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## Towards an Ancient Chinese-Inspired Theory of Music Education

### Abstract

In this philosophical paper, I propose a theory of music education inspired by ancient Chinese philosophy. In particular, I draw on five classical Chinese philosophical texts: the *Analects* (*lunyu* 論語), the *Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子), the *Zhuangzi* (莊子), the *Xunzi* (荀子) and the *Yue Ji* (樂記). Given that music education was an integral part of the social fabric in ancient China, it is potentially illuminating to uncover the theoretical underpinning of this enterprise, and to examine the implications of such a theory for contemporary music education. Based on the texts, I posit an ancient Chinese-inspired theory of music education that comprises four facets: society, teacher-model, effortful training and effortless action. I conclude this paper with implications for contemporary music education.

**Keywords:** Chinese philosophy; Confucianism; transcultural; grit; flow, philosophy of music education

Music education philosophy has drawn largely from Western philosophical literature, such as the ancient Greeks, Susanne Langer, John Dewey and Paolo Freire. Relatively few philosophical writings in music education have drawn on Asian literature, such as ancient Chinese philosophy (e.g., Fung, 1994; Tan, 2012, 2014, 2015a, 2015b). As an alternative species of philosophical theorising, Chinese philosophy may provide fresh ideas and perspectives on extant thinking in music education.

In this paper, I propose a theory of music education inspired by ancient Chinese philosophy. Given that music education was an integral part of the social fabric in ancient China, it is potentially illuminating to uncover the theoretical underpinning of this enterprise. To this end, I examine five ancient Chinese philosophical texts and develop my argument with reference

to them. These five texts are: (1) the *Analects* (*lunyu* 論語), a set of “collected sayings” that records the ideas of Confucius (551–479 BCE); (2) the *Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子), a collection of conversations and anecdotes attributed to Mencius (372–289 BCE), a student of Confucius’ grandson, Zisi; (3) the *Xunzi* (荀子), a set of writings attributed to Xunzi (310–235 BCE) whose philosophical lineage harks back to Confucius; (4) the *Zhuangzi* (莊子), a text that contains anecdotes and stories of the Daoist sage, Zhuangzi (369–286 BCE); and (5) the *Yueji* (樂記), the first complete treatise on music in recorded Chinese history written around the first and second centuries BCE (on the five texts, see Chan 1963; Cook 1995; Ivanhoe and Van Norden 2005). These texts were selected because they articulated rich ideas that are relevant to music education, both for ancient China and contemporary music education. In particular, they contain a rich wealth of wisdom and insights that can address the four research questions that lie at the heart of this study: (1) What was the philosophical foundation of music education in ancient China? (2) What was the ancient Chinese philosophers’ construal of an ideal music educator? (3) What was the nature of musical skill training according to the ancient Chinese philosophers? and (4) What was the final purpose of musical skill training for the ancient Chinese philosophers?

In what ensues, I mine the five philosophical texts to address each of the research questions in turn via four distinct sections: (1) philosophical foundation of music education in ancient China; (2) the ideal music educator; (3) the nature of skill-based training; and (4) the joyous virtuoso. I then link the emergent themes into a Confucian “single thread” (*yiguan* 一貫) and propose a theory of music education inspired by the ancient Chinese texts. I conclude this essay by sketching four implications for contemporary music education. As implied by the title of this paper, the ancient Chinese philosophical texts serve only as sources of inspiration for contemporary music education; I do not claim generalisations about music education either

across or within diverse Chinese communities through these texts. Moreover, in drawing on ancient Chinese thought, I am not bound to every aspect of Chinese philosophy any more than a music educator who draws on Plato is constrained to teach only the Dorian and Phrygian modes. After all, as with many other philosophical systems, there are limitations to Chinese philosophy, especially when the ideas are taken to the extreme. For example, despite its benevolent roots, Confucian philosophy became the basis of authoritarian government over long stretches of Chinese history (e.g., Tan 2003). Through time, the Confucian notion of “social harmony” have also changed, and is understood differently today between democratic and non-democratic countries (e.g., Kim 1997; Tan 2003). My defence for drawing on ancient Chinese philosophy nonetheless, is that it is not the philosophy in and of itself, but what subsequent generations of self-professed followers did with it that rendered it oppressive (Tan 2003). To blame early Chinese philosophy for the problems of East Asian societies later on appears somewhat akin to blaming the Western world’s present problems on Plato and Aristotle. In fact, without classical thinkers such as Confucius, Mencius, Plato, and Aristotle, humankind could probably be worse off today. Their philosophies, while by no means flawless, became the basis of many of our present value systems. Therefore, while limited, an ancient Chinese-inspired theory of music education is nonetheless of potential educational and research value.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to define some important terms. In this paper, I follow Jorgensen (1997) to understand music education in its broadest possible meaning, that is, the teaching and learning of music both in and out of school through formal and informal means. This includes the transmission of musical practices, beliefs, values, skills, and mores through the community, family, religion, and society. Construed as such, music education includes school music, community music, and the entire gamut of musical teaching and learning in society. In

