**Frontiers of Music History:**

**The Trans-Eurasian Making of “China” in 18th-century Qing Court Music**

*A Peaceful Beginning*

[the proposal opens with a snapshot on Beijing on June 6 1644 when the Qing army entered Beijing, building into a small case study]

On June 6, 1644, flocks of government officials, gentries, and commoners lined up two miles outside the Chaoyang Gate of Beijing.[[1]](#footnote-1) While they gazed anxiously towards the east, behind them, the city lay ravaged, burning in disarray. Back in March, Li Zicheng (1606-1645) and his army of rebellious peasants captured Beijing, capital of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644/1662), and drove the Chongzhen Emperor (1611-1644) to commit suicide and its officials into hiding. Just three days before, on June 3, Li formally proclaimed himself emperor in the Forbidden City, which had stood at the heart of Beijing’s Inner City for more than two centuries. Hardly had he enjoyed one day as emperor, however, when Li immediately abandoned the city and fled with his troops to the western provinces. So hastened was his retreat that Li could not even confirm his imperial legitimacy by personally performing any of the sacrificial rites to *jiaoshe* “suburban temples” (dedicated to Heaven, *tian*, and Earth, *di*), *zongmiao* “ancestral temples,” or *sheji* “temple dedicated to soil and grain”—although he did make sure to sack the city once more and set the imperial palace complex aflame. Indeed, news had already broken that, several days before, Li’s army suffered a crushing defeat at Shanhai Pass, Ming’s heavily fortified last defense between Beijing and the Manchurian Plains, located astride the mountains (*shan*) and sea (*hai*) at the eastern end of the Great Wall. It would appear as though rightful order were to finally prevail once more after Li’s brief yet brutal rule.

Much to the surprise of the welcoming crowd, however, marching towards them as the party triumphant of the fateful Battle of Shanhai Pass was not the “regiment in rescue of the emperor” (*qinwang zhi shi*) of the Ming but the Eight Banners (Chinese *baqi*; Manchu *jakūn gusa*) troop of the Qing (1636-1911). It was led by Dorgon (1612-1650), paternal half-uncle and regent of the seven-year old Aisin-Gioro Fulin (1638-1661) who only eight months ago became Shunzhi Emperor of the Qing and Eyeer Zasagch Khan of the Mongols. For residents of Beijing, Dorgon’s Eight Banners troop was not only a familiar army but also a long-dreaded nightmare. Over three decades, the Ming had fought expensive and endless wars on its northeastern frontier with the Qing Empire, established by Fulin’s father Hong Taiji (1592-1643), as well as with the Qing’s preceding polity, the Later Aisin (Ch. Jin) Khanate (1616-1636), founded by Fulin’s grandfather (Hong Taiji and Dorgon’s father) Nurhaci (1559-1626). Living not far from the military frontlines, residents of Beijing had experienced first hand humiliation from Ming’s defeats and devastation by the Eight Banners troop’s raids and rampages. Hostility, xenophobia, and racism loomed large towards the Qing invaders, whom the Sinitic languages-speaking Han referred to as *nüzhen* (Jurchens)—in addition to racial slurs such as *da* (“Tartar”) or *lu* (literally “captive”)—and who referred to themselves, after 1635, as *manju*, or Manchus.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Therefore, despite his juggernaut, whether Dorgon could avoid the same fate of Li Zicheng was by no means clear when he entered the the old Ming capital. Heeding the suggestions of his advisors, many of whom came from Han families in Manchuria or defected from the Ming, Dorgon issued series of decrees that would prove crucial in securing the Qing’s legitimacy in eyes of Han literati and gentries, both in Beijing and other in parts of the Ming still under its pretenders’ and loyalists’ control. To distinguish the Qing from Li Zicheng, whom