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Musical Scholarship of the "Golden Age" of the Qing Dynasty Based on 17th and 18th Century Books and Treatises

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Abstract. In 1772, by the order of the Emperor Qiánlóng, work began on the compilation and copying of the collection of classical Chinese works known as the *Sìkù Quánshū*, which included books on musical philosophy, aesthetics, drama, palace ceremonies, as well as treatises on European music theory written at that period of time in China. The detailed review of some of these works presented in the article is aimed at introducing new information about the content of music theory sources from the times of the reign of Kāngxī and Qiánlóng into the corpus of Russian musical scholarship. The authentic documents of the era demonstrate that the "Golden Age" of the musical culture of the Qīng court possessed its own stylistic characteristic features, as reflected in the diverse scholarly interests of Chinese scholars in the 17th and the 18th centuries. As part of the new cultural and political reality, classical Chinese musicology was inculcated with a number of transformative aspects, from the revolutionary theoretical expositions of Emperor Kāngxī to his active implementation of Western European musical knowledge. On the other hand, the strict fixation in the treatises of the musical aspect of the ceremonial events of the palace confirms the intention of the Qīng emperors to preserve traditional rituals as the foundation of their own political stability, explicitly demonstrating a continuity of the art of music of previous dynasties.

Keywords: Sìkù Quánshū, Kāngxī, Qiánlóng, music theory treatise, musical culture of the court

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Introduction

The musical and historical sources of the Qīng dynasty of the "Golden Age" period bring together the results of a summation of Chinese musical scholarship, which included philosophy of music, aesthetics, musical drama, etc. A significant number of the musical treatises are of both a scholarly and a practical orientation in which the knowledge of the types of the music in the court is set out, along with a systematisation of the rules of court ceremonies and the constituencies of the orchestras accompanying them, including vocal and instrumental scores for performance during the mandatory holidays, sacrifices, banquets, etc., in general, describing all the musical components of the events of the imperial palace. As documents of their era, they are conducive to recreating an authentic perspective of the musical life of the *Gùgōng* (palace), where within the format of traditional ceremonies music was performed not only by the numerous peoples subordinate to the Manchus, but also by Western Europeans, which brought a special flavour to the sound space of the "Forbidden City."[1]

Many of the books and treatises on music have been included in the full-length *Sìkù Quánshū* (Complete Collection of Books from the Four Treasuries). The work of assembling the library, which lasted from 1772 to 1782, brought together almost 3,500 books and about 80 scrolls created by Chinese scholars up to the middle of the 18th century pertaining to various branches of science, technology, philosophy and art. While noting "some shortcomings in the principles of material selection, editorial work and copying," modern researchers argue that "these shortcomings do not reduce its [the anthology's. — *F. X.*] highly significant role in the collection, fixation and unification of ancient texts." [1, p. 14]

The Book *(Yùzhì) Lǜlǚ Zhèngyì* as a Stimulus for Ideas of Traditional and New Music Scholarship

An important place in the *Sìkù Quánshū* is occupied by the four-volume edition *(Yùzhì) Lǜlǚ Zhèngyì* (御制律 吕 正 义 — *The Fundamentals of Music Written by the Emperor*[2], which was written by Emperors Kāngxī and Qiánlóng. Of all the works created during the "Golden Age" of the Qīng era, this work is the most voluminous. The book formulates Emperor Kāngxī's perceptions of music theory, a description of court instruments and the music performed in the imperial palace, records of ceremonial works, information about European music theory, etc. It is no coincidence that in Chinese literature it is often referred to as the "musical encyclopaedia of court life."

The official date of publication of the three-volume work with the foreword of the Yōngzhèng Emperor is considered to be 1723. However, the fourth volume was published only in 1746 (in the 11th year of the reign of Emperor Qiánlóng). The fact that the last volume did not see the light of day until 23 years after Kāngxī's death does not reflect the long period of work on it. The desire to complete the great work of his grandfather led Qiánlóng to the idea of creating the fourth volume known as *Hòu Biān* (后编 — *The Last Volume*), which was entirely devoted to the five

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[1] The Forbidden City, or Gùgōng, is an ancient palace in Beijing.

