthetic 'addition,' but rather that they should be viewed as an integral part of Daoist thought, which informs our understanding of its concepts of being and knowledge. This notwithstanding, in doing so one can still be trapped by the persistent stereotype of the distinction between Daoist philosophy (*daojia*) and Daoist religion (*daojiao*), and perceive the Daoist conception of music – which was formulated mostly by thinkers identified under the *daojia* label – as solely theoretical and secular 'philosophizing' about the nature of music. As Eric Nelson demonstrates, such a distinction comes from the typically Western (Enlightenment) dualism of superstitious religion and rationalistic philosophy, which goes against genuine Daoist understanding of philosophy as a way of life that entails certain transformative strategies (Nelson 2020, 16), most of which are aimed at transcending the limits of the human body and cognition, up to obtaining immortality. The following paper attempts to challenge this alleged dichotomy with regard to the Daoist conception of music and to discuss its usually omitted mystical component. This requires, of course, a broad and adequate definition of mystical experience, which is given in Section Five after the analysis of the views on musical experience in the writings created by (or attributed to) Laozi (5th c. BC?), Zhuang Zhou (369-286 BC), and Xi Kang (223-262 CE).

2. The Great Sound cannot be heard: music in *Laozi*

Daoism is traditionally considered to be founded by the sage named Laozi (literally 'Old Master'), to whom the first Daoists attributed the work later known as the *Scripture of the Way and Power* (*Daodejing*). The eponymous Way (*Dao*) – the core concept of Daoist thought – is polysemic and to a large extent undefinable. This is due to numerous declarations found in the *Laozi* according to which Dao is formless, unseen, inactive, and nameless. Its basic meaning relates to the way the world functions:

from the universe taken as broadly as to transcend the human idea of 'being' (*you*), through patterns of natural regularities, up to the genuine operation of human inner powers (*de*). At the same time, as Chen Guying argues, Dao is viewed as some sort of transformative and dynamic entity responsible for the generation of all things (Chen 2020, 3-7). Laozi himself admits that since it precedes even the creation of heaven and earth, he does not know its name, but if he must refer (*zi*) to it, he would call it 'Dao,' and when forced to name (*ming*) it, he would call it 'great' (*da*) (Laozi 1984, 101). In this sense, 'Dao' seems to denote the Way as such, while 'the great' constitutes its connotation, both being only tentative and relative means of addressing the Way of things.

Accordingly, the elements described as 'great' are the closest analogues of the Way. Chapter Forty One of the *Laozi* mentions among them the 'Great Sound': "the Great Instrument is incomplete, / the Great Sound is inaudible, / the Great Image has no form. / Dao is hidden and nameless, / yet only Dao is good at imparting and completing" (Laozi 1984, 171-172). Hence, the resemblance between Dao and the Great Sound is twofold. On the one hand, the Great Sound is as great as to escape the human ability of hearing, which corresponds with the hidden and nameless nature of Dao. On the other hand, just as Dao generates and completes things, so the Great Sound "exists within the sounds and that is why it cannot be heard," as explained by Wang Bi (226-249 CE), the most influential commentator of the *Daodejing*. The Great Sound is, therefore, not only the source of all sounds, but also something that unifies (*tong*) them. Importantly, similar comparisons are to be found in the later religious texts of Daoism, such as the *Scripture of Western Ascension* (*Xishengjing*, late fifth century), which records the principles Laozi taught the border guard Yin Xi before he (allegedly) departed for India. In the opening section of the *Xishengjing*, Laozi says that since Dao cannot be spoken of, and sounds are prior to words ("language is formed when sounds are exchanged"), Dao can be compared to musical sound. If you pluck a string, Laozi continues, even if your mind has a knowledge of appropriate sounds, the mouth is unable to express them in words. This gives us a glimpse of how subtle Dao is, but this is not enough, as we need to "dampen the sounds to consider them within" to the point where we will be able to repeat after Lord Lao: "I don't hear, don't speak; I don't know why things are" (Kohn 2009, 157).

