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| Title | On the usefulness of nothingness: A Daoist-inspired philosophy of music education |
| Author(s) | Mengchen Lu and Leonard Tan |
| Source | <i>Philosophy of Music Education Review</i> , 29(1), 88-101 |

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On the Usefulness of Nothingness: A Daoist-Inspired Philosophy of Music Education

Mengchen Lu, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

nie162538@e.ntu.edu.sg

Leonard Tan, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

leonard.tan@nie.edu.sg

Abstract

In 1952, John Cage wrote *4'33''* which famously asked the performer *not* to play a single note: *tacet*. This provocative work raises a number of questions. In music—and by extension, music education—what does it mean to *not* do something? What does it mean to make *no* sound? More fundamentally, what is the nature of *non-action*, *non-sound*, and even *nothingness* in and of itself? Since Cage was influenced by Eastern philosophy, we journey to Asia in search of insights into nothingness and associated notions of absence and negation. In particular, we draw on the writings of Daoist philosophers, principally Laozi, to examine a quartet of philosophical terms, namely, *wu* (nothing/ness), *wuwei* (non-action), *wusheng* (non-sound), and *wuaile* (neither sorrow nor joy). Using these ideas, we propose a Daoist-inspired philosophy of music education, one that emphasizes the usefulness (*yong*) of nothingness (*wu*).

Keywords: Daoism, Nothing/ness, music education, Chinese philosophy

“I am here , and there is nothing to say .”

John Cage, “Lecture on Nothingness”¹

The lights in the hall dim. The pianist enters, takes a bow, and basks in the glory of the applause. As she takes her seat, the audience hushes and waits in eager anticipation. She opens her score, which contains one singular Italian term in each of the three movements: *tacet*. She sits quietly for 4 minutes and 33 seconds and marks the three movements of the work by opening and closing the piano lid. Throughout the piece, she does not play a single note.²

Cage’s provocative work raises a number of questions. In music—and by extension, music education—what does it mean to *not* do something? What does it mean to make *no* sound? More fundamentally, what is the nature of *non-action*, *non-sound*, and even *nothingness* in and of itself? In the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Martin Heidegger opens with the fundamental philosophical question, “Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?”³ By raising the question of *being*, Heidegger has also invited us to ask: What is *nothing*? What is *nothingness*? And how might a philosophy of nothingness illuminate music education?⁴

Since Cage was influenced by Eastern philosophy,⁵ we journey to Asia in search of insights into nothingness and associated notions of absence and negation. In particular, we draw on the writings of Daoist philosophers, principally Laozi,⁶ to examine a quartet of philosophical terms, namely, *wu* (無: nothing/ness), *wuwei* (無為: non-action), *wusheng* (無聲: non-sound), and *wuaile* (無哀樂: neither sorrow nor joy). In what ensues, we unpack each of the four terms in turn.

Wu (無: “nothing/ness”)

We begin with the philosophical term for nothing and nothingness in the Chinese language: *wu*. The characters for nothingness, shaman, and dance all have similar sounds in the Chinese language, as made apparent by how all three are similarly romanized as “*wu*.” In ancient China, shamans engaged in dancing. During a shamanistic dance, a spirit is born. As one cannot see this spirit, it is perceived by humans as “nothing”; yet it is nonetheless present (*you* 有).⁷

In order to understand *wu* (nothing/ness), therefore, we need to consider *you* (presence); they relate to each other. According to Daoist metaphysics, *wu* refers to the state of formlessness before the world came into being. *Wu* creates *you*, which is the presence of reality; in turn, *you* creates all things in this world. As noted by Laozi in the *Daodejing*, *you* and *wu* form the Dao (道: the “Way”).⁸ Simply stated, we understand nothing only in relation to something, absence only in relation to presence, and vice versa. Like *yin* (陰: “dark”) and *yang* (陽: “bright”)—where two seeming opposites complement and require each other—one cannot exist without the other.⁹ Just as there is *yin* because there is *yang*, and vice versa, there is presence because there is absence, and vice versa. Take for example, the presence and absence of life. If one does not live, how does one die? Conversely, to understand life, one must know that it will end. Death requires (logically and in reality) life; similarly, life requires death.