addition, four key terms in Chinese warrant definition. These terms are better left untranslated as translating them to English may be misleading or compromise the range of meaning that they connote in the original. First, the “*dao*” (道), commonly translated as the “Way,” is a multi-faceted term that refers variously to a principle, a doctrine, a method, a path or the Truth. All ancient Chinese philosophical schools refer to their teaching as the *dao*. Second, the “*junzi*” (君子), commonly translated as the “superior person,” refers to a person who has completely internalised moral goodness, humanity (*ren* 仁), appropriateness (*yi* 義), and ideal social behavior through a rigorous Confucian education. Third, “*li*” (禮), commonly rendered as “ritual,” refers not just to social and religious ceremonies of the Zhou dynasty held in high regard by Confucius, but also to normative daily conduct. Mastery of *li* through relentless effortful training is crucial to being a *junzi*. Fourth, “*tian*” (天), which literally means “sky” but often glossed as “heaven,” refers to the deity of the Zhou dynasty which presides over a hierarchy of supernatural spirits; it is also a personified force, an immanent fashioner and shaper of what humans see in real life (Tan 2012; 2015a).

### **Philosophical Foundation of Music Education in Ancient China**

Music was an important part of what it met to be a *junzi* in ancient China. Together with archery, charioteering, calligraphy, mathematics and ritual, music was part of the “six arts” of the Confucian curriculum (Wiant 1965). In particular, music was of primary importance to Zhou educational practice that influenced Confucius’ theory of self-cultivation through education (Eno 1990). As will be made clear, the philosophical foundation of music education in ancient China was founded on at least three assumptions: music is joy and a necessity of humans, music transforms humans and music has the power to improve society.

The first assumption is that music is joy and a necessity of humans. This is captured with striking poignancy at the beginning of Xunzi's *Treatise on Music* (*yuelun* 樂論). According to Xunzi, "Music is joy, an emotion which humans (*ren* 人) cannot help but feel at times.<sup>1</sup> Since humans cannot help feeling joy, their joy must find an outlet in voice and an expression in movement . . . Humans must have their joy, and joy must have its expression" (*Xunzi*: 20/98/14; Watson 2003, 115. See also, *Yueji* 1.2; Cook 1995, 28). In the original Chinese, Xunzi's declaration right at the beginning of the quotation ("music is joy") exploits the fact that music (*yue*) and joy (*le*) are both written with the same Chinese character: 樂 (Fung 1994; Tan 2012; 2015b). By proclaiming that music *is* joy using a linguistic pun, Xunzi skillfully moves music from an external phenomenon (i.e., music) to an internal affective trait (i.e., joy) that all humans must have, thus solidifying the status of music in the Confucian curriculum and uniting it with emotional expression (see also, *Yueji* 1.6; Cook 1995, 33-34).

While Xunzi captures the essentiality of music to humans from an affective perspective, Mencius does so from a physiological and sensory perspective: "The way the mouth is disposed towards tastes, the eyes towards colours, the ear towards sounds (*sheng* 聲), the nose towards smells . . . therein also lies the Decree (*ming* 命)" (*Mencius* 7B.24; Lau 2004, 162). *Ming* connotes fatalism, and in claiming that the ear's response to sounds (*sheng* 聲) is *ming*, Mencius theorises that *tian* (i.e., heaven) wants humans to respond to music: no human agency can prevent that. In fact, not only is it impossible for humans to resist the power of music, everyone in the world wishes to be like Music Master Shi Kuang, just as everyone in the world wishes to cook like Master Chef Yi Ya (*Mencius* 6A.7. See also, Van Norden 2003, 151). For Mencius, music, like food, is a necessity, and better music is always as welcomed as better food. In short,

the first philosophical assumption of music education in ancient China is that music is joy and a necessity of humans.

The second assumption is that music transforms humans. According to Xunzi, music “enters deeply” into humans and “transforms them rapidly” (*Xunzi* 20/99/15; Watson 2003, 117). For Xunzi, the power of music is not just superficial but deep, and not just gradual, but rapid; it is effective in its permanence and expedience (Cook 1995; Tan 2012). Mencius attributes an even greater force to music than to words, boldly asserting that humane words do not penetrate people as deeply as the sounds of humane music (*rensheng* 仁聲) (*Mencius* 7A.14. See also, Lau 2004, 147). As music has direct transformative power, it is an important means of self-cultivation for the ancient Chinese philosophers. Confucius exhorts his disciples to be “stimulated by the Odes, take your stand on *li* and be perfected (*cheng* 成) by music” (*Analects* 8.8; Lau 1979, 93), while the *Yueji* argues that the *junzi* “uses music to carry out his teachings and lead people on the path of virtue” (*Yueji* 6.4; Cook 1995, 59). Given the immense importance that Confucius attaches to music as a means of self-cultivation, it is little wonder that music is part of the “six arts” of the Confucian curriculum.