In his commentary to *Laozi* XLI, Wang Bi also pointed out that once something is differentiated (*fen*), for instance by introducing particular notes, it is no longer great. This is connected with another passage from *Laozi* (in Chapter Twelve), which states that "five tones deafen the ears" (Laozi 1984, 45). "Five tones" (*wu yin*) refer to the classical pentatonic scale, which means that Laozi's remark is targeted at Confucian theoreticians who were focused on transforming sounds-as-noises (*sheng*) into sounds-as-notes (*yin*) by means of structuring them in accordance

with traditionally recognized measures. Such an ordering first disarticulates and differentiates original sounds and then hierarchizes them, which makes people undervalue some of the sounds and close their ears to those that do not fit into the scale. This does not mean, though, that Laozi rejects the notion of harmony. On the contrary, Chapter Two explicitly states that "voices and tones harmonize each other" (*sheng yin xianghe*) (Laozi 1984, 10). But as Wang Bi reminds us, this is not an artificial, but a spontaneous, natural (*ziran*) harmony of all sounds. This, as Rafał Mazur aptly observes, sheds light on how to understand the Great Sound: it is given not as a pinnacle of all other sounds, but rather as their totality, and only if one is able to hear all the sounds of the universe without prioritizing ones over the others (Mazur 2018, 87). This idea had a huge impact upon Zhuangzi's thought on music.

3. Opening ears to nonhuman harmony: music in *Zhuangzi*

The book *Zhuangzi*, authored in part by historical Zhuang Zhou, ardently condemns the Confucian effort to 'harness' musical sounds, clearly echoing *Laozi* XII: "only when we uproot and scramble the six tones, burn up all the flutes and zithers, and plug up the ears of Master Kuang, will the people of the world be able to hang on to their keen hearing" (Zhuangzi 1961, 353; transl. Zhuangzi 2020, 86, modified). What is more, 'keen hearing' requires attentive listening to all the sounds of the universe. Chapter Two ("On Equalizing Things"), which forms the core of Zhuangzi's philosophy, opens with the section that distinguishes three types of music, literally 'piping' (*lai*). The first, human piping, as when people play the flute, is distinguished from earthly piping, which is spontaneously produced by nature, as when the wind "roars and whizzs, scolds and sighs, shouts, wails, booms, growls" through hollows and holes, creating a "small harmony" during a breeze and a "great harmony" during a gale. The last type of music – the Heavenly piping – is like "the gusting through all the ten thousand differences that yet causes all of them to come only from themselves (Zhuangzi 1961, 43-46; transl. Zhuangzi 2020, 11-12, modified). Importantly, earthly piping is not simply tantamount to the "sounds of nature." The whizzing of the wind is treated as mere sound (noise) only when there is a difference between artificial and ordered music on the one hand and nonregulated, natural noises on the other. Such a distinction has been introduced by humans and then imposed upon the world. From the perspective of the Way the world naturally functions, they are no less musical than court music, although different in character. As So Jeong Park observes, that is why Zhuangzi purposively employs the term 'tone/note' (*yin*) with reference to the peeps of birds (Park 2013, 339). Yet, the simplistic statement that the cry of birds is also some sort of music is far from the conclusion of Zhuangzi's story. Since not only the concept of music, but also the distinction between music and sounds was

established along with the creation of the anthropocentric view of the world, court melodies and the whizzing of the wind are in themselves (*ziran*) neither music nor mere sounds. If we should ask whether the whizzing is a cacophony or a symphony and realize that there is no good answer to this question, Scott Cook argues, we will come "one step closer" to the profundity of Zhuangzi's thought (Cook 1995, 342). Hence, the Heavenly piping refers to what Laozi called the "Great Sound": the all-embracing 'music' of the universe created by different things acting out of themselves, which is, again, another analogue of Dao. Importantly, by distinguishing Heavenly piping from earthly piping Zhuangzi shows that a true musical experience goes beyond observable nature and reaches the Way it intrinsically and really functions.

The relative and anthropocentric character of the distinction between music and sounds is also proven by the fact that animals may be scared of music that is appreciated by humans (Zhuangzi 1962, 621-623). But the music human beings can perform and be attracted to is by no means monosemous. It can follow tradition or spontaneously arise from human nature; be fixed and focused on technical harmony or embrace all the surrounding sounds uniformly. Chapter Fourteen of the *Zhuangzi* describes various types (and simultaneously stages) of music performed by men that correspond with the trichotomy of humane, earthly and Heavenly piping. This informs us especially about how human beings can approach the latter two types of sounds. The elaboration is put into the mouth of the Yellow Emperor, who performs the 'Xianchi' music and gives an explanation as to why his listener ("the Perfect One from the Northern Gate") was first terrified, then weary, and finally confused. The music, the Yellow Emperor explains, first resonated with human affairs, then reflected the patterns of nature, and finally accorded with the Great Harmony of all beings. The first type of music, which – importantly – already surpasses the musical ideal of the Confucians, achieved "endless constancy" (*suochang wuqiong*), the most perfect combination of high and low notes, heavy and light sounds, with melody that has no beginning nor end, which had to frighten the listener; it is the epitome of the human understanding of music, yet still constitutes the first and lowest part of (Xianchi) music. The second stage of music is said to reflect the harmony of *yin* and *yang* forces – the operation of sun, moon, and all the natural phenomena. It is, in contrast, devoid of "rule and constancy," uncontrolled and free, as though equally opening to all directions; the mind struggles to grasp (*chu*) it, but is unable to gain any knowledge (*zhi*), which wearied the mind and made the body 'empty' (*kong*) of itself. The final stage seems to form the dialectical unity of the previous types: it is the endless unity of different yet "unwearying" tones, adjusted to the requirements of the spontaneity of things (*ziran zhi ming*). It fills the universe yet has no specific place; it is unrevealed yet at the same time it speaks to everyone in a distinctive way. That is why the listener felt confused and ultimately