Nonetheless, all remains a mystery. In Section 1 of the *Daodejing*, Laozi noted that *you* and *wu* “arise from the same source but have different names. Together they may be termed ‘the mysterious’”.¹⁰ In other words, *you* and *wu* originate from the same source—that which is mysterious. The true, enduring Dao can never be fully grasped just as notions such as depth, greatness, smallness, and distance cannot be really understood: there exists something deeper than deep, greater than great, smaller than small, and further than far. Given these ultimate

realities that the human mind can never comprehend, the true enduring Dao can never be explained using words. A worldview based on Laozi's ideas embraces the mysterious and the unknown as a fundamental reality of life.

Although all is a mystery, *you* (presence) and *wu* (nothing/ness) create one another, a Daoist philosophical principal known as *youwu xiangsheng* (有無相生). This principle looks to nature as a source of inspiration. Take, for example, life (*you*) and death (*wu*). A cow is born (*you*), the cow dies (*wu*), which becomes food to sustain another life (*you*). This other life generates more lives, and the cycle continues. Death (*wu*) is simply part of the larger natural cycle that creates more and more in this world (*shengsheng buxi* 生生不息). Another example is to think of *you* as knowing and *wu* as not knowing. When one knows something, one knows what one did not know. When one knows what one did not know, one may then want to know more, thus showing again, the principle of *youwu xiangsheng*. Knowing and not knowing work together as humans try to know the Dao.

As Laozi noted, “All between heaven and earth is like a great bellows . Empty, yet it does not collapse, the more it is moved, the more it issues forth.”¹¹ Bellows refer to emptiness ; even when heaven and earth create a void, it does not lack activities, and all beings will emerge from this void, from nothing (*wu*) to something (*you*) to the “ten thousand things” (*wanwu* 萬物), that is, all things and events in the world. Therefore, “emptiness” is not complete absence; on the contrary, it has limitless potential for creativity. If Laozi were a music teacher, he might create this space—this “great bellows” and “emptiness”—for creativity. For example, when teaching phrasing, he makes space for students to create their own musical ideas regarding the interpretation of a piece. It is in making space for nothingness (*wu*) that students create

something new (*you*). Therefore, we see here, the usefulness of nothingness (*wu*): this space is useful because students can now create.

Wuwei (無為: “non-action”)

While *wu* in itself refers to “no,” “not,” “nothing,” or “nothingness,” it can also be attached to other characters as a form of negation, as in the Chinese philosophical term for non-action: *wuwei* (無為). This is a philosophically complex term that is richly nuanced and holds several interpretations and meaning.¹² As *wu* means “non” and *wei* means “to do,” it is easy to misunderstand *wuwei* as simply “doing nothing.” However, as Victor Fung explains, “doing nothing” would be *buwei*, not *wuwei*.¹³

To understand *wuwei* in its most natural, basic form, we turn to nature. For example, a flower grows on its own, without effort. In the world of nature, “The Dao is ever non-acting, yet nothing is left undone.”¹⁴ As a flower grows, there is *wei* (action); it is definitely not *buwei*. Yet, it is natural and effortless. *Wuwei* has therefore also been translated as “effortless action.”¹⁵ *Wuwei* can also mean not striving for personal fame and glory, and not boasting, a characteristic that is captured by Victor Fung’s translation of *wuwei* as “non-egoistic action.”¹⁶ For Laozi, “One who shows [oneself] cannot be bright”, “one who asserts [oneself] cannot shine”, “one who praises [oneself] cannot be meritorious”, and “one who boasts of [oneself] cannot endure”.¹⁷ By showing off, one is not bright (that is, not wise). One who is arrogant will not appear outstanding. One who self-praises will not have one’s credits recognized, and one who boasts will not be able to last long. Just like water that flows downwards in waterfalls, humans, according to the Daoist philosophical worldview, should seek to be lowly and humble; yet, like water, they should continue to benefit the world. As Laozi expresses in *Daodejing* Section 9:

