

An Analysis of the Origins and Connotations of Daoist Music

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Abstract

This paper examines the origins and functions of Daoist music, along with its expressive forms of expression and core content. The primitive Wu religion served as one of the ideological sources of Daoism, and it inherently incorporated musical elements. Meanwhile, Daoism assimilated ancient folk traditions, and the instruments employed in Daoist music gradually diversified over time. Daoist music primarily encompasses ritual music, utilizing a wide array of traditional Chinese instruments—notably the distinctive *daoqing* and *xiaoyin*. These practices exhibit pronounced Chinese ethnic characteristics. Their study holds significant referential value for the contemporary expansion and transformation of Chinese culture.

Keywords

China; Daoist; Music; Origins; Connotations; Cultural Expansion.

1. Introduction

Daoist music predominantly encompasses liturgical music (*fashi yinyue* or *daochang yinyue*) employed in *zhai-jiao* rituals, along with performative traditions such as *daoqing* (Daoist devotional storytelling through song) and *xiaoyin* (meditative whistling-chanting practices).

2. The Origins and Functions of Daoist Music

As an ideological precursor of Daoism, ancient Chinese shamanism (*wu jiao*) inherently integrated musical elements. Archaic shamanic rites operated through a tripartite structure of poetry, music, and dance—a sacred synthesis through which practitioners (*wu*) invoked deities, communicated with spirits, and conducted soul retrieval rituals. This ritual musicality is evidenced in Ge Hong's (283-343 CE) *Baopuzi Neipian Daoyi*:

"They merely slaughter fattened beasts, pour out libations of wine,
Strike metal and leather instruments (*zhuangjin fage*),
Sing ecstatically and leap in dance (*ouge yongyue*),
Kowtow and sit in futile observance,
Begging for divine benediction." [1]

The phrase *zhuangjin fage* refers specifically to ritual percussion using bronze bells (*zhong*) and hide drums (*gu*), while *ouge yongyue* encapsulates the shamanic practice of achieving trance states through kinetic vocalization and movement. Following Daoism's formalization as an institutional religion, these musical traditions were systematized for didactic purposes. During *zhai-jiao* ceremonies, the strategic deployment of music serves dual functions: articulating cosmological petitions while constructing a hierophantic atmosphere that embodies sacred authority.

As documented in *The Supreme Perfected's Compendium on Lingbao Fasting Rituals and Ceremonial Protocols* (*Taiji Zhenren Fu Lingbao Zhaijie Weiyi Zhu Jing Yaojue*, late Eastern Jin

dynasty), the Lingbao purification ritual (*Lingbao zhaiqi*) unfolds through precise ceremonial phases:

The rite commences with incense offering (*shaoxiang zhuyuan*) accompanied by invocations, followed by prostrations to the ten cosmological directions (*li shifang*). Subsequently, "The ritual officiants (*zhai ren*) process leftward in sequence, circumambulating the incense burner three times (*xuanrao xianglu san za*). During this movement, they orally intone. *The Hymn for Pacing the Void and Treading the Formless (Buxu Nie Wu Pi Kongdong Zhang)*." The text elucidates the ritual's cosmic symbolism: "This circumambulation mirrors the celestial practice. At the Great Canopy Heaven (*Daluo tian*) of the Supreme Jade Cavern (*Wushang Yudong*), where the Heavenly Lord of the Great Tao (*Taishang Daojun*) presides over the Seven-Jeweled Terrace (*qibao ziran zhi tai*). The Perfected Ones (*zhentian*) of the highest realms. Conduct fasting rites, chant hymns, and circumambulate. This divine terrace—a prototype replicated in our earthly ritual." [2]

Daoist texts from as early as the Han dynasty demonstrate sophisticated understanding of music's multidimensional efficacy. *The Scripture of Great Peace (Taiping Jing)* systematically articulates music's capacity to restrain wrath and induce harmony, prevent conflict and eradicate malevolence and cultivate virtue and subdue rebellion. The text further correlates the pentatonic system (*wuyin: gong-shang-jue-zhi-yu*) with cosmological frameworks through correlative cosmology. This sonic-cosmic matrix extends to sacred geography: "The Green Thearch (*Qingdi*) governs the East; The Red Thearch (*Chidi*) presides over the South; The White Thearch (*Baidi*) commands the West; The Black Thearch (*Heidi*) rules the North. Where the Yang energies of Southeast foster life-nourishing music (*yang le haosheng*), the Yin forces of Northwest breed discordant tones (*yin nu haoza*)—

Thus does harmonious qi (*heqi*) circulate through musical modulation." The text culminates in a acoustico-political theory: "When Yin and Yang achieve equilibrium (*yin yang tiao*), musical tones manifest euphonious clarity; When cosmic forces fall into disharmony (*yin yang buhe*), sounds degenerate into cacophonous chaos." This formulation establishes music as a diagnostic tool for assessing sociopolitical order, prognostic medium through which cosmic imbalances prefigure human affairs, and regulative mechanism for aligning earthly governance with celestial patterns [3].