stupid, but as a result it was possible for him to reach Dao (Zhuangzi 1962, 501-510). Commenting upon the 'musical apophasis' of the Xianchi story, David Chai emphasizes two elements that will be of particular importance for the later development of the Daoist conception of music. First, musical ultimacy does not exist independent of the phenomenal world, much less is it pure intentionality; it is not of its own doing, but rather channels the 'sound of Dao'. Second, for these reasons, the heavenly music is not assigned to appropriateness; in a self that identifies with the oneness "no emotional attachment to music is to be found. Freeing oneself of emotive association is to rid oneself of the tendency to imbue music with moral qualities, a trait it does not inherently possess" (Chai 2017, 368). And these are the points that will be systematically and polemically developed by Xi Kang, whose arguments had a great impact upon the musical thought in the period of the Six Dynasties (220-589 CE).

4. Xi Kang's arguments against attributing human emotions to music

Xi Kang (also referred to as Ji Kang) is considered the leader of the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove" (*Zhulin qixian*) – the group of scholars, poets and musicians from the third century CE, who were highly critical of government control and restraining spontaneous human nature by means of etiquette. His philosophy is usually associated with the current called "Pure Conversations" (*qingtan*), which consisted in speculative discussions about the essentials of the Daoist theory. In his *Debate on musical sounds lacking either sorrow or joy* (*Sheng wu ai le lun*), Xi Kang – hidden under the name of the "Host of Eastern Fields" – responds to the questions posed by a "guest from Qin," who represents the Confucian theorists of music. The latter states that certain melodies are, in themselves, happy or sad, which reflects the peaceful or disordered situation of the states (and times) in which they were created.

In his first response, Xi Kang offers a series of arguments that demonstrate music contains no emotions. First, sounds are objective elements of nature, just like smells, therefore they cannot be modified by human mood: "they are in substance what they are and do not change" (*qi ti ziruo er bubian ye*). Second, much less are they reifications of human emotions. Saying that certain music is sad would be identical to arguing that weeping *is* sorrow. Even if music carries emotions, this is due to the difference between the two, just like weeping is a manifestation, and not the pivot (*zhu*) of sorrow. Xi Kang warns that one "should name according to the matter, as things have their designations" (*yin shi yu ming, wu you qi chu*). Third, different people and areas react differently to the same melodies, just as identical feelings can be expressed by distinct tunes, which proves that there is no constant (*chang*) relation between the two (Xi 1962, 197-198).