[2] 御制律吕正义. 海南出版社, (清) 允祉 等, 著, 2000, 共四编, 2429 页 [(Yùzhì) Lǜlǚ Zhèngyì = The Fundamentals of Music Written by the Emperor. Hainan Publishing House, (Qing Dynasty) Yunzhi et al. Vols I–IV, 2000, 2429 p.]. Library of the Forbidden City. *Putong Guji* [Facsimile]. No. 00000034-9/52.

types of music at the palace and the traditions of the court ceremonial. In an earlier article, we argued that combining the fourth volume with the first three seems rather arbitrary. Apparently, Qiánlóng "did not even read the previous three volumes, but immediately began to create the fourth, which eventually became a grandiose project and contained an abundance of information about the organisation of musical life in the Forbidden City." [2, p. 44]

The first volume *Shàng Biān* (上 编 — *The Upper Volume*) expounded the foundations of Kāngxī's 14 Lǜ theory. There exists the point of view that in creating this new theory, the emperor was guided by a vain desire to surpass Zhū Zàiyù, the famous philosopher of the Míng era, who entered the history of Chinese music as the first inventor of equal temperament. The eminent Chinese music historian Yáng Yīnliú spoke critically about Kāngxī's ideas, writing that "his [the emperor's. — *F. S.*] spontaneous creativity violated the logic of the traditional twelve-tone system." [3, p. 1012] However, recent research suggests that Kāngxī's theory continues to excite the minds of music scholars. In contrast to Yáng Yīnliú, Hú Zhǔqīng writes in his dissertation that "the Qing's reform to musical tuning, despite its apparent narrowness, potentially reflected the much broader transformation that took place on a global scale, or what I call the 'Phonological Revolution'." [4, p. 15] We shall add on behalf of ourselves that, while expressing his own thoughts about the new musical system, Kāngxī in no way rejected the previous achievements; indeed, he devoted 8 of the 16 sections of the first volume to the 12 Lǜlǚ theory, the origins of the Huángzhōng tone and the essence of the Sānfēn Sǔnyì theory. Given the emperor's views on the role of music in establishing world harmony and its universal relationship with the factual political system, 14 Lǜ could not avoid possessing analogies with the state system, its internal hierarchy, etc. Taking this into account, the study of Kāngxī's theory in a new cultural and historical context becomes absolutely appropriate.

While the second volume *(Yùzhì) Lǜlǚ Zhèngyì* seems very traditional in its presentation of information about musical instruments, the third volume was based on parts of the *Lǜlǚ Zuǎnyào* (律呂纂要 — *Collection of the Fundamentals of Music*) treatise[3], whose title has been translated as *A Compilation of the Essentials of Music*, which was created earlier, during the period between 1680 and 1707. Its authorship is attributed to Tomás Pereira, an Italian Jesuit missionary who played an extremely significant role in the spread of European musical theory and practice among the ruling Chinese elites. This fact is very important and testifies, on the one hand, about the genuine interest in European music theory on the part of the Kāngxī emperor, and, on the other hand, to the service in the Imperial Palace of qualified foreign specialists, due to whose efforts, Western music became a part of the Chinese court musical repertoire.

The value of the treatise per se was not called to question by either Kāngxī or Qiánlóng. The latter, by his own command, incorporated *Lǜlǚ Zuǎnyào* into the *Sìkù Quánshū* (四 库 全书 — *The Complete Collection of Books from the Four Repositories*) collection, recognising the importance of that historically significant treatise with the following comment: "This book is a copy of the imperial treatise of the Qīng dynasty, without any indication of the author's name, and without any introduction or afterword. The book is comprised of two distinct parts. The first part is based on

[3] 律呂纂要 [*Lǜlǚ Zuǎnyào* = Collection of the Fundamentals of Music]: Copy of the manuscript. National Library of China. *Pǔtōng Gǔjī*. No. 15252. 119 p.

the study of pitch. The second part is the study of durations." (Cit. ex: [5, p. 68])

The treatise *Lǜlǚ Zuǎnyào* presents the foundations of Western European music theory. It is notable for the unique manner of its presentation, which is characterised by the use of the ideographic properties of Chinese hieroglyphic writing to translate musical concepts. The work is divided into two parts, each of which is in turn divided into 13 sections. Each of the sections is devoted to a separate topic.