“The work being done, step out of view, that is the dao of Tian”.¹⁸ This was why the Daoists were hermits; they left society and went to the mountains to seek peace and engage in *wuwei*. Besides Laozi and Zhuangzi, many Pre-Qin Daoists were also hermits, such as Liezi, Zheng Zhangzhe, Qian Louzi, and Jie Guanzi.¹⁹

The Daoist notion of non-action (*wuwei*) serves as philosophical lens to view Cage’s 4’33’’. The pianist did not do nothing; she was not in a state of *buwei*. Rather, she created the conditions for the piece of music to grow and develop on its own naturally and without effort. Laozi recommended such an approach to life: to follow the course of nature and to let things develop on their own. If he were a music teacher, it would be unlikely for him to set artificial standards for his students; rather, he would allow students to grow and develop at their own pace, on their own—just like the way a flower grows. For Laozi, “the sage dwells in the midst of non-action (*wuwei*) and practices the wordless teaching (*buyan zhijiao* 不言之教).”²⁰ By not using words, by not over-teaching, by not setting artificial standards, and by not insisting on students winning prizes and seeking glory, Laozi allows students to flow with the way of the Dao and with nature. We see therefore once again, the usefulness of nothingness (*wu*): by engaging in *wuwei*, students are given the space to develop and grow.

Wusheng (無聲: “non-sound”)

To understand Laozi’s philosophy of music and sound, we must remember that Laozi was arguing against Confucian philosophy—a rival philosophical school in early China.²¹ For Confucius, music, especially classical music of the Shao, was an important way to cultivate virtues.²² However, for Laozi, music written *by* humans, *for* humans, will create desires for insatiable sensory pleasures. When we excite the senses, humans would want more and more:

more and more food, more and more music. Therefore, Laozi repudiated Confucian thinking with the phrase, 五音令人耳聾 (*wuyin lingren erlong*: “The Five Tones Deafen Humans’ Ears”).²³ The “Five Tones” (*wuyin* 五音) refer to the classical music that Confucian philosophy advocated. For Laozi, these “Five Tones” have negative effects on humans and human civilization.

Instead of the “Five Tones”, Laozi argues for the “Great Note” (*dayin* 大音), and famously said 大音希聲 (*dayin xisheng*: “The Great Note is Rarified Sound”).²⁴ The word 希 (*xi*) means “very little,” almost nothing. Herein lies the question: Does “rarified sound” (*xisheng*) mean “very little” sounds, or does it refer to the total absence of sound (*wusheng*)?

On the one hand, when we read Laozi’s quote in context, there are strong reasons to believe that Laozi means “no sound.” In the *Daodejing*, “The Great Note is rarified sound” appears together with “The Great Image has no form” (*daxiang wuxing* 大象無形).²⁵ Since “rarified sound” is stated in parallel with “no form” (*wuxing*), we may possibly interpret “rarified sound” as being “soundless” or “non-sound” (*wusheng*). The importance of non-sound and the soundless in Daoist philosophy is further emphasized by another Daoist philosopher, Zhuangzi, in his notion of the *Heavenly Piping* (*tianlai* 天籟) which cannot be perceived by the human ear.²⁶

On the other hand, however, if Laozi really means “soundless” (*wusheng*), he could simply say “The Great Note is Soundless” (*dayin wusheng*) rather than “The Great Note is Rarified Sound” (*dayin xisheng*). There must be a reason why he uses *xisheng* (rarified sound) rather than *wusheng* (soundless). Maybe he does indeed mean for *xisheng* (rarified sound) to refer to very soft sounds: the softer the sound, the more we listen and pay attention, hence The “Great Note” (*dayin*) is “very soft” (*xisheng*). Laozi could also use *xisheng* because true silence,

as John Cage notes, is not possible as long as one is alive.²⁷ We might also think of *xisheng* as sounds that are unassuming; sounds we would normally not consider as music, such as sounds from everyday living and the sounds of nature.