This brings Xi Kang to the essence of his view on music. Importantly, he does not deny the obvious (phenomenological as one could say) truth that music makes people sad or happy. As stressed by Ronal Egan, "nowhere does Xi Kang deny that an emotional response to music is commonplace. Instead, he argues against the view that people respond to emotions embodied in the music" (Egan 1997, 15). Humans, however, are not moved (*gan*) by just any kind of music, but only by that which is harmonious (*he*). When a human heart (*xin*) is moved by harmonious sounds (*he sheng*), its inner feelings (*qing*) are aroused; if they happen to be the feeling of sorrow, the listener starts feeling sorrow while listening to the music. This does not mean, though, that the melody itself was sad, nor even that the music "produced" certain emotion: it was rather that an emotion was "released" (*fa*) from within the human heart in reaction to musical harmony. The pivot (essence) of emotions lies in the heart, Xi Kang continues, and not in the sounds that are without any symbols (*xiang*), namely which are of a non-representational nature. Interpreting the sounds as rigidly denoting certain emotional states would make one impossible to understand higher types of music, such as Heavenly piping, which blows differently through all things yet allows each of them to be out of itself (Xi 1962, 198-199). This shows that the apophatic musical thought of Zhuangzi is a key for understanding the context and meaning of Xi Kang's arguments. In this context, Zhuangzi's criticism of the anthropomorphisation of music finds its deeper justification in the form of an objection against "keeping apart name and reality" (*ming shi ju qu*), specifically confusing the names for "the outer and the inner" (*wai-nei*), that is "the other and the self" (*bi-wo*). This strongly resembles Gilbert Ryle's celebrated concept of "category-mistake", which he employed to address the misrepresentations "of the facts of mental life" (Ryle 1949, 16-27). And indeed, Xi Kang explicitly writes that "there is a difference in terms of category" (*qubie you shu*) between emotions such as delight, anger, grief and joy, by means of which people come into (cognitive) contact with things (*jiewu*), and the objects themselves. One cannot speak of music as either happy or sad (note that Xi Kang focuses here on naming) just as we cannot say that the person we hate *is* hate or the flavor we like *is* like (Xi 1962, 199-200). In other words, emotions are intrinsically and unavoidably subjective, whereas musical harmony transcends subjectivity.

The Confucian "guest from Qin" responds to that by returning to the issue of the musical performer, arguing that music comes from the heart and certainly expresses the feelings contained therein. These emotions can be "perceived" (*jian*) because humans share feelings despite different regions etc., therefore "a skilled listener or examiner" (*shan ting-chazhe*) will certainly comprehend (*jue*) it. The guest holds that rarely are there listeners equipped with such an ability (*neng*), much less with "spirit-like understanding," which creates an asymmetry that is essentially contrary

to the Daoist approach to music: a good listener belongs to the elite and there is nothing mysterious about the creator or performer. The Guest even has a dig at the Host, saying that "you cannot conclude, simply because you have never met a skilled listener, that music has no principles to be examined" (Xi 1962, 200-201; transl. Xi 1983, 77). Analogously, the fact that certain music makes people sad or happy means that there must be some reality in the music that causes this (cf. Brindley 200, 25-6). Xi Kang replies that this would first mean that a performer cannot hide his emotions from the listeners and accordingly – deceive them (for instance by dancing and laughing despite grief at heart). Secondly, if Confucians go further and claim that the rise or fall of whole states is represented (*xiang*) in music, which could be then (supposedly) passed on to later generations, then given their premises there has to be some "constant rhythm," a fixed sequence of notes that corresponds with the public mood. However, not only are they unable to find it, but they also allow music to be changed, and they even credited Confucius with rearranging songs. Such hypocrisy shows the real reasons for introducing the figure of the rare listener, namely fooling the common people that they are unable to understand music and have to rely on the education of the scholars in that regard. Xi Kang denounces this as an ideology and castigates its proponents: "they fabricated these accounts, wishing to make sacred their affairs. They wanted the whole world to misunderstand the way of music, so they did not speak what is reasonable and natural." And since their idealized listeners are indeed rare to find, they started to locate them in antiquity, which is a typical mistake of all Confucians who rely heavily on the statements made in the past instead of seeking the truth of the "natural principles" (*ziran zhi li*). At this point Xi Kang decides to reassert his understanding of the natural structure of musical experience. Emotions come into being through contact with things (*dai wu er cheng*), they do not exist antecedently (a priori) inside the human heart-mind (*wu yu yu nei*), so they gather in the heart only because of some events. He adds this premise to his previous elaboration because his Confucian opponent seems to operate with a very fixed notion of the constancy of the feelings transmitted in music. Then Xi Kang proceeds to repeating his central claim: harmonious sounds spontaneously release the feelings that are actually gathered in the human heart; this "release" (*fa*) is different from "production" (*sheng*), as it is more about "the stimulation of men's hearts by harmony" (*hesheng zhi gan renxin*), which could be compared to the "uninhibiting effect that wine has" on people's nature (Xi 1962, 203-204; transl. Xi 1983, 79-81).