The third assumption of music education in ancient China is that music has the power to improve society. It is efficacious in doing so as it brings people together. As Xunzi notes, “when music is performed in the ancestral temple of the ruler, and the ruler and his ministers, superiors and inferiors, listen to it together, there are none who are not filled with a spirit of harmonious reverence (*hejing* 和敬).” He further notes that when music is performed within the household, “there are none who are not filled with a spirit of harmonious kinship (*heqin* 和親),” and when it is performed in the community, “there are none who are not filled with a spirit of harmonious obedience (*heshun* 和順),” concluding thus that “music brings about complete unity and induces

harmony (*he* 和)” (*Xunzi*: 20/98/21-20/98/22; Watson 2003, 116). The key term that recurs is *he* (和): harmony or harmonious, which is celebrated in the Confucian texts as the highest cultural achievement (Ames and Hall 2001). The Confucian tradition adopts the musical attribute of harmony as a dominant metaphor for social cooperation and contentment and elevates the metaphor by making it bear the weight of critical aspects of Confucian social theory. For *Xunzi*, music is not a personal undertaking but a communal event that induces social harmony. It has the power to create social order in various aspects of society, from the ancestral temples of rulers to households and communities. In all three “spheres of musical validity” (Jorgensen 1997, 45-65), namely, family, religion, and village clans, live performances of music evoke similar feelings and responses due to a sense of shared symbolism.

It is clear, therefore, that music education in ancient China was founded on three assumptions: music is joy and a necessity of humans, music transforms humans, and music has the power to improve society. Linking these three assumptions into one single thread, the crux of the music education enterprise in ancient China was the creation of an ordered society in response to the social disunity of the times: to transform people through the joy of music so as to create an ordered society. Having grounded the philosophical foundation of music education in ancient China to society, I move on to this society itself and see what the ideal music teacher might have looked like to the ancient Chinese philosophers.

### **The Ideal Music Educator**

Given the early Chinese thinkers’ penchant to theorise the ideal *junzi*, it would be interesting to speculate what their conception of an ideal music teacher might have been; after all, Confucius was a musician himself and even taught music to the Music Master of Lu (*Analects* 3.23). By drawing on passages related to the nature of teaching, I shall suggest that the

ideal music teacher in the ancient Chinese tradition is a teacher-model who inspires and exhibits a complex array of teacherly qualities, including a constant desire for self-improvement.

The most important notion of teaching in the ancient Chinese tradition is modeling. For Xunzi, the best form of learning is human-to-human, especially with teachers who are learned, so that they can serve as models for students. He also notes that “of all the ways to order the temperament and train the mind,” none is “more vital than to find a teacher” (Watson 2003, 28). While the notion of the teacher-model should not surprise modern readers, the sheer amount of weight and importance accorded to it by the ancient Chinese might be. As Donald Munro (1983) points out, much of education in ancient China was in unearthing models for emulation, such as King Shun, the model of filial piety (*xiao* 孝). He further notes that in ancient China, modeling on virtuous models was favoured over the strict imposition of laws. In like vein, Eno (1990, 12-13) notes that in classical Confucianism, “the teacher represented to a greater or lesser degree the embodiment of the philosophy, surpassing in importance not only texts, but even the rituals themselves.”

To understand why the ancient Chinese placed such importance on modeling, I draw on Hebert Fingarette’s (1981) distinction between model in the instrumental sense, and model in the consummate sense. While the former refers to a model that students may want to merely copy, the latter refers to a model that goes beyond superficial imitation; in fact, in the latter model, people do not even need to be told to model. In Confucius’ words, “the virtue (*de* 德) of the *junzi* is like wind (*feng* 風); the virtue of the small man (*xiaoren* 小人) is like grass (*cao* 草). Let the wind blow over the grass and it is sure to bend (*yan* 偃)” (*Analects* 12.19; Lau 1979, 116. See also, *Analects* 13.12 and 9.14). By inference, the ideal music teacher in the ancient Chinese tradition is a consummate model whose musicianship is so compelling that it “blows over” and

“bends” the musicianship of the students. As a young boy, I was fascinated by Leonard Bernstein. Even though my contact with him was via television, I was awestruck and inspired to become the conductor and music educator that he was. Just as the grass bent when the wind blew, the sheer power of his musicianship blew me over. No one instructed me to look up to him and strive to model after him—I naturally did.