Daoist tradition systematically sacralized music's provenance through curated absorption of ancient mythologies. *The Zhengtong Daoist Canon (Zhengtong Daozang)* preserves pivotal accounts from pre-Qin texts like *the Classic of Mountains and Seas (Shanhaijing)*, constructing a theological framework for music's celestial genesis. *Shanhaijing-Great Wilderness: Western Scroll* records that Qi, son of Yu the Great, "rode a celestial dragon to the Heavenly Court, where he clandestinely transcribed divine melodies (*xianyue*). These stolen harmonies subsequently became the prototype of human music." This narrative establishes music as privileged cosmic knowledge, Shamanic journey (*dengzhen*) as medium of cultural transmission and divine-human tension in accessing sacred sound [4]. *The Eastern Scroll* describes Kui, a one-legged bovine entity on Liubo Mountain: "Its roar reverberates like thunder. The Yellow Emperor fashioned drums from its hide, using its bones as mallets. Each strike resounded five hundred li (1 li= 500 meters), establishing cosmic order through percussive terror." [5] This mytho-historical account Animates Daoist sound cosmology (*shengyin yuzhou lun*) and Positions drumming as primordial act of world-shaping. Daoist *Pacing the Void Melodies (Buxu Sheng)* were explicitly mythologized as celestial residue. Wang Ji's *Etymological Studies of Lyric Forms (Ciming Jijie, Qing dynasty)* cites the *Wuyuan Records*:

"Prince Chen Si of Cao Wei heard transcendent chanting (*shenxian zhi sheng*) within Yushan's caverns. Musicologists transcribed these numinous vibrations, which Daoist ritualists later codified as Buxu liturgy." [6] Though anachronistic (Buxu traditions postdate Cao Wei), this etiological legend performs retroactive sacralization of ritual music and constructs imagined

antiquity for liturgical legitimacy. Texts like *Biographies of Immortals (Liexian Zhuan)* and *Comprehensive Mirror to the Daoist Canon (Lishi Zhenxian Tidao Tongjian)* propagate music-centered hagiographies. The tale of Nongyu, daughter of Duke Mu of Qin (r. 659-621 BCE), epitomizes this:

"Mastering phoenix mimicry through xiao flute over three years, her perfected melodies summoned celestial phoenixes, which bore her aloft in apotheosis." This narrative matrix positions musical virtuosity as ascension technology and establishes instrument mastery (*qizhi*) as spiritual discipline. Such theological underpinnings mandated strict musical training for Daoist clergy. They should not only be familiar with Daoist scriptures and proficient in ritual choreography but also skilled in hymnodic execution and instrumental virtuosity. Only adepts synthesizing these competencies qualified for roles like *Doujiang*, master Liturgist (ritual-musical director) and *Gaogong*, High Priest (cosmological interface specialist).