5. Xi Kang's mysticism of music

However, the Confucian adversary does not seem to take this disquisition into account and so Xi Kang has to address his other concerns

and rephrase the main arguments. Xi Kang attacks the idea that one can detect in music the airs of whole ancient states, pointing out the naivety of such hermeneutics: first, it is impossible to understand the emotions of whole states, much less to reduce them to a single feeling; second, given the distance of time and space it is simply not viable to grasp the actual meaning of the music from these countries, thus even the idealized spirit-like understanding is closer to guessing rather than a true knowledge of feelings. Most importantly, it is never about comprehending (*tong*) one's feelings, but rather interpreting (*jie*) and discussing (*lun*) them, similar to translating a foreign language. Hence, Xi Kang rejects the possibility of an unmediated knowing other people's inner life based on its verbal expressions (cf. Egan 1997, 18) and therefore openly (and in the context of ancient philosophy in general, quite pioneeringly) acknowledges the non-transient and not always helpful nature of language. "What one says is perhaps not sufficient to verify what is on his mind," the host argues, especially since "language is not something that is by nature fixed" and depending upon the region "the same thing has different designations (*chu*)." Hence, "the relationship of music to mind is like that of body (*xing*) to mind (*xin*). There are those with the same physical features whose feelings differ, and there are those who differ in appearance but who are the same in mind," therefore those who want to examine the "natural principles" of music cannot rely on the mind of either listener or the creator. "Mind and music are clearly two separate things," thus one cannot know people's minds by means of music nor understand the nature of musical harmony by referring to its subjective reception (Xi 1962, 206-214; transl. Xi 1983, 83-92). Music has some objective qualities: it is simple or complex, high or low, etc., whereas each individual's feelings are her or his own; the only 'effect' (*gong*) of music is restlessness obtained by means of releasing one's feelings, and one cannot expect from harmony that it will appease the feelings controlled from inside human heart (mind). The super-subjective character of musical harmony implies its non-representational and non-intentional nature, which brings Xi Kang to the metaphysical conclusion of his arguments and a crucial hint at his mysticism of music: "harmony is the substance of music, but it moves things in different ways; dependence on something else is the essential character of mind and will; they are released in response to stimulation. This being the case, the relationship of music to mind is one of separate roads and different paths; they do not intersect. How can you stain the Great Harmony with happiness and sorrow, combine the Void Name with grief and joy?" (Xi 1962, 216-217; transl. Xi 1983, 83-96). This Great Harmony (*taihe*) or the Void Name (*chuming*) is, as we know from Laozi and Zhuangzi, nothing but a way of referring to Dao, which shows that according to Xi Kang the nature of Dao – and of 'Heavenly piping' – sheds light on the essence of music as such, including that created and performed by humans.

In this sense, Xi Kang eventually went much further beyond only demonstrating that human emotions cannot be seen as already present in music. In spite of this, So Jeong Park tries to show that Xi Kang's criticism was only reduced to the emotions coming from outside of music, but he did not deny the existence of specifically musical emotions and that humans can reach the emotional state of harmony through music (Park 2020, 257). These statements are, however, not only directly inconsistent with the text of *Sheng wu ai le lun* and do not explain the lack of the concept of "musical feelings" (*shengqing*?) in the sophisticated philosophical dictionary of Xi Kang, but they mostly disagree with the core idea of a separation between always subjective emotions and absolute harmony ("mind and music are clearly two separate things"). As Jana Rošker emphasizes, Xi Kang explicitly opposes the standpoint that the structure of music resembles in any way the structure of emotions, so that "a structural transfer from the mind of the composer to the mind of the listener is not possible." The structure of harmony is, in turn "infinite and open, just like the structure of the universe," and in this way "the 'emptiness' of harmony surpasses the binaries of internal and external worlds on the one hand, and even of concepts and actualities on the other" (Rošker 2014, 110, 116, 118). This implies, as Meilinn Chinn correctly observes, an objection against attributing music any kind of representation (*xiang*): music can only be said to repeat – beyond all the binary possibilities – the great harmony of nature's autopoietic processes. Music can be of course practice, but it gives us rather non-representational access to "the Great" (Chinn 2021, 177-179, 183). Music shares the harmony "outside the human realm," and thus it does not depend upon the human mind (Chinn 2020, 150). At the same time, "harmony as a holistic concept with universal and partial aspects opens itself to different participating subjects, an important property that qualifies it as a metaphor for the Dao" (Middendorf 2010, 149). Hence, when David Chai writes that for Xi Kang "music is an entirely subjective experience" (Chai 2009, 169) this can be justified only with regard to the ever-changing, context-dependent and individually specific process of a release of inner emotions as a result of the contact with musical harmony, but not to the non-representational uniting with musical harmony during which one forgets about one's mind (*wuxin*). As Jiyeon Kang writes, Xi Kang wants to show that music offers "limitless freedom of each individual that transcends personal gains" and transcends "the secular realm, for in this realm humans are bound by emotional attachments and limitations that consequently make them susceptible to agony and suffering" (Kang 2014, 173). Such an experience cannot be depicted as 'subjective' in any meaningful sense, and given its soteriological function, it cannot be described better than as a mystical experience.