The treatise contains information about Kōng (空), a musical staff with five lines and four intervals, as well as keys and vocal registers. Interestingly, in the description of chord voices, the emphasis is shifted from the register to the timbre of the voice; thus, the soprano voice is referred to as a child's voice, the alto and the tenor voices are referred to as the voices of young men, while the bass voice is described as the voice of an old man. Such a generalised approach involving symbolic interpretation of musical terms by means of the Chinese language is also manifested in the widespread use of the characters Gāng (刚) and Róu (柔), used to describe the signs of alteration (sharp and flat), as well as to denote registers (the high and the low) and music in general. The fourth section of *Gāng Róu Lè Shuō* (刚柔乐说 — *About Strong and Weak Music*) is devoted to these issues. The Gāng and Róu characters return in the seventh section *Fá Bànyīn Shuō* (乏半音说 — *About the Semitone*), which describes the importance of the semitone: "If there is no semitone in the work," the author writes, "it is impossible to understand the work as the music of Róu or Gāng." [Ibid., p. 72] The same Gāng and Róu appear in the twelfth section, which describes the practical use of accidental alteration signs if there is a need to expand the semitone.

The section titled *Lè Míng Xù Shuō* (乐名序说 — *About the Names of the Steps*), introduces the reader to the ascending and descending motion along the seven degrees of the scale, each of which is provided with its own name: the first step being called Míng Lè Shū, the second — Lā Míng Lè, the third — Fǎ Míng, the fourth — Sho Fā Wǔ, the fifth — La Sho Le, the sixth — La Ming, the seventh — Fa Wu Yin. Particular attention is paid to the intervals between the steps. This is the subject of the final thirteenth section *Shěn Yòng Yuèyīn Shuō* (审用乐音说 — *About the Definition of Tones and Semitones*). The author focuses the reader's attention on the fact that musicians must accurately determine all the tones and semitones in the major and minor scales, since an error in one interval would entail an error in another.

The movement of melodic voices, conjunct and disjunct, as well as their correct resolution, are described in the sixth section *Pái Yuèyīn Shuō* (排　乐音说 — *About Counterpoint*), in which the elementary rules of counterpoint and connection of four chord voices are also mentioned. The tenth section entitled *Zhǎngzhōng Yuè Míng Xù Shuō* (掌中　乐名序说 — *About the Guidonian Hand*) contains information about the Guidonian hand, a technique for memorising the scale degrees, which confirms its use at court when teaching the imperial eunuchs to sing.

While a number of sections from the first part of *Lǜlǚ Zuǎnyào* have not been included in the third volume of *Lǜlǚ Jīngyì* (the third, sixth, eighth, tenth, twelfth and thirteenth sections), the content of the second part of the treatise has been included in full. As noted above, the second part of the work is devoted to the description of the note durations. A significant departure from *Lǜlǚ Jīngyì* can be noted only in the use of the names of the durations, which, nonetheless, are given in both cases in accordance with the traditional understanding of note duration by Chinese musicians: Zuì Zhǎng (最　长 — is the longest), Duǎn (短 — is short), Duǎn Zhī Bàn (短之半 — is half short), Xiǎo (小 — is small), Xiǎo Zhī Bàn (小之半 — is half

small), Sù (速 — is fast), while Zuìsù (最速 — is the fastest).

Unlike the European designation system, where all the durations fit within a set of parts comprising a whole, Chinese names mix different qualitative characteristics of size (long, small) and tempo (fast). Thus, the question of finding the correct equivalents when translating the terms of Western music theory into Chinese turned out to be quite difficult. Moreover, there was the problem of explaining such phenomena that did not exist in Chinese music in principle — for example, counterpoint and polyphony. "By focusing on how Pereira and his Chinese readers selected and transformed European theories, we can see that they were not passive translators or learners, but active, collaborative creators of knowledge." [6, p. 78]

Here we note that, while the *Lǜlǚ Zuǎnyào* may have been the first scholarly work documenting Chinese music and its relationship to Western musical theory, it was not the only one of its kind. Another treatise is known to date from about the same period, *Lǜlǚ Jiéyào* (律呂節要 — *A Summary of the Essentials of Music*). The latter, which consists of five parts, reflects on the acoustic properties of sound, as well as on the causes of consonances and dissonances. Despite its remarkable qualities, this work was not widely distributed and never became a topic of interest on the part of the Chinese scholarly community. Although smaller in scale than the *Lǜlǚ Jiéyào*, and having a more theoretical than practical content, it is undoubtedly of interest for studying the process of incorporating Western European music theory within a new cultural context.

Continuation and Criticism of the Tradition

Along with the new trends brought to China by European Jesuit missionaries, the traditional type of music scholarship continued to strengthen and develop. In 1678, the two-volume work on the theory and history of music *Gǔ Yuè Shū* (古　乐书 — *The History of Ancient Music*) was published. Despite the fact that there are no scholarly works devoted to it in contemporary musicology in China, it was appreciated by contemporaries and immediate descendants, who included a copy of *Gǔ Yuè Shū* in the 18th-century *Sìkù Quánshū* book collection. The lack of in-depth present-day studies of this work only testifies to the fact that, like all other works on music, the manuscript has been hidden in the library archives until recently.