In contemporary music education, it appears that modeling is conceived predominantly along the lines of the instrumental model. For example, Fredna Grimland (2005, 5) operationally defines modeling as “a means of teaching where the teacher demonstrates certain desirable or undesirable performance techniques or behaviors—as a way of facilitating students’ responses to desired musical outcomes.” Perhaps music educators may consider embracing the consummate model as well. More recently in the West, Vernon Howard (1992) has emphasised this approach, such that the exemplar becomes a normative construction to be emulated. While the instrumental model demonstrates, the consummate model actualises and personifies music—the notion of modeling moves from being a teaching tool to *becoming the musician that the teacher wants the student to be*. This places the onus on teachers to constantly strive towards being the finest musician possible, rather than being dull didactic instructors who no longer make music actively. Contra George Bernard Shaw (DiGaetani, 2008), those who *can*, teach!

Furthermore, the notion of a consummate teacher-model is one who exhibits a complex array of teacherly qualities. In the *Analects*, we see how Confucius as a teacher-model continually seeks self-improvement (7.23), self-evaluates critically (7.3), perseveres (7.2; 7.18), is of a humble disposition (9.8), acknowledges aspects where students may be better than him (5.9) and makes teaching equally available to all classes of people (7.7). In addition, Confucius does not simply use authority to answer his disciples even when questioned for his actions (17.7),

and not only permits but even *expects* disagreement (2.9). Although he often serves as an authoritative leader, there are heart-warming moments that reveal that the teacher-student relationship is that of reciprocal concern (6.10; 7.35; 11.11).

Most importantly, perhaps, is the fact that the *Analects* certainly does not portray Confucius as a perfect teacher, making the portrait of this venerated philosopher even more realistic and compelling. He can be harsh at times, and even talks about one student to another (18.8). Yet, these negative aspects of Confucius are instructive. They remind us that humans—Confucius or otherwise—are all, as Immanuel Kant would assert made from “crooked timber” (Berlin 1990, 23). Yet, just because one is flawed ought not to mean that one should cease teaching; rather, one should, like Confucius, constantly seek self-improvement. Knowing his own shortcomings (7.34), Confucius willingly admits his mistakes (7.32; 17.4) and is ever willing to learn from others (7.23). In fact, David Elstein (2009) argues that it is Confucius’ humility, willingness to acknowledge shortcomings and relentless pursuit of virtue (7.35) that makes him a model. By inference, the ideal music teacher is not necessarily one who is flawless, but one who is humble, acknowledges his or her own limitations and continually seeks to improve.

I have shown therefore, that the ideal music teacher in the ancient Chinese tradition is a consummate teacher-model who inspires people to want to be like him or her and exhibits a complex array of teacherly qualities, including a constant desire for self-improvement. Having considered the nature of teaching, we explore the nature of musical training itself.

### **The Nature of Musical Skill-based Training**

Although none of the passages in the five texts under this current purview explicitly details the nature of musical training, we may infer from other passages—especially those related

to the nature of skill-based training—to construct an image of what the nature of musical training might have been like for the ancient Chinese thinkers. As I will demonstrate, the nature of this training is *effortful* and comprises four facets: repetitive practice, sequencing, persevering with single-mindedness and unifying learning into a single thread.

An interesting story by the Daoist philosopher, Zhuangzi, serves as our primary point of departure (*Zhuangzi*: 19/50/12-19/50/16. See Watson 1968, 199-200). In this story, “Confucius” (a name that the playful Zhuangzi often uses as a fictitious character in his writings) was walking on the road when he saw a hunchback catching cicadas with a sticky pole as easily as if he were plucking them down with his hand. Confucius praised his skill, and asked him if there was a *dao* for catching cicadas. The cicada catcher replied “yes,” and went on to describe the *dao*: for five or six months, he practised balancing balls on top of each other. Once he could balance two balls without them falling, he knew he would miss very few cicadas. Then he balanced three balls and when they did not fall off, he knew he would miss only one cicada in ten. Then he balanced five balls—once they did not fall off, he knew catching cicadas would be as easy as grabbing them with his hand. Throughout the process, he perceived nothing but cicada wings and let nothing else in the world take their place. “Confucius” was impressed. He turned to his disciples, praised the hunchback’s undivided will, and described him as wise and venerable.

Four aspects central to the nature of skilled-based training can be inferred from this story. First, repetitive practice over a period of time is essential (see also, *Zhuangzi* 19/50/18). Second, this practice is thoughtfully sequenced. The cicada catcher started with two balls before progressively adding to five, moving from the simple to the complex, recalling a similar notion by Johan Pestalozzi during Western Enlightenment. As he gradually improved, he found cicada catching progressively easier. Third, he unified his will and persevered with single-mindedness,

perceiving “nothing but cicada wings,” and was aptly praised by “Confucius” for his “undivided will.” In all three aspects, effort on the part of the learner was crucial (see also, *Analects* 7.2; 7.18).