3. Daoist Liturgical Music

The earliest documented evidence of Daoist liturgical music appears in historical records from the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534 CE). In 415 CE, during the Shenrui era of Emperor Mingyuan, the Mount Song Daoist Kou Qianzhi (365-448 CE) received the *Cloud Resonance Chants (Yunzhong Yinsong)*, comprising two seminal works: the *Hymns of the Celestial Realm (Huaxia Song)* and the *Pacing the Void Chants*. The *Hymns of the Celestial Realm*, alternatively termed *Huaxia Zan* or Four-Tone Huaxia (*Sisheng Huaxia*), represents an early form of liturgical chant. Tang Dynasty Daoist scholar Du Guangting (850-933 CE) clarifies in *Supreme Yellow Register Rituals (Taishang Huangzhai Yi)*: "*Huaxia Zan* originates from the *Jade Repository of Luminous Truth Scripture (Yugui Mingzhen Jing)*, though only eighteen melismatic passages (*xvsheng*) remain in contemporary usage." These *xvsheng* denote vocalizations without semantic content, characterized by elongated syllabic ornamentation. The Song Dynasty *Jade Sound Ritual Manual (Yuyin Fashi)* elaborates on the cosmological symbolism: "According to the *Yupian* lexicon's annotation for 'Huaxia,' this term denotes a sacred expanse spanning 3,500 li, evoking cosmic vastness. In ritual practice, the *Huaxia Zan* commences at the *Hall of Contemplating Truth (Sizhen Tang)*, its chants progressing solemnly through cloisters and ascending altar platforms, embodying this transcendent spatiality." *The Pacing the Void Chants* accompanied ritualized processions simulating celestial ascent. As the *Chao Clan Treatise (Chao Zhi)* explains: "*Pacing the Void Scripture (Buxu Jing)*, transmitted from the Supreme Pole Immortal (*Taiji Zhenren*) to the Duke of Left Immortals (*Zuoxian Gong*), contains hymns chanted by transcendents during their aerial circumambulation of the Jade Capital when paying homage to the Mystic Metropolis (*Xuandu*)." Surviving *Buxu* lyrics from the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589 CE) comprise pentasyllabic verse forms. Notably, the Liu Song period (420-479 CE) incorporated *Sanskrit-style Chants (Fanyong)* into Daoist liturgy. This early predominance of melismatic vocal settings (*Xuzi Puqu*) created ethereal soundscapes during purification rituals (*zhaijie*), cultivating an aura of cosmic mystery to inspire religious awe. The Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) witnessed systematic development under Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712-756 CE), a noted musical connoisseur who personally instructed Daoists in the Buxu tonal system at the Palace Chapel (*Neidaochang*). As recorded in the *Zhen'gao*: "The Emperor resolved longstanding disputes over transmission lineages and established authoritative melodic standards, promulgating revised Buxu rhythmic modes (*yun*) and melodic contours (*qiang*) throughout the empire." Xuanzong's own compositions included *the Summoning Transcendents Melody (Jiangzhen Zhaoxian Zhi Qu)* and *Purple Tenuity Send-Off Melody (Ziwei Songxian Zhi Qu)*, performed at the Supreme Clarity Palace (*Taiqing Gong*). This imperial patronage catalyzed prolific Daoist music creation: Sima Chengzhen (647-735 CE) of the Shangqing tradition composed *Melody of Mysterious Truth (Xuanzhen Daoqu)*, Li Huiyuan of

Maoshan Daoism created Melody of the Great Canopy Heaven (*Daluo Tianqu*), He Zhizhang (659-744 CE), the scholar-official turned Daoist, authored *Supreme Purity Sage Melody* (*Ziqing Shangsheng Daoqu*), Court musician Wei Tao produced ritual suites including *Auspicious Clouds* (*Jingyun*) and *Celestial Accord* (*Shuntian Yue*)^[7]. Contemporaneous sources like *Tang Institutional History* (*Tang Huiyao*) and *Register of Jiegu Drumming* (*Jiegu Lu*) document popular Daoist compositions such as *Nine Transcendents Melody* (*Jiuxian Daoqu*) and *Primordial Unity Music* (*Taiyi Zhi Yue*) for deity invocation ceremonies. This proliferation of ritual music epitomized the Tang synthesis of Daoist spirituality and imperial musical sophistication. Tang Daoist music (618-907 CE) underwent significant transformation through synthesizing indigenous folk traditions and melodies from the Western Regions. This cross-cultural exchange enriched liturgical repertoires with novel tonalities and rhythmic structures. By the Five Dynasties period (907-960 CE), ritual orchestras had adopted an eclectic approach, as noted in the Daoist Ritual Compendium: "Ritual fasts now incorporated diverse regional music—Ba ballads and Yu dances intermingled freely within the liturgy." The Northern Song (960-1127 CE) witnessed the codification of Daoist vocal music in *Jade Sound Rituals*, the earliest extant collection of liturgical scores. This text preserves fifty Tang-derived melodies using a unique proto-notation system: "Characters are annotated with tonal markers (*sisheng*) or the notation congregational response (*zhonghe*). Absent conventional gongche pitch notation, melismatic phrasing is indicated by sinuous lines beneath characters—vertical strokes denoting pitch direction, horizontal extensions indicating duration." This graphic notation, ancestral to Xi'an drum ensemble scores, enabled precise transmission of vocal ornamentation. While surviving Song scores represent only a fraction of the era's musical output, texts like *Perfected Liturgies of the Supreme Yellow Register* (*Wushang Huanglu Dazhai Lichengyi*) compiled by Jiang Shuyi document additional hymns for salvation rituals. Court support remained pivotal. Emperor Zhenzong (r. 997-1022 CE) authored six volumes of *Jade Capital Anthology* (*Yujing Ji*)—liturgical texts performed by the Imperial Ritual Music Bureau. By the Yuan era (1271-1368 CE), secular ci poetry forms had permeated ritual music, prompting cautionary notes in *Essentials of Daoist Liturgy* (*Daomen Tongjiao Biyong Ji*): "Exoteric rituals prioritize salvific efficacy. Mourners' grief-stricken states render theatrical musical displays inappropriate during requiems." Early Ming (1368-1644 CE) composers blended Northern (*beiqu*) and Southern (*nanxi*) operatic styles with traditional liturgy. New compositions like *Welcoming the Phoenix Chariot* (*Ying Fengnian*) and *Drunken Immortal's Delight* (*Zui Xianxi*) increasingly prioritized aesthetic appeal over solemnity. Critics lamented in temple records: "Rituals degenerated into sensory spectacles—clangorous percussion, garish decorations, and jesting lyrics performed with operatic flamboyance." The 15th-century Imperial Daoist Music of the Great Ming (*Daming Yuzhi Xuanjiao Yuezhang*) codified fourteen compositions, blending Tang-Song legacy pieces with contemporary works. Despite institutional decline post-1600, rural ritual traditions preserved musical knowledge. A landmark achievement occurred in 1799 when Suzhou Daoist Cao Xisheng published three critical editions: *Celestial Harmonious Music* (*Juntian Miaoyue*), *Codified Ancient Harmonies* (*Guyun Chenggui*) and *Elegant Rhythms of Feathered Robes* (*Nichang Yayun*). These collections systematized Ming-Qing performance practices, ensuring the continuity of China's oldest living musical tradition.