Since the *Sìkù Quánshū* included copies of valuable manuscripts, they were usually provided with some comments from the editors. The fact that the Introduction to *Gǔ Yuè Shū* was written much later is confirmed by the date placed under it – September 1784 (the forty-ninth year of the reign of Emperor Qiánlóng). In addition, the names of three editors are mentioned: 纪昀 (Ji Yun, 1724–1805), Lù Xīxióng (1734–1795), Sūn Shìyì (1720–1796) — and the chief proof-reader Lù Fèichí (?–1790).

The introduction to *Gǔ Yuè Shū* sets out the general content of the work, as well as some brief information about the author: "The author of this book is a scholar of our Yīng Huīqiān dynasty, who was born in the city of Hángzhōu." [7, p. 1] The brief summary provided by the editors is as follows. The first volume explains the origin and essence of the theory of the twelve Lǜlǚ, wherein the author refers the reader to the work *Lǜlǚ Xīnshū* (律 吕 新 书 — *A New Presentation of the Fundamentals of Music*) written by scholar Cài Yuándìng (1135–1198) from the Sòng dynasty, as well as to the musical ideas of the thinker of the same historical period Zhū Xī (1130–1200). As well as describing traditional musical instruments, the second volume presents an analysis of the content of the work on music theory *Lǐ Shū* (礼　书 — *A Book on Etiquette*) by the Sòng scholar Chén Xiāngdào. Here the author discusses the book *Pàn Gōng Lǐ Yuè*

Shū (類 宫 礼 乐 疏 — *A Book on Ceremonial and Music*), written by writer Lǐ Zhīzǎo (1566–1630) from the Ming era.

All references to the works of the luminaries of Chinese music scholarship who lived 500 years before the appearance of Yīng Huīqiān's book testify to the fact that the brilliance of their ideas and postulates did not fade at all with the passage of time, but only played more brightly in the new cultural and socio-political conditions of the final quarter of the 17th century.

Another scholarly direction was related to the collection and commentaries of works of musical drama, including the *Kūnqǔ* dramatic form. The latter flourished at the royal court during the "Golden Age." Qiánlóng, a well-educated emperor with an intricate artistic taste, greatly appreciated the grace and skill of musical performers. However, following the departure of the sixth Qīng ruler, the popularity of *Kūnqǔ* would decline, with new varieties of Chinese drama taking its place. In this sense, the book *Jiǔgōng Dàchéng Nánběi Cí Gōngpǔ* (九宫大成南北词宫谱)[4] serves as a "mirror" of its era and provides genuine and very valuable information about the admiration for the drama Kūnqǔ by the palace court elites.

The book *Jiǔgōng Dàchéng*, published in 1746, comprised a collection of musical scores with commentaries. Its author and compiler was Yǔn Lù, Prince Zhuāng (1695–1767), the sixteenth son of Emperor Kāngxī. Zhōu Xiányǔ, Zōu Jìnshēng, Xú Xīnghuá, Wáng Wénlù and other officials responsible for the Qīng court music took part in the compilation of this collection. It took five years from 1741 to 1746 to create this anthology. A free translation of the title of this collection, which comprises 81 volumes, may sound something like *The Works of the Southern and Northern Yuán Drama Theatre, Collected by the Imperial Palace.*

The book contains 4446 *Qǔpái* melodies, each of which has a name, is represented by three hieroglyphs and requires particular knowledge for its decoding. When creating a new work, musicians would often choose a famous *Qǔpái* and only then add the texts of new dramas in accordance with the fixed melodic and rhythmic scheme, which was determined by the *Gélǜ* (格律— *The Norms of Chinese Prosody*), the Chinese norms of verse. The main parameters of the *Gélǜ* were the ratio of tones, the rhymes, poetic meter, and metric-compositional structure.