When we put together all the possible interpretations for “The Great Note is Rarified Sound” (*dayin xisheng*), we see that these four characters may explain the paradoxes and contradictions within *4'33''*. Just like Laozi, who rejected Confucian “Five Tones” and classical music, Cage saw the limitations of music composed by humans, for humans.²⁸ When we listen to *4'33''* for the first time, the immediate response is that this piece is silence: *wusheng* (soundless). We *perceive* the piece as silence because we *expect* the pianist to play something and the composer to have written something, but all we receive from the performer and composer is “nothing” (*wu*): *tacet*. We do not hear the “Five Tones” (*wuyin*); we hear the “Great Note” (*dayin*): we hear silence, we hear *wusheng* (soundless). Paradoxically, as we hear silence from the performer, we begin to hear the unassuming sounds from daily living, such as the sounds of chairs and coughs. Outside the concert hall, sounds from cars and car horns may also be heard. According to Cage, these sounds are real: they are sounds from everyday living, and are not artificially made. For him, everything we do is music.²⁹ The more we pay attention to them, and listen to them, the “louder” they seem to get. Yet at the same time, in the concert hall, we are aware of the incredible silence from the performer. In short, sound and non-sound co-exist in *4'33''*.³⁰

If Laozi were a music teacher, he might emphasize the value of silence and the soundless in his music classroom; he might also encourage deep inward reflections, rather than just focusing on the sounds. And if Laozi were right to say that the soundless is *the Dao*, which is mysterious and profound, it follows that allowing students to experience the soundless is a way

of letting them sense the ineffable that cannot be spoken. Next, Laozi might stress the importance of listening to the sounds of nature and everyday living. In line with his idea of Harmony of “Refined Notes” and “Raw Sounds” (*yinsheng xianghe* 音聲相和), he might get his students to make music in outdoor venues together with sounds from nature. This might include singing with birds, or playing instruments beside the natural sounds of water. Therefore, we see once again the usefulness of nothing/ness (*wu*): by highlighting the importance of non-sound and the soundless, the notion of what music education means is greatly expanded.

Wuaile (無哀樂: “neither sorrow nor joy”)

Like Laozi, the Neo-Daoist philosopher Ji Kang resists Confucian philosophy. In the treatise entitled, “Sounds Have in Them Neither Sorrow Nor Joy” (*shengwu ailelun* 聲無哀樂論), Ji Kang argues against Confucian notions that music is value-laden and that only certain forms of music can and should be taught.³¹ For Ji Kang, sounds in themselves do not contain feelings; they are “neither sorrowful nor joyous” (*wuaile*). Rather, music acts as a *trigger* that unleashes feelings that humans *already have* in them, causing them to feel sorrow or joy. In other words, human feelings reside where they truly belong—within humans, rather than within the music. It would be erroneous, Ji Kang contends, to conflate feelings within humans with sounds in and of themselves. And since sounds are “neither sorrowful nor joyous”, Ji Kang extends the argument to claim that they are inherently value-free, thus mounting a philosophical opposition to the Confucian theory that only classical Shao music deemed to be ethical should be played and taught.³²

If Ji Kang were a music teacher, he might shift the focus of attention in terms of the affective aspects of the music from the composer (and the musical work) to the student. For

example, if he teaches Beethoven's Symphony No. 5, Ji Kang would focus on how the student *reacts* to the music, rather than whether Beethoven meant to be sorrowful or joyous. This illustrates the usefulness of nothingness (*wu*): by regarding the sounds of Beethoven as being fundamentally *without* any sorrow or joy (*wuaile*), Ji Kang makes space for students to react rather than to prescribe or dictate how they should react to Beethoven. In doing so, Ji Kang opens up multiple interpretations of Beethoven.