4. Musical Instruments in Daoist Music

The instrumentation employed in Daoist rituals has undergone a complex evolution, paralleling the development of Daoist musical traditions from simplicity to sophisticated diversity. During the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420 CE), ritual instrumentation primarily consisted of metallic bells and leather drums, as recorded in classical texts describing ceremonial practices as "striking metal and beating leather". In Liu Song Period (420-479 CE) added bowed string

instruments. In Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE), the main instruments were bronze bells and stone chimes with detailed specifications: "Bells were cast in gold, silver, copper, or iron with polygonal forms ranging from two to nine facets or cylindrical shapes, their dimensions varying according to ritual requirements. Suspended in the western pavilions of temples, these were struck with an accelerating-decelerating pattern: three or eight beats per measure, progressing through twenty-four then twelve measured strikes during ceremonies." "Chimes of precious metals or jade, mounted on ceremonial stands, provided rhythmic structure for liturgical recitations. Notably, the Tianbao era (742-756 CE) saw Buxu (Pacing the Void) melodies incorporated into the Yanyue court music system, indicating expanded instrumentation beyond basic percussion. During the Southern Song and Yuan dynasties, the primary Daoist musical instruments were bells and qing (stone chimes), but others included xiao (vertical flutes), guan (double-reed pipes), sheng (mouth organs), zhui (a type of flute), jiqin (a bowed string instrument), bi (reed pipes), li (another type of reed pipe), and fangxiang (metallophones). According to *The Later Compilation of the Maoshan Annals (Maoshan Zhi Houbian)* from the Ming dynasty, Daoist musical instruments during the Jiajing reign (1522–1566) included the yunluo (cloud gong), sheng (mouth organ), guan (double-reed pipe), di (dizi, transverse flute), zha (clappers), ban (wooden clapper), gu (drum), zhong (bell), and qing (stone chime). By the Qianlong period (1736–1795) of the Qing dynasty, instruments such as the di (flute), guan (pipe), xiao (vertical flute), xian (strings), tiqin (a type of fiddle), yunluo (cloud gong), tangluo (small gong), muyu (wooden fish), tanban (sandang wood clappers), and dagu (large drum) were widely used in shifan gu ("Ten Variations Drum" ensemble). When luogong (gongs) and nao (cymbals) were added, it was called cuxi shifan ("refined and coarse ten variations"). During Daoist rituals such as *zhai-jiao* ceremonies, the music and chanting ensemble presented a magnificent spectacle. According to *The Later Compilation of the Maoshan Annals* by Jiang Yongnian during the Jiajing reign (1522–1566) of the Ming dynasty, the ensemble was structured as follows:

Chanting Group (22 members): Zhiqing (in charge of stone chimes), 4, Zhengyi (ritual master), 1, Biaobai (chant leaders), 4, Qingdao (purification attendant), 1, Xuandu (scripture reciter), 1, Cichan (penitential prayer chanters), 2, Yinyi (ritual ushers), 2, Shouding (incense burner attendants), 2, Zhizhong (bell keeper), 1, Zhigu (drum keeper), 1, Shizhi (assistants), 2.