An integral part of the Yuán theatrical performing tradition was the unique phenomenon of the *Gōngdiào*. The "Gōngdiào," as prominent Chinese researcher Liú Wénfēng writes, "refers to the addition of song arias and recitations to typical melodies. The Gōngdiào make the content of the play more accessible to the public, expanding and explaining the original song arias and allowing the actor to convey the character and his feelings in more detail." [8, p. 78]

These same feelings were revealed through the 17 modes of expression known as the *Gōngdiào Shēngqíng* (宫调声情, literally "the feeling of voices"), and were divided according to the style, expressed feeling, and nature of the melody of the dramas into six *Gǔn* and eleven *Diào*. The founder of this theory of performance in the Chinese musical drama was the scholar from the Yuán dynasty (1271–

[4] 允禄 等. 九宫大成南北词宫谱, 1746, 共81卷 [Yun Lu et. al. *Jiǔgōng Dàchéng Nánběi Cí Gōngpǔ = Works of the Southern and Northern Yuán Drama Theatre, Collected by the Imperial Palace*, 1746. 81 Vols]. Library of the Forbidden City. *Putong Guji* [Facsimile]. No. 00001201-1/48.

1368), Zhì An, who described the essence of this phenomenon in 1341in his book *Chàng Lùn* (唱　论 — *The Theory of Singing*). All of the 17 *Gōngdiào* have received their names, such as, for example, *Xiān Lǚ Gōng* (仙吕宫 — *The Voice of a Female Deity*) — a clean, clear, soft and iridescent melody; *Nán Lǚ Gōng* (南吕宫 — *The Voice of a Woman from the Southern Part of the Country*) — expressing a sense of grief by its compassionate and sensitive melody; *Zhōng Lǚ Gōng* (中吕宫 — *The Voice of a Woman from the Central Part of the Country*) — a sharp shift in mood, a change of feelings, etc.

The authors of *Jiǔgōng Dàchéng* carried out an immense amount of work of analysing the history of Chinese drama from the time of the Táng Dynasty to the middle of the 18th century. They compiled notes about each drama, explaining the origins of their texts and the *Qǔpái* melodies, as well as analysing the expressiveness in terms of *Gōngdiào Shēngqíng* and singing methods, having pronounced a fair share of critical comments of the previous interpreters of the work. Indeed, in the pages of the book it is clearly stated that the authors "do not agree with the interpretation of some dramas given in earlier books and give their own explanations for some of them." (Cit. ex: [9, p. 56]) For example, at the end of the section on the drama *Dà Hóng Páo* (大　红袍 — *Big Red Robe*), we find the following commentary: "This drama was created not during the Yuán Dynasty, as stated in other books, but during the Míng Dynasty, since during the Yuán Dynasty the *Dà Hóng Páo Qǔpái* had not yet existed. This drama has a clear, soft and iridescent melody, so the *Gōngdiào* of this drama is *Dà Hóng Páo*." [Ibid.]

In the section devoted to the northern drama, the authors write that the rhythm and pattern of the *Qǔpái* melody in the drama can be adapted for a new text. Moreover, inserted words and melodic turns added to the original text of the drama were tolerated for the sake of rhythmic and melodic diversity. The authors stated their understanding of the role of the inserted words the following way: "The inserted words simply help to express better the text in writing down the drama, they play a supporting role and cannot relate to the main part of the text of the drama. In some of the old books, the inserted words are not clearly marked, which makes them difficult to be recognised in the main text. What would we do, if future generations mistakenly perceive the inserted words as an integral part of the main text of the drama and thereby disseminate the wrong text? Therefore, in order to highlight them in the texts of the dramas, we made the characters of the inserted words smaller." (Cit. ex: [10, p. 39])

Conclusion

To sum up, we must note that the era of the Qīng "Golden Age" was characterised by great productivity and diversity in the field of musical-theoretical thought. Several of the above-mentioned works only outline the chief areas of interest of the musical researchers, among which the emperors themselves were often involved. The relevance and topicality of such books and treatises is confirmed by their inclusion in the *Sìkù Quánshū*, China's largest cultural project of the 18th century, which provided a comprehensive overview of the system of knowledge about classical Chinese culture, including information about music. The diversity of the subjects of these works confirms not only the variety of interests of the servants and masters of the Forbidden City, but also the depth of their immersion into the subject of research.

The study of the treatises on music theory from the aforementioned period confirms the idea that China, on the one hand, still

maintained an active position regarding the preservation of its millennia-long heritage of music history. On the other hand, as evidenced by the carefully preserved treatises on Western European music theory, the country opened the door to new trends in Western European music, which, albeit with difficulty, penetrated into the sound space of the palace. At the same time, there was a process of assimilation of classical theories with new ideas related to the acoustic foundations of Chinese music — the 12 and 14 Lǜ systems.

The practical significance of translating and studying the treatises of the "Golden Age" is also very clear. The information gleaned from them clarifies many issues related to the musical life of the imperial palace, the artistic tastes of the aristocracy, the degree of adherence to tradition, the relevance of Western European music science, and much more.

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