Synthesis of Four Daoist Philosophical Principles

What would music and music education look like if we embrace Daoist ideas? First, with respect to *wu* (nothing/ness), teachers would embrace nothingness and create spaces for their students to be creative. They would not provide quick and easy answers but allow students to discover for themselves. They would not be overly occupied with lesson plans and would flow with their students' natural inclinations. Importantly, they would embrace questions, acknowledge that life is ultimately a mystery, and not fear the unknown. Second, with respect to *wuwei* (non-action), they would not set artificial standards for their students, but would allow them to grow and develop at their own pace. They would not seek external glory (competitions, high grades, prizes), and may even engage in the wordless teaching. They may also simply stop teaching and let the students grow by themselves. Third, with respect to *wusheng* (non-sound), teachers might emphasize the value of silence and the soundless in their music classroom. They might also stress the importance of listening to the sounds of nature and everyday living and get their students to make music in outdoor venues together with birds and other sounds of nature. Fourth, with respect to *wuaile* (neither sorrow nor joy), teachers would focus not on the emotional meaning of each musical piece, but the students' response to the music.

The above ideas constitute a Daoist philosophy of music education. Since Daoist ideas primarily aimed at refuting Confucian ones, such a philosophy might be at odds with a Confucian philosophy of music education.³³ Projecting Confucian lenses on music education, many kinds of education in schools today may be seen as forms of Confucian “rituals” (*li* 禮) in one way or another that may possibly restrict one’s nature.³⁴ A Daoist approach to music education reminds us to see students as individuals with differing characters, needs and wants; we should not use the same approach to teach all students. In short, a wholly Daoist philosophy of music education is one which places the individual right at the center.

Towards a Daoist-*Inspired* Philosophy of Music Education

Needless to say, there are clear limitations if we embrace all Daoist ideas in an unthinking manner. For example, such an approach may become overly free and unstructured. Following the natural inclinations of students also raises issues of practicality. Still, while the Daoists may have gone too far in certain aspects, their ideas remain useful and insightful. Our approach, therefore, is not “A Daoist Philosophy of Music Education;” rather, it is a “A Daoist-*Inspired* Philosophy of Music Education.” Furthermore, in line with the overall spirit of Daoism and *yin-yang* theory where opposites complement each other, we propose a holistic and balanced approach to music education that comprises not just *wu* (nothing/ness) but also *you* (presence). Our approach therefore, consists of (1) *you* (presence) and *wu* (nothing/ness); (2) *youwei* (action) and *wuwei* (non-action); (3) *yousheng* (sound) and *wusheng* (non-sound); and (4) *youaile* (presence of sorrow and joy) and *wuaile* (neither sorrow nor joy). Our central proposition is that music education is fuller when we embrace both the *yin* and the *yang*, the *you* (presence) and the *wu* (nothing/ness). In the below, we unpack each of the four pairs of *you* and *wu*.

Our first pair, *you* (presence) and *wu* (nothing/ness), encourages music educators to think of what we teach, and what we do *not* teach. What we say, what we do *not* say. What we do, what we do *not* do. In lesson plans, teachers often think of the things we do; it is ever so easy to miss the other side of the coin: what we do *not* do. As Laozi notes, “presence (*you*) is valuable; nothing/ness (*wu*) is useful.”³⁵ By extension, what music educators have to teach (*you*) is valuable; what they do *not* teach (*wu*) is useful. Although we plan, we should also leave spaces for students to explore. Time may be set aside by music educators to allow their students freedom to pursue their passion; they may choose their own musical activities, write their own music, or listen to music of their choice.³⁶

In proposing our second pair, *youwei* (action) and *wuwei* (non-action), we are arguing for a balanced approach, one that avoids extremes. On the one hand, music education that is overly focused on *youwei* (action) may become too teacher-centered, standards-driven, competition-oriented, and oppressive. On the other hand, an approach that is only *wuwei* (non-action) may lack structure, discipline, and be difficult to implement practically. Therefore, in our approach, music education is about achieving the right balance between the two. There are times in which music educators should do something (*youwei*: action); there are times where non-doing (*wuwei*: non-action) is ideal or appropriate to the circumstances. For example, a classroom teacher may set some broad goals (*youwei*), but leave room for students to develop in a natural way (*wuwei*). When conducting a choir, a conductor may provide clear directions through modeling, instructions, and conducting (*youwei*), but also allow moments to simply allow students to make musical decisions, and even sing without a conductor (*wuwei*). In our Daoist-inspired philosophy of music education, both doing and non-doing are crucial. With this basic principle, there are numerous possibilities for a richer curriculum.