Inner Altar Music Ensemble (15 members): Yunluo (cloud gong), 1, Sheng (mouth organ), 4, Guan (管, double-reed pipe), 2, Di (dizi flute), 2, Zha (clappers), 2, Ban (wooden clapper), 2, Gu (drum), 2.

Outer Altar Music Ensemble (15 members): Yunluo (cloud gong), 2, Sheng (mouth organ), 2, Guan (double-reed pipe), 2, Zha (clappers), 2, Di (dizi flute), 2, Ban (wooden clapper), 2, Gu (drum), 2.

In Song-Yuan periods, liturgical music crystallized into the Buxu system comprising four formal structures: Buxu (Processional hymns), Song (Laudatory odes), Zan (Devotional praises), Jie (Didactic verses). These modular compositions, employing distinct melodic modes and poetic meters, were strategically combined during jiao purification rituals to create extended sacred narratives. The integration of percussion, aerophones, and chordophones produced vibrant soundscapes essential for ritual efficacy.

In addition to the "Step-Void" (*buxu*) liturgical music system, Daoist religious music also featured two other notable forms: "Daoqing" (Daoist narrative singing) and "Xiaoyin" (mystical whistling and chanting).

5. Daoqing and Xiaoyin

Daoqing, a narrative-singing art form alternating between spoken recitation and melodic singing, emerged during the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE) and reached its zenith in the Song

(960-1279) and Yuan (1271-1368) periods. Daoist practitioners employed this medium to recount hagiographies of immortals, articulate transcendental contemplations, and propagate Daoist doctrines. The earliest extant work in this genre is Wang Fanzhi's Tang-era *Poems of Daoqing*. During the Song-Yuan transition, the genre absorbed influences from popular lyric poetry (*ci*) and dramatic arias (*qu*), as evidenced by Southern Song performer Zhang Lun's drum-accompanied daoqing performances and Quanzhen Daoist monks' adaptations using sanqu verse forms. The Ming dynasty woodblock-printed Newly Compiled Expanded Edition: Zhuangzi's Lament over Skeletons in Northern and Southern Lyrics represents the best-preserved daoqing manuscript.

The practice of xiaoyin, a form of vocalization with ritual and musical dimensions, gained prominence during the Wei-Jin period (220-420 CE) and Six Dynasties era (220-589 CE). Early textual evidence from pre-Qin classics reveals two significant aspects of xiao: 1) Phonosemantic Coupling: The character xiao frequently appears in binomes with "song", as demonstrated in *Classic of Poetry* couplets: "His xiao becomes song" (Jiang You Si, Shao Nan) [8] and "Xiao-songs wound the heart" (from *Bai Hua, Xiao Ya*) [9]. This linguistic pairing suggests a proto-musical function. 2) shamanic implementation: The *Chuci (Songs of Chu)* records xiao's role in soul-summoning rituals: "Complete the instruments for perpetual xiao invocations" [10]. This description evokes images of Wu shamans employing vigorous vocalizations during necromantic rites. Originally mimicking natural sounds, xiao evolved into a Daoist breath-control technique (*qijin zhi shu*) employed in ritual contexts. Ge Hong's *Biographies of Immortals*, juan 5 (*Shenxian Zhuan, chapter 5*) documents xiao's use for summoning spiritual entities. By the Wei-Jin period, this practice transformed into an artistic musical form, as evidenced by: 1) Aesthetic Refinement: Ruan Ji's (210-263 CE) xiao was described as 'resonant and clarion' (*Shishuo Xinyu* citing *Weishi Chunqiu*) [11], while Su Mountain hermits produced 'phoenix-like tones.' 2) Auditory Enchantment: The *Shishuo Xinyu* records how Liu Daozhen's xiao performances captivated listeners, including an elderly woman who offered sacrificial pork in appreciation [12]. Daoist adepts reinterpreted xiao beyond mere breath cultivation. Yang Xi's 4th-century manuscript in *Declarations of the Perfected*, juan 3 (*Zhen Gao*) describes Xue Lü's synesthetic experience where xiao "condensed spirit through ethereal chanting" and "moved souls with subtle tones." This fusion of vocal techniques (xiao-chang) marked its transition to musical artistry. *The Book of Jin (Jin Shu) biography of Cheng Gongsui* memorializes this transformation through his wind-riding xiao improvisation that crystallized into the seminal *Rhapsody on Whistling (Xiao Fu)*:

