

Mozart's against music essay



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Mo Tzu's Against Music is not against Music: How Mo Tzu critiques early Chinese Class based society in their Musical Practices Music in Mo Tzu's China was a historical and religiously based event. Music has always been a form of expression in Chinese cultural history, whether it is among the musical festivals of the common people, or the extravagant operas held in the courts of the ruling class aristocracy. Other than these forms of musical entertainment, more critical were the "rites" often closely associated with the "music" of the time.

In fact, "rites-music" is a more general term often used to describe these early practices of playing and performing ritualistic forms of music. These forms of music asserted how the upper class was inherently more spiritual, nobler, and better individual beings than the common man. For Mo Tzu, whose fundamental notion is a theme of "universal love" between all men, this notion of ranked relationships just because of the different ways people played and enjoyed music was hypocrisy.

In contrast to the Confucian notion of ranking the relationships of kinship and blood relations, Mo Tzu felt that individual births were more like random events, and all men has a responsibility to love himself and others. Mo Tzu's notions of universal love was not only threatening to the Confucian way of thought, it also threatened the very basic clan-tribal relationship early Chinese governments were formed under.

These tribal clans emphasized the superiority of their bloodline, in contrast to the commoners, to justify their heavy taxation and other unequal practices. When Mo Tzu criticizes Music in "Against Music," he is criticizing

the musical practices that have already become synonymous with materialist luxury and class distinction. The fundamental beginning of Chinese musical arts cannot be separated from forms of religious expression.

Like the early medieval Church hymns and songs, an early beginning for Chinese musical arts were in the religious and ritual practices of Chinese society. For Endymion Porter Wilkinson in *Chinese History: A Manual*, the aesthetic arts are a fundamental part of Chinese history: "It goes without saying that the arts also provide vital evidence for other fields, such as the history of religion" (686). Religion and music go hand and hand in Chinese culture, and history can also be seen through these perspectives.

In fact, according to Yonghua Liu, in "Daoist Priests and Imperial Sacrifices in Late Imperial China," the most important Daoist Priests in charge of the traditional religious rites and rituals began their careers in the court as either dancers or musicians, or sometimes both: "According to principles of appointment mentioned above, the certified Daoists priests [...] were first promoted to chief musicians" (61). This reflects how musicians often held critical positions in the religious rites and rituals. Furthermore, this underlines how music and religion cannot be separated during Mo Tzu's time.

While the earliest music concerned solely religion and the expression of holy sacrifices, music and ritual gradually became a practice mainly held by the ruling and governing class. Due to the expensive materialistic quality of the earliest bronze instruments associated with Chinese rituals, musical rites was a form of expression exclusively monopolized by the ruling and wealthy

upper class. In *Suspended Music: Chime Bells in the Culture of Bronze Age China*, Lothar Von Falkenhausen traces the significance of Bells in Chinese history.

For Falkenhausen, bells were fundamentally important in the formation of Chinese class societies: " More reliably than other kinds of musical instruments, bells can serve as an indicator of the social context of musical activity, for many bear inscriptions documenting important historical details about their owners" (14). Interestingly, Falkenhausen pinpoints how " Zheng bells are so far unique in furnishing music-related information," reflecting the earliest instances of inscriptions of music on Chinese instruments.

While these bells were mostly used for the ruling class to display their status and inscribe their histories during the Spring and Autumn period, Zheng bells reflect how Music itself was a fundamental part of upper-class societal relationships. As the upper social classes gained wealth and class distinction from their agricultural civilians through taxes, most of these taxes were transferred for the religious rites and rituals to ensure the peace and prosperity of the people.

However, as these religious rites and rituals progressed, the upper class began using musical performances (from the tax payer's pocket) for private entertainment and enjoyment. [Is there a source for this last point?] For Mo Tzu, his main argument is not, in fact, against the " Music" we would consider today. Mo Tzu is not against the harmonies people sing; in fact, Mo Tzu would be totally in favor for the songs farmers sing while working and

plowing the fields, and he is not against the music of the weaving girls singing their work songs.

Due to the expensive and specific nature of the Music Mo Tzu is critiquing, it is easy to think that he is against music altogether as a form of personal expression. However, the modern reader must remember that Music was never a personal form of expression in the earliest Chinese dynasties. Since Music was often a complicated and ritualistic affair, often the music that was played was not as important as the pomp and ceremony set up for the ritual.

Indeed, Mo Tzu's argument is in the classical Chinese notion of Music, one that could not be separated from the religious rites and ceremonies of the upper social class. Importantly, in *Against Music*, Mo Tzu specifies how "It is not that I don't like the sound of the drum," reflecting how he is not against music per se (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mozi>). Instead, he is against all the wasted resources the upper class societies put towards music and the rituals around music for entertainment.

However, Mo Tzu definitely had a strong argument and critique against these early acts of Music. In *Eastern Philosophy: Key Readings*, Oliver Leaman views Mo Tzu as a "militant preacher" in contrast to the "refined gentleman" title Leaman views Confucius. In Leaman's perspective, while Confucius sympathizes with the "traditional institutions, rituals, music, and literature of the early Chou dynasty," Mo Tzu criticized these class based musical practices harshly (225).

While Leaman's critique of Mo Tzu as a "militant preacher" might be misleading, Mo Tzu indeed does critique the unnecessary class material

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differences, which he blames largely on the music culture among the ruling class in *Against Music*. However *Against Music* does not refute Music in general; instead, Mo Tzu's critique on Music is more focused on the practice of music-making in the courts, than the actual harmonies these ritual orchestras make. Donald H. Bishop, in *Chinese Thought: An Introduction*, has a slightly different reading on the differences between Confucius and Mo Tzu.

Bishop views Mo Tzu as an enlightened critic who saw the "double standards" on the ruling class and citizens, with music being one of these double standards. Bishop has a more informed and unbiased perspective of Mo Tzu's critique on Music and other artistic practices. Since his heavy rhetoric is often misunderstood as completely denying music altogether, Bishop emphasizes how Mo Tzu said "If musical instruments also contribute to the benefit of the people, even I shall not dare condemn them" (79).

For Mo Tzu, the fault in the expensive bells and other musical instruments used in court religious practices was that it came from the labor of the common class, and yet these kinds of heavily materialist instruments made it unrealistic for the common class to be able to have any access to music. In this perspective, music in the courts came from the sweat of the common people, but did virtually no benefit to their everyday lives. Mo Tzu recognized the excessive practices of the ruling aristocrat class in their emphasis on musical rituals and entertainment, and indicts these practices as entirely unnecessary for successful government.

Mo Tzu's essential concern is to better the lives of the common people, and for his philosophies to bring about social change for the better. Mo Tzu

pinpoints three essential resources needed for the common people to live a carefree life, food, clothing, and shelter, when he says, " There are three things the people worry about: that when they are hungry they will have no food, when they are cold they will have no clothing, and when they are weary they will have no rest" (310).

For Mo Tzu, the responsibilities of the ruling class should be to provide for the commoners these three basic needs of survival. However, the religious musical ceremonies intended to bring about a good harvest have actually no direct relationship with the situation of the commoners themselves: " Now let us try sounding the great bells, striking the rolling drums, strumming the zithers, blowing the pipes, and waving the shields and axes in the war dance.

Does this do anything to provide food and clothing for the people? I hardly think so" (310). By using a rhetorical question, Mo Tzu emphasizes how these ceremonial practices actually have nothing to do with providing the critical essentials for the commoners. Instead, it is only a means of high-end entertainment for the ruling class unaware of the realities of the commoners.