Our third pair is *yousheng* (sound) and *wusheng* (non-sound). As noted earlier, if the Daoists were music educators, they might stress the importance of silence and the soundless in the music classroom, and also emphasize listening to the sounds of nature and everyday living. In our approach, a balanced and more complete curriculum certainly has all these aspects, but also music that society conventionally regards as music, such as classical, popular, and music of diverse cultures. Our philosophical approach, therefore, includes both *yousheng* (sound) and *wusheng* (soundless). In a music classroom, a music teacher teaches sounds and songs, but also makes space for students to experience silence. The teacher also includes everyday soundscapes and non-conventional instruments (such as keys or other STOMP ideas). In an orchestra, the conductor programs music written by composers, but also provides opportunities for students to make music outdoors with sounds of nature. In other words, instead of only teaching music from the established composers and teaching only sounds, music educators, in our approach, stress an expanded view of music and music education.

Finally, we propose *youaile* (presence of sorrow and joy) and *wuaile* (neither sorrow nor joy) as the fourth pair. As noted earlier, if Ji Kang were a music teacher, he might focus on how a student reacts emotionally to a piece of music rather than the emotional content of the piece; this is because Ji Kang believes that sounds are fundamentally without any ethical value or emotion (thereby refuting Confucian theories of music). The advantage of Ji Kang's approach is that students are given space to react; this is different from being told how they *should* react. Ji Kang's approach, therefore, allows several interpretations and responses to a piece of music. While Ji Kang's approach has obvious advantages, it may result in a lack of guidance for students. It can also be useful for students to learn about composers' historical background, and maybe even their emotional intentions, to see how the students' responses differ from what the

composers intended. Our philosophy therefore includes both *youaile* (presence of sorrow and joy) and *wuaile* (neither sorrow nor joy) as teaching approaches. For example, a teacher may start with the assumption of music being *wuaile* (neither sorrow nor joy), and simply allow students to respond as they wish to a piece of music. After that, the teacher can talk about what the composer wanted to express through the music (*youaile* : presence of sorrow and joy) as evident from biographical, stylistic, or historical information. With this approach, music educators are neither overly prescriptive and didactic, nor overly free.

Conclusion

This Daoist-inspired philosophical approach highlights the importance of *wu* (nothing/ness) in music and music education. It offers insights when compared with extant philosophies of music education, such as David Elliott and Marissa Silverman’s praxial philosophy.³⁷ While Elliott and Silverman stress the importance of active doing in music education, our approach posits that both doing and *non*-doing are important. According to Elliott, active doing in music education can enable students to achieve what Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi calls “flow.”³⁸ Interestingly, the Chinese notion of *wuwei* (non-doing) can also be construed as a form of flow.³⁹ The philosophical approach we propose, therefore, contributes to contemporary praxial philosophy of music education in balancing Western praxial doing with Daoist non-doing.⁴⁰

Our approach is also a practical model. Each time teachers walk into their classrooms they may ask themselves: “What am I going to do?” “What am I *not* going to do?” “What sounds and music should my students be engaged in?” “How can I make space for *non*-sounds?” “How can I get students to respond to the emotional content of the music?” “How can I find ways to

not dictate their feelings towards music?” While the original Daoist ideas may be rather cryptic, our approach offers a simple but useful model for the music teacher.

This study may be extended in several ways. Each of the philosophical ideas may be applied to different contexts in music education, including for generalist and specialist teachers, private and ensemble teachers, and band, orchestral, and choral directors. Our approach can be compared with or even synthesized with other philosophies, such as praxial (as noted above) and aesthetic philosophies.⁴¹ Additionally, it can serve as a first step towards other philosophies of nothing/ness. Perhaps, there might be a Western or Indian philosophy of nothing/ness for music education in future.

In line with the spirit of Daoism, while we have offered some practical ideas, we have consciously created space for music teachers and practitioners to be free and creative in the phenomenal world so as not to be prescriptive. Indeed, in this fast-moving age, we always want to do something, perhaps even say or prescribe too much. Laozi tells us, embrace nothingness. Presence (*you*) is valuable; nothing/ness (*wu*) is useful:

Thirty spokes share a single hub; grasp the nothingness (*wu*) at its center to get the use of the wheel.