Fourth, in putting together all that he has practiced, the hunchback unified learning into one single *dao*. The notion of unifying learning into a single *dao* or thread can also be seen in a striking conversation between Confucius and his disciple, Zigong. Confucius asks Zigong if he takes him for one who studies a great deal and remembers it all. Zigong replies “yes,” after which Confucius says, “no,” further explaining that he links all that he learns in a “single thread” (*yiguan* 一貫) (*Analects* 15.3; Lau 1979, 132. See also, *Analects* 4.15). For Confucius, learning is not about infinite studying but understanding the underlying unity—the “single thread”—of the *dao*, which foreshadows the view in the West of a unitary or holistic nature of wisdom (Whitehead 1929). In like vein, Xunzi exhorts that study is inherently the study of making all one rather than a futile pursuit of endless knowledge (Watson 2003, 29). Similarly, Zhuangzi said, “Your life has a limit but knowledge has none. If you use what is limited to pursue what has no limit, you will be in danger” (*Zhuangzi*: 3/7/27; Watson 1968, 50). Applied to music education, rather than exhaust oneself by trying to play all the musical works there are out there, or try mastering all the instruments there are in the world, music students should focus instead on the underlying *musicianship*. Music education may at times be necessarily fragmented—the student learns how to set up a musical instrument in one lesson, fingering the next, and the art of interpretation the following week—it is crucial for students to unify all these learning into a single thread. In short, the fourth aspect of the nature of musical training is that effort is needed to link learning into a single thread—musicianship.

It is clear therefore, that there are four aspects to the nature of musical training that we may infer from the texts. Notwithstanding the tremendous amount of effort required, students should embrace learning as a kind of joy (*Analects* 1.1). Furthermore, the payoffs of effortful training are immense, as we shall see in the next section.

### **The Joyous Virtuoso**

To experience the rewards of effortful training, we go to Zhuangzi's kitchen in the celebrated "Tale of Cook Ding"—one of the several important "knack" passages which celebrate how individuals who attain skill mastery experience a state of unity with the *dao* (*Zhuangzi*: 3/7/30-3/8/11. See Watson, 1968, 50-51). In this story, we learn about how Cook Ding masters the skill of butchering an ox. At the beginning, when he first commences his training, all he can see is the whole carcass. After three years of training, he displays an almost supernatural efficacy as his spirit (*shen* 神) guides his hands and he executes his task as though he were performing the Dance of the Mulberry Grove. He no longer has to think; instead, he simply follows the natural forms of the ox, slices the major joints and guides the knife through the big hollows. By harmonising the movements of his knife with the inherent contours of the ox, no vessels, tendons—much less the big bones—block his blade. While a mediocre cook will need to change his knife once a month, Cook Ding is able to use the same knife for eighteen years, as he is so well skilled that he does not need to hack the oxen. Lord Wenhui praises his mastery of skill, to which he replies, "what your servant loves, my lord, is the *dao*, and that is a step *beyond skill*."

Like many stories in the *Zhuangzi*, although the Tale of Cook Ding may appear mundane, ordinary and even amusing at the surface level, it is designed to illustrate important lessons. In this story, after three years of effortful training, Cook Ding achieves a state of virtuosic ease. Butchering an ox is no longer an effortful task but *effortless action*. He no longer has to rely on

his senses of perception and cognitive understanding; rather, the somatic self takes over and he arrives at *the dao*—“a step beyond skill.” Cook Ding has achieved the state of *wuwei*: a philosophical term that literally means “non-action” or “non-striving.” By *wuwei*, I follow Edward Slingerland (2003, 7) to refer to “a state of personal harmony in which actions flow freely and instantly from one’s spontaneous inclinations.” Furthermore, without the need for “extended deliberation or inner struggle,” one accords “perfectly with the dictates of the situation at hand and displays an almost supernatural efficacy.” *Wuwei* embraces a family of concepts, including “flowing along with, being at ease, fit with the world, forgetting, and joy” (Slingerland 2003, 11). The meaning lies in the activity itself—no external rewards are needed (see also, *Zhuangzi* 19/50/23; Watson 1968, 201). We have arrived at the epitome of the pursuit of skill-knowledge: the *joyful virtuoso*. Such an experience is surely not unfamiliar to musicians who attain mastery of their performance medium. One is so completely immersed in the *dao* of music that one forgets about oneself and experiences an indescribable sense of joy when making music. Furthermore, just as our virtuoso butcher follows the natural forms of the ox, our virtuoso musician follows the inherent contours of the music.

