

COMMENT ON “AROUSSED BY THE ODES, ESTABLISHED BY THE RULES OF PROPRIETY, PERFECTED BY MUSIC: INTEGRATING AESTHETIC EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC EDUCATION THROUGH CONFUCIAN AESTHETIC PHILOSOPHY”

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As Yang (2024) indicates odes constitutes the core of Confucian aesthetic education thought for two thousand years. Odes refer to poetry education. Poetry education is a mode of education in traditional Chinese society. Emotional education is the primary educational approach of poetry education. As stated in “Annotations on the Four Books”:

Poetry is grounded in human nature and temperament, encompassing both the virtuous and the unvirtuous. Its words are easily comprehensible. The cadence and repetition are captivating and can easily touch people when chanted. Therefore, at the outset of learning, scholars can arouse their hearts through loving the good and hating the evil and cannot restrain themselves. This can only be achieved in this manner (Zhu, 2016, p. 265).

Reading poetry will imperceptibly infect, educate, and cultivate people. Music pertains to music education. Music education originated from religious sacrificial music and dance activities in clan society and later evolved into a major component of social and political education. In the Western Zhou Dynasty, “music education” and “poetry education” were not entirely distinct. It can even be said that “music education” and “poetry education”

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were integrated. After all, “The Book of Songs” can be regarded as the textbook for “music education,” and every piece in “The Book of Songs” can be set to music. Poetry chanting was an important part of social etiquette at that time and possessed high social and cultural value.

Initially, “music” and “propriety” were integrated as part of sacrificial ceremonies. With the development of social civilization, rulers discovered the pleasure function of “music” and gradually indulged in the sensory satisfaction brought by “music.” The Duke of Zhou formulated propriety and created music, separating “propriety” and “music” and using “propriety” to restrain “music,” thereby promoting a significant transformation in the relationship between propriety and music. In the actual practice of propriety and music, they maintain a relationship of mutual promotion and utilization.

Confucius laid the foundation for Confucian music education and provided theoretical support for later academic development. His disciples continued to promote his music education concept. Mencius further strengthened Confucius’ concept of “benevolence,” emphasized the self-awakening of internal morality, and regarded “benevolence” and “propriety” as people’s innate good qualities. Based on the view that “human nature is originally evil,” Xunzi deepened the concept of “propriety” and emphasized the importance of propriety and music education for regulating personal behavior and shaping personality. Xunzi also put forward profound insights into the relationship between heaven and man. He believed that nature has inherent laws and that human beings have social responsibilities. The two should perform their respective duties without conflict. He advocated that to obtain the blessings of nature, people need to follow the laws of nature and, at the same time, actively exert their creativity and use natural resources to meet human needs. This is what Xunzi called “mastering the laws of nature and using them.”

The concept of “distinguishing between heaven and man” is mirrored in the theory of human nature as “the distinction between nature and artificiality.” Xunzi held that humans possess natural natures which are innate and bestowed by nature. “Eyes being fond of beautiful colors, ears being attracted to beautiful sounds, and mouths having a preference for delicious tastes” are all manifestations of human nature. However, if left unrestrained, chaos and contention will ensue. This is considered “evil.” Thus, we should “transform nature and create artificiality” (Tu and Liu, 2015, p. 141).

Artificiality refers to human actions that are conscious and voluntary under the guidance of the “mind.” Xunzi stated that the “mind” represents human conscious awareness. The “mind” is unrestricted and holds dominance over the five senses. It can restrain and control people’s natural emotions and ensure their development conforms to the norms of social etiquette. The act of the “mind” thinking and then making choices regarding human nature and temperament is what is termed “artificiality.” Xunzi believed that artificiality has three connotations. Firstly, it is people’s conscious and voluntary behavior. Secondly, it

encompasses propriety, laws, benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and music. It can also be regarded as a country’s social system and moral civilization, created by sages through “accumulating thoughts.” Finally, the process of people’s conscious learning and practicing benevolence and righteousness, as well as the education and shaping of human nature and temperament by a country’s social propriety and music system, is called “artificiality.”

The “Record of Music” in “The Book of Rites” not only inherits the essence of Xunzi’s “Treatise on Music” but also marks the mature stage of Confucian music education thought. This document points out that the ancient kings formulated propriety and created music not to satisfy people’s basic sensory needs but to guide people to establish correct values through propriety and music education so as to conform to moral and social norms. “The Record of Music” emphasizes the educational function of music and advocates that only gentlemen with a particular cultural accomplishment can truly understand the profound meaning of music, that is, “only gentlemen can understand music”. This understanding transcends the category of music as art and covers the political and ethical levels. Gentlemen can not only understand music but also use music to reconcile emotions and aspirations. While music education shapes the character of gentlemen, it is also implemented by gentlemen. Its educational effect on people is comprehensive. “The Record of Music” also puts forward the aesthetic concept of “the unity of heaven and man.” This concept further expands to the level of cosmic harmony on the basis of Xunzi’s theory of “harmony” between individuals and society.

Aroused by the odes, established by the rules of propriety, perfected by music. All three place great emphasis on moral emotions and moral rationality. The natural emotion in poetry is a passive emotion. The generation of natural emotions stems from people’s on-the-spot feelings when exposed to different stimuli. This feeling does not require rational thinking and is a natural emotional expression. The moral emotion of poetry is a rational emotion gradually developed from natural emotions. This moral emotion regulated by reason can serve as the driving force for people’s moral behavior. Moral emotion reflects the appropriate ethical emotion that makes people human. This is precisely why poetry education has always attached importance to moral emotion.

In comparison, the connotations of propriety and music are more abundant and profound. Propriety and music constitute a unique ancient Chinese educational approach, enabling people to learn how to govern the country, aid the world, and cultivate personal moral qualities through “propriety.” Poetry education guides people’s emotions to transform from natural to moral ones. Propriety education teaches people to make their thinking more morally rational while maintaining emotions. Music education integrates and balances the boundaries between emotion and reason in poetry and propriety education, emphasizing the improvement of both emotion and reason. Compared with poetry and propriety education, its function in moral education is more comprehensive. Music education is based on the

inherent educational characteristics of “music” while also considering the educational characteristics of poetry and propriety. It focuses on making people’s emotions and reason reach a harmonious unity. Here, harmonious unity does not mean achieving absolute equality in the distribution of poetry, propriety, and music. It is a doctrine of the mean. That is, while making poetry, propriety, and music complement each other, we do not deliberately highlight the educational effects of poetry, propriety, and music. The degree of use of poetry, propriety, and music entirely depends on the actual situation of the educated and makes corresponding flexible choices.

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