Clay is fashioned to make a vessel; grasp the nothingness (*wu*) at the center to get the use of the vessel.

Bore windows and doors to create a room; grasp the nothingness (*wu*) of the interior to get the use of the room.

Presence (*you*) constitutes what is valuable, nothingness (*wu*) constitutes what is of use.⁴²

Notes

An abridged version of this paper was presented at the 12th International Symposium on the Philosophy of Music Education, Don Wright Faculty of Music, Western University, London, Ontario, Canada, 5–8 June 2019.

¹ John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 109.

² Douglas Kahn, “John Cage: Silence and Silencing,” *The Musical Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (1997): 556-598.

³ Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953/2014), 1.

⁴ The consideration of nothingness in Western philosophy goes back to Parmenides during the Fifth Century BCE. See Alexander P. D. Mourelatos, “Pre-Socratic Origins of the Principle that There are No Origins from Nothing,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 78, no. 11 (1981): 649-665. See also, Allan Coxon, *The Fragments of Parmenides* (Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2009), Robin Waterfield’s translation in *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and Sophists* (New York: Oxford Paperbacks, 2000), and Benjamin Jowett translation of Plato’s *Parmenides* available at Project Gutenberg. It is interesting how the lines of philosophy from East and West converge, especially as early Greek philosophy could have been influenced by Asian thinking and vice versa, which speaks to what Raimond Gaita calls “a common humanity.” See Gaita, *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁵ In the late 1940s and 1950s, Cage was introduced to Zen, which began an interest in Eastern philosophy. Philosophers and teachers who influenced him included the Japanese professor

Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki and the British philosopher Alan Watts. In 1951, he wrote a piece entitled *Music of Changes*, which was influenced by the Chinese *I-Ching* (*The Book of Changes*). A year later, he composed 4'33'', and noted that it was due to Eastern philosophy that his interest in silence developed. On the influence of Eastern philosophy on Cage's music, see David Revill, *The Roaring Silence: John Cage: A Life* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2014). See also, Kahn, "John Cage," 556-598.

⁶ Laozi, whose original name was Li Erdan, was colloquially named Laodan and conferred the honorific title of "zi" during the Spring and Autumn period, thereby resulting in Laozi as we know today. See Xie Yang Ju 謝陽舉, *Daojia, qiandaojia sixiang, laozi sixiang yuantou* 道家·前道家思想·老子思想源頭, "Daoism, Pre-Daoism and the Source of Laozi's Thoughts," *Journal of Northwestern University Philosophy and Social Science*, 3 (2001): 33–39.

⁷ Li Zehou 李澤厚, *Jimao wushuo* 己卯五說 [*Five Essays*] (Beijing: China International Film Publishing House, 1999). Li further explained that the Daoist school of philosophy, Laozi, and the *Daodejing* all originated from this shamanistic tradition. See also, Wen Yiduo 聞一多, *Wenyiduo shenhua yu shi* 聞一多神話與詩 [*Wen Yiduo's myths and poetry*] (Jilin: Jilin People's Republishing House Press, 2013).

⁸ *Daodejing* Section 1. In this paper, all translations of the *Daodejing* are based on Robert Eno, *Daodejing* <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/23426/Daodejing.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y> , accessed January 15, 2021. See also, Roger Ames and David Hall, *Dao De Jing: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2010).

⁹ On *yin-yang*, see for example, Robin R. Wang, *Yinyang: The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press). More recently, Victor

Fung and Leonard Tan have applied *yin-yang* theory in the context of music education. See Victor Fung, *A Way of Music Education: Classic Chinese Wisdoms* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2017), and Leonard Tan, “Reimer through Confucian Lenses: Resonances with Classical Chinese Aesthetics,” *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 23, no. 2 (2015): 183-201.

¹⁰ *Daodejing* Section 1. See Eno, *Daodejing*, 10.

¹¹ *Daodejing* Section 5. See Eno, *Daodejing*, 11.