Nonetheless, *Zhuangzi* does not over-romanticise. Instead, he portrays an account of *wuwei* that is clearly experiential. Returning to our kitchen, Cook Ding notes that despite being in a state of *wuwei*, whenever there is a tangled knot, he would spot the challenge, focus his sight and slow down his hand. Then, he would flick the blade with the slightest of moves, and before one knows it, the carcass would fall apart like earth crumbling to the ground. He would then raise his knife, face all four directions in turn, and prance in place with complete satisfaction (*Zhuangzi*: 3/7/30-3/8/11. See also, Watson 1968, 50-51).

Unlike mere habit, *wuwei* necessitates a certain degree of awareness on the part of the agent; it is not “mindless behavior” but “embodied mind” (Slingerland 2003, 8). Thus, our cook is fully aware of tangled knots, during which he reverts to a brief stage of *effortful* action. This scenario is not unlike playing a violin concerto: although one may learn a work to the point of *wuwei*, there may nonetheless be occasional moments or passages when one has to revert to a stage of effortful concentration. However, a skilled virtuoso will be able to negotiate these spots with ease, and before long, return to the state of effortless action. Eno (1990, 177-179) notes that in studying *li*, music, and dance, the Confucians “more than likely encountered the very sorts of totalistic experiences described by modern artists.” Thus, Confucius joyfully forgets his cares (*Analects* 7.19), Mencius’ feet begin to prance and hands begin to dance (*Mencius* 4A.27) and Xunzi embraces his spontaneous dispositions and walks along the *dao* without purposive effort (*wuwei*).

Furthermore, at the epitome of skill acquisition, our musical sage, like the perfect Confucian *junzi*, has no rules (*Analects* 18.8)—actions are governed entirely by trained judgments. Having embodied musicianship, our virtuoso musician transcends explicit rules (*Analects* 4.10) and focuses on musicianship itself. Speaking of the Confucians, Eno (1990) notes that “to apply rules in life requires not logic, but art,” further noting that “this art is the limiting boundary of rule-learning; once it is mastered, the guiding role of explicit rules become secondary.” Eventually, the goal is not more rules, “but superseding rules with the organisational unity of a skill system” (173). As Haiming Wen (2009, 14) points out, humans in the Confucian worldview “use their wisdom to handle the changing world appropriately at every moment.” Similarly, having embodied musicianship, our virtuoso is ready to handle myriad musical events, be it performing in a different environment, or playing in tune with a stand partner who has gone

wayward in pitch. He or she also responds to the times in an ever-changing world. Borrowing from Haiming Wen, our virtuoso musician co-creates the world through *creatio in situ*, that is, situational creativity (see also, Tan 2015a). Our virtuoso is not only joyful but also deeply creative. Rules are no longer present, and one actively creates with effortless action.

### **Theoretical Model and Implications for Music Education**

To recapitulate, the research questions of this present study were: (1) What was the philosophical foundation of music education in ancient China? (2) What was the ancient Chinese philosophers' construal of an ideal music educator? (3) What was the nature of musical skill training according to the ancient Chinese philosophers? and (4) What was the final purpose of musical skill training for the ancient Chinese philosophers? These questions were addressed via the four distinct sections above. Linking the major themes unpacked into a “single thread” (*yiguan* 一貫), a dynamic theoretical model of music education inspired by ancient Chinese thought begins to emerge. This circular model comprises four facets: society, teacher-model, effortful training, and effortless action.

Our model begins *in medias res* with society. Consistent with ancient Chinese thought, our society in this model has no definite beginning (Tan 2015a). In this society, people believe that music is joy and a basic necessity of humans, transforms people, and has the power to improve society. From this society, our ideal music teacher-model emerges. This teacher-model—a consummate model—embodies the essence of musicianship. There is no need for coercion as the joy of music shines forth naturally from the teacher, and people want to be like this teacher-model. Thus, people are inspired to engage in effortful musical training that requires repetitive practice, sequencing, persevering with single-mindedness and unifying learning into a single thread. Despite the efforts required, the dividends are manifold when they achieve skill mastery

and are at one with the *dao*. Having arrived at *wuwei*, our joyful virtuosos create music with effortless action. They achieve musical autonomy, responding to the ever-changing world and actively co-creating the world. They make music in all aspects of society: religious, family, and all forms of social contexts. Consequently, society improves. And thus, we are back to where we began—society. Consonant with ancient Chinese thought, this is a dynamic and circular model that moves and changes with the times. The model is never being, but always becoming (Hall and Ames 1987).

Although inspired by the ancient Chinese thinkers, I suspect that this model is timeless and transcultural when we move beyond the specific social, cultural and political contexts of ancient China. This model situates music education socially, emphasises the role of the teacher-model, effortful training, and the immense payoffs rooted in human experience. I should stress, however, that not all phenomenal instances of music education may fit neatly into this theoretical model; in any case, theory and practice do not always enjoy an isomorphic relationship (Schwab 1978). Nor do I claim that this model contains the solutions for all issues in contemporary music education. Nonetheless, I propose a quartet of implications for music education that music educators may consider.