"Exquisite tones flow from vermilion lips,
Sorrow-laden notes tremble through pearly teeth.
Melodies undulate in hidden modulations,
As vital breath surges—a parched intensity rising.
They harmonize the Yellow Bell's pitch with Qingjiao's clarity,
Weave Shang and Yu modes into cascading Zheng notes...
A mere quiver of lips conjures song,
The parting of teeth releases sound.
Each resonance, a response to nature's touch;
Every chant, an improvisation of the moment." [13]

This demonstrates that *xiao* possesses melodic qualities, capable of producing diverse tones through breath control and lip modulation. As an improvisational vocal art with fluid melodies, *xiao* could "evoke imagery through associative resonance and spontaneously adapt to poetic recitation."

Emerging as a musical art form during the Wei-Jin period—an era marked by the flourishing of Xuanxue (Neo-Daoist philosophy) and the rise of religious Daoism—*xiao* became culturally significant. Daoism, drawing upon classical Daoist thought, championed an anti-conventional lifestyle emphasizing natural spontaneity. The practice of sustained *xiao* chanting, utilizing *dantian* (elixir field) respiration, transcended mere Daoist qigong exercise; it embodied the transcendent bearing of accomplished adepts and the refined eccentricity of cultured elites. As the *Rhapsody on Whistling* extols: "Its profundity connects with divine numinosity; its subtlety plumbs metaphysical depths." Through *xiao* performance, Daoist metaphysical principles could be apprehended beyond verbal constructs—achieving intuitive comprehension through sonic embodiment. A revelatory account in *Shishuo Xinyu* "Reclusion" chapter) illustrates this:

"Ruan Ji (styled Ruan Buning) was renowned for his *xiao* carrying hundreds of paces. When rumors spread of a zhenren (perfected being) appearing in the Sumen Mountains, Ruan visited and found the adept seated contemplatively on a cliff. Approaching cross-legged, Ruan expounded successively on: the arcane quietism of Huangdi and Shennong; the virtuous governance of the Three Dynasties; then active cultivation techniques and spiritual disciplines—all met with unbroken silence. Finally, Ruan performed his *xiao*. After prolonged stillness, the adept smiled: 'Again.' Upon Ruan's repetition and subsequent descent, a sudden orchestral resonance erupted above—the mountains echoing with what proved to be the adept's responsive *xiao*." [14]

This encounter exemplifies *xiao* as "tonal semiosis transcending speech." As Eastern Jin statesman Huan Xuan observed: "Divinely resonant tones need no prolixity—a single perfected note suffices for supreme harmony. While Ruan's discourse left Sumen unmoved, one subtle *xiao* prompted the adept's smile. Truly, only profundity conjures such numinous resonance!"

The *Shangqing Tai Ji Yin Zhu Yu Jing Bao Jue* provides definitive documentation regarding the musical characteristics of *xiao*. The verse "Xiao songs resound through the Mystic Capital (Xuandu), as jade chimes strike with qiong-bells" vividly depicts a transcendent soundscape where impassioned *xiao* vocalizations harmonize with ritual instruments—jade chimes and qiong-bells—creating reverberations that fill the celestial realm. This ensemble practice, frequently observed in Daoist liturgical contexts, produced profoundly moving melodies. Daoist canonical texts further illuminate the numinous quality of *xiao* performance by transcendents. The *Dongzhen Taishang Zidu Yanguang Shenyan Bianjing* preserves the "Three Hymns Composed by Queen Mother of the West When Transmitting Scriptures," whose opening verse describes her practice: "Performing *xiao* songs atop the Jiuxuan Terrace, where cliff-winds carry piercing chill; With mind focused on Six Perceptions, eyes purified beyond worldly dust." This demonstrates *xiao*'s significance as a sophisticated musical practice among Daoist adepts.

6. Conclusion

As an invaluable component of China's musical heritage, Daoist music—through its unique vocabulary, expressive techniques, and instrumental combinations—maintains enduring relevance for contemporary musical creation. It continues to inspire the development of distinctively sinicized compositions while enriching China's narrative, vocal, and performative arts traditions.

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