¹² On *wuwei*, see for example, Edward Slingerland, *Effortless Action: Wu-wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). On *wuwei* applied to music education, see Leonard Tan, “Towards an Ancient Chinese-Inspired Theory of Music Education,” *Music Education Research* 18, no. 4 (2016): 399-410.

¹³ Victor Fung, *A Way of Music Education: Classic Chinese wisdoms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹⁴ *Daodejing* Section 37. See Eno, *Daodejing*, 21.

¹⁵ Slingerland, *Effortless Action*, 7.

¹⁶ Fung, *A Way of Music Education*, 64-67.

¹⁷ *Daodejing* Section 24. See Eno, *Daodejing*, 17.

¹⁸ Eno, *Daodejing*, p. 12.

¹⁹ Feng Youlan 馮友蘭, *Zhongguo zhexue jianshi* 中國哲學簡史 [*A Brief History of Chinese philosophy*] (Beijing: Peking University press, 1985); Zhang Chengqiu 張成秋, *Xianqin daoia sixiang yanjiu* 先秦道家思想研究. [*The Study of Pre-Qin Daoism*] (Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua Book Company, 1971).

²⁰ *Daodejing* Section 2. See Eno, *Daodejing*, 10.

²¹ On the various philosophical schools in early China, see Bryan Van Norden, *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011).

²² Leonard Tan, “Reimer through Confucian lenses: Resonances with Classical Chinese Aesthetics,” *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 23, no. 2 (2015): 183-201.

²³ *Daodejing* Section 12. See Eno, *Daodejing*, 13.

²⁴ *Daodejing* Section 41. See Eno, *Daodejing*, 23

²⁵ *Daodejing* Section 12. See Eno, *Daodejing*, 13.

²⁶ Park So Jeong, “On Sound: Reconstructing a Zhuangzian Perspective of Music,” *Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2015): 3. The notion of “the music of the spheres” in Western thought makes for an interesting comparison with Zhuangzi’s *Heavenly Piping*. See Dominique Proust, “The Harmony of the Spheres from Pythagoras to Voyager,” in “The Role of Astronomy in Society and Culture,” *Proceedings of The International Astronomical Union, IAU Symposium*, 260 (2011): 358-367.

²⁷ On this point, see for example, David Revill, *The Roaring Silence: John Cage: A Life* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2014).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

³⁰ It is worth noting that there remains a fundamental difference between 4’33” and the Daoist notion of *dayin*. While the physical phenomena of both seem similar, *dayin* emphasizes a tradition of deep internal reflection, which may be foreign to most Western audience.

³¹ On the treatise, “Sounds Have in Them Neither Sorrow Nor Joy,” see David Chai, “Musical Naturalism in the Thought of Ji Kang,” *Dao* 8, no. 2 (2009): 151-171.

³² Tan, *Reimer through Confucian Lenses*, 190.

³³ On Confucianism and Daoism, see for example, Bryan Van Norden, *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011); Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963);

Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan Van Norden, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005).

³⁴ On Confucian rituals, see for example, Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine, 1998); Robert Eno, *Confucian Creation of Heaven* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

³⁵ *Daodejing* Section 11. Adapted from Eno, *Daodejing*, 13.

³⁶ Although based on Daoist philosophy, such an approach finds grounding in motivational theories such as Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory where students have the autonomy to choose what they want to do. See Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior* (New York, NY: Plenum, 1985).

³⁷ David Elliott and Marissa Silverman, *Music Matters: A Philosophy of Music Education*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

³⁸ On flow, see for example, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990).

³⁹ On *wuwei* and flow applied to music education, see Tan, "Towards an Ancient Chinese-Inspired Theory," 399–410.

⁴⁰ In addition to praxial philosophy, our Daoist-inspired approach to music education also contributes to a growing body of Asian philosophies in music education, such as Fung's *A Way of Music Education*.

⁴¹ For a meta-perspective on some of the issues involved in the paper, the work of Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1991), might be useful.

⁴² *Daodejing* Section 11. Adapted from Eno, *Daodejing*, 13.