First, music educators may consider issues with regard to music's place in society. In *Art and Experience*, John Dewey (1934/1980, 4) laments that art has been extensively and pervasively set "upon a remote pedestal," and "the arts which today have most vitality for the average person are things he does not take to be arts." A number of contemporary music education writers no longer see traditional art forms—such as bands and orchestras—as being valid in music education (e.g., Kratus 2007). Perhaps this need not be so. Instead, efforts may be made to reclaim music's place in society and re-connect with the audience. For example, an orchestral

director may perform Star Wars and Gustav Holst's Mars from *The Planets* in a same concert and illustrate how, as Mencius would say, "the music of today derives from the music of the past" (*Mencius* 1B.1. See also, Bloom and Ivanhoe 2011, 13): the Imperial March from Star Wars is strongly reminiscent of Holst's Mars. While people may view Star Wars as "functional movie music" and Gustav Holst as "high art," this approach breaks down artificial barriers and situates so-called "high art" in society and ordinary experience. This is consonant with Richard Shusterman's (2000, xvi) socio-cultural ideal "where so-called high and low art (and their audiences) together find expression and acceptance without oppressive hierarchies." Simply put, "art music" should not be placed on a pedestal and music education that teaches so-called "art music" should situate itself within society.

In any case, notwithstanding issues with the ways in which traditional large ensembles are presently conducted, Jorgensen (2010, 23) rightly notes that bands and orchestras "continue to contribute to the fabric of cultural life in communities large and small." I think for example, of the Indiana University Summer Concert Band's performances held every summer at the lawn of the Musical Arts Centre in Bloomington, Indiana, which has brought the people of Bloomington together in shared celebration for several decades. A similar thing can be said of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestras outdoor concerts at the Waldbühne, and the Singapore Symphony Orchestra's open-air performances at the Singapore Botanical gardens. To recapitulate Xunzi, whether in the home, religious or social communities, live performances of music evoke feelings of shared symbolism and induce harmony among people. Bands and orchestras in many parts of the world have played a crucial role in social bonding and can continue to do so.

Second, the Confucian portrait of the teacher-model has much to recommend music education. In particular, it construes modeling not simply as a form of teaching tool (i.e., the

“instrumental” model), but in terms of being a normative exemplar that students are naturally inspired to learn from (i.e., the “consummate” model). To appropriate Confucius’ metaphor, teachers ought to be the “wind” that naturally moves the “grass” (i.e., their students). What this implies then, is that regardless of the teaching level, teachers have the responsibility to strive towards the highest possible level of musicianship. With the practical realities of teaching, it is ever so easy for teachers to slide into daily administrative—even mechanical—routines that have little or nothing to do with the actual doing of music. Just as Confucius continually seeks self-improvement, evaluates himself critically, perseveres in learning, and is humble and willing to learn, conscious efforts ought to be made for teachers to better themselves as musicians every day, be it joining a community choir, taking additional lessons, or picking up a new book.

To recall Elstein (2009), it is Confucius’ humility, willingness to acknowledge shortcomings and relentless pursuit of virtue that makes him a consummate model. Similarly, an ideal music teacher-model is not one who is perfect, but one possesses the humility to acknowledge shortcomings—and does something about them. The ability to critique oneself is crucial. In addition, whether in the general music classroom or rehearsal hall, music teachers ought to remain open-minded to the responses of their students. Even in the traditional large ensemble setting, there is no one approach to musical interpretation; teachers ought to absorb ideas by their students and weave them into a coherent whole such that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Tan 2014; 2015a). Indeed, teaching and learning, as Confucius would argue, is not merely top-down, but bi-directional: the teacher learns from the student, and the “wind” can certainly blow in the opposing direction.

Third, music educators may consider centering their approach on human experience. Zhuangzi’s theoretical concept of *wuwei* appears remarkably similar to Csikzentmihalyi’s (1990,

4) theory of flow: “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it.” In fact, Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 151) cites the “Tale of Cook Ding” in his seminal book on flow theory, and even claims that Zhuangzi’s use of the character *you* (遊) *is* flow. Just as effortful training over time lies at the heart of *wuwei* for Zhuangzi, “incremental honing of challenges and skills,” not a “superhuman quantum jump,” is the basis of the flow experience for Csikszentmihalyi (1990, p. 151). Csikszentmihalyi adds that just as Cook Ding experiences flow, so do great violinists. I should add, however, that one does not have to be a Heifetz and play Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto in order to experience flow. The issue is not the difficulty of the musical piece in and of itself, but whether one’s skill matches the challenge of the work (i.e., challenge-skill balance—an important aspect of flow theory). Even with Bach’s *Minuet in G*, mastery of the piece results in the flow experience. It follows then, that *even five year olds can become joyful virtuosos* with the right literature, inspiring teacher-models, and effortful training. The onus, then, is on teachers to assign suitable music, and also for students to engage in effortful training in order to attain the skills needed to arrive at the flow experience.