The experience of musical harmony as described by Xi Kang meets most of the criteria of mystical experience distinguished by both early

twentieth-century and later philosophies of religion (cf. Rogacz 2017). As something that cannot be represented in words, it shares William James' first characteristics of mysticism in terms of its ineffability, which is connected with James' second point, namely the idea that mystical experience still gives some sort of noetic insight into truths inaccessible to human intellect. As such, it is usually passive, which can also be said of musical experience in the eyes of Xi Kang, which consists in "release" of inner emotions after the contact with harmony, whereas the latter cannot be influenced nor modified by human reason or will. Out of all the four elements of mystical experience (James 1917, 380-382) only transiency – the fact that mystical states cannot be sustained too long – is debatable, but given the limited time and size of at least human and earthly piping, this condition can also be seen as fulfilled. In another classical discussion of mysticism, Henri Bergson emphasized its direct and open nature, in the sense that a true mystical experience is independent from tradition, churches, and dogmas (Bergson 1935, 210-215), which was certainly close to Xi Kang, who criticized the Confucian ideologization of music, wanting to liberate the unique, free and individual experience of the Harmony from ritualistic and traditional shackles. Later theorists began to stress that mystical experience is about a union with "the divine" which does not reduce to the personal or impersonal God of theistic religions and is more about sensing the presence of this 'divine' rather than any conceptual belief about its presence (Rowe 2007, 72), which is, again, in direct accordance with Xi Kang's non-intentional characteristics of the experience of harmony and the apophatic approach to the divine Dao of things. William Rowe and many other analytical philosophers of religion are, however, still trapped by a mentalist dualism of 'extrovertive' and 'introvertive' mysticism (occurring inside or outside the human soul, cf. Rowe 2007, 78-79), while according to the relations of many mystics, particularly the Asian ones, mystical experience allows for transcending the very opposition between the subject and the object, showing that its allegedly absolute nature is in fact relative and applies only to the human realm. And this view was openly upheld with regard to musical experience by Xi Kang. Based on their analysis of both Western and Eastern mysticism, Denise Lardner Carmody and John Tully Carmody define mysticism as a "direct experience of ultimate reality" which is then usually mediated through body, signs, and sounds, whereas "ultimate reality" refers simply to the unconditioned being or principle, such as God or Dao, which is in the East usually conceived as power connected with the cycles of nature, the attainment of which requires eliminating people's desires (Carmody 1996, 10-15). Such a definition of mystical experience perfectly suits the approach of Xi Kang, although understanding that individual experience of musical harmony and, ultimately, the Way things are may also be of a mystical nature certainly requires that readers are open to the broad meaning of mysticism. But this was certainly the case

for Xi Kang, who "had an on-going, life-long, devotion to *qin* music" and when sentenced to death for his political stance, played a swan song on the *qin* zither the night before his public execution (Egan 1997, 29-30).

6. Conclusion

Xi Kang's approach to musical experience was a continuation and refinement of the views of Laozi and Zhuangzi. For Laozi, the Great Sound is nothing but a provisory name for Dao, and as such it is ineffable and transcends human limits, yet is omnipresent in all sounds, which entails an apophatic practice of "not-hearing." Laozi's approach is best illustrated by the example of the Daoist poet and musician Tao Yuanming (365-427) who "played silently" on his stringless *guqin* as he grasped the "true meaning" of this music. Zhuangzi, in turn, preferred to address Dao as the "Great Harmony," or "Heavenly Music," which requires an experience open to the endless unity of all different sounds of the universe after stultifying reason and emptying one's mind, including getting rid of one's emotions. Importantly, Zhuangzi did not stop at the level of 'natural mysticism,' as he distinguished a type of music higher and more subtle than "earthly piping," which does not consist in listening to the 'sounds of nature,' such as the whizzing of the wind, but an insight (or rather "inheart") into their spontaneous nature (and harmony). This position was developed by Xi Kang with his epistemological arguments against attributing human emotions to music, and finally for the "categorial" separation between heart-mind and its feelings, which are released when stimulated by music, and the absolute Great Harmony, best characterized as a "Void Name." This shows the consistency of the Daoist mysticism of music, which undoubtedly had an impact on musical practice in Chinese society and East Asian religions in general.

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