While this may seem obvious, how often have we seen ensembles in state adjudications playing music far too difficult for students to learn to the point of *wuwei*? How often have we stressed meeting standards artificially set by adults rather than teaching from a child’s experiential perspective? The recent worldwide trend towards standardisation, enumeration and accountability is likely to further exacerbate the problem. Csikszentmihalyi (1991, 112) laments that “even when children are taught music, the usual problem often arises: too much emphasis on how they perform, and too little on what they experience,” further adding that in doing so, they “succeed in perverting music into the opposite of what it was designed to be: they turn it into a

source of psychic disorder.” It is crucial for music educators to reclaim the rightful place of flow in the classroom. After all, flow is timeless and transcultural. In Csikszentmihalyi’s (1991, 151) words, it is through the flow experience that “East and West meet: in both cultures ecstasy arises from the same sources.” Indeed, flow is deeply satisfying, increases one’s enjoyment of life, and is intensely joyous. And if Nel Noddings (2003) was right to declare that education should offer students opportunities to experience ecstatic happiness, an experiential approach to music education, one that stresses the joy and intrinsic value of music, can rejuvenate music education at all levels—away from artificial standards, back to the learners themselves.

Fourth, the move from effortful training to effortless action in the theoretical model reminds contemporary music educators that there *is* value to spending time on practice to acquire skill. A number of writers have pointed out that traditional instrumental music programmes require much time and effort: Kratus (2007) notes that getting a single good tone from the oboe requires a substantial amount of effort, Williams (2011) argues that students often do not acquire sufficient skills to make music even after a year of ensemble participation, and Cope and Smith (1997, 284) claim that instrumental learning requires a “well-developed capacity to delay gratification” in order to remain motivated. If the above critics are correct, it follows that instrumental music education is an exercise in deferred gratification. This raises the issue of whether instrumental music education is relevant in this day and age when students are often immersed in “instant cultures” (Chapman 1982).

But it is precisely because we live in a culture of instant gratification that traditional large ensemble programmes (i.e., band, choir, and orchestra) play an integral role in instilling delayed gratification. Many of the accomplishments of human civilisation from scientific discoveries to literature, sports, art and music are possible only because humans are able to undertake action on

the basis of deferred gratification. Furthermore, moving from effortful training to effortless action necessitates and fosters “grit,” that is, perseverance and passion for long-term goals, which as empirical research suggests, predict achievements over and beyond talent (Duckworth and Quinn 2009). In a recent study on the practice behaviours of 241 American collegiate instrumental students, Miksza and Tan (2015) found positive associations between grit and flow: as students’ self-reported levels of grit increased, so did their self-reported levels of flow when practising. This finding not only provides empirical support for the inter-relationship between effortful training and effortless action unpacked in this paper, but also counterpoints claims that the need for practice in traditional large ensembles is problematic. In short, practice to acquire skill in choral and instrumental ensembles is a good: it requires and develops grit, which is in turn linked to flow. Notwithstanding the values of delayed gratification, the “wait time” to experience flow need not be too long. While certain skills may require years to develop, teachers may set short-term targets that students can master well enough to experience flow; the short-term “ends” become the “means” for long-term goals. Regular lessons become opportunities to experience flow; they inspire students towards ever-increasing challenges. Students are not given “too much too quickly.” Instead, they are constantly challenged and intrinsically rewarded by the flow experience along the way.

In conclusion, I have proposed a theoretical model of music education inspired by ancient Chinese thought. The four facets of this model are society, teacher-model, effortful training and effortless action. I have also suggested four implications of this theoretical model for contemporary music education. Given the space constraints, it is not possible to unpack all the possible implications of Chinese philosophy for music education, nor have I been exhaustive in my treatment of the ancient Chinese philosophers. Future writers may build on some of the

conceptual grounds covered in this paper; it also remains for other scholars of non-Western philosophical traditions to bring their areas of specialisation to music education research in the English-speaking world. Meanwhile, Xunzi's declaration on a bamboo strip more than two thousand years ago bears restatement: "music is joy." It is by no means an accident that music and joy have been written using the same Chinese character for more than 2,000 years: 樂. As music educators, let us not forget the *dao* of music–joy, and centre music education on human experience.

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In this citation, I have modified Watson's translation of *ren* 人 from "man" to "humans" as *ren* does not connote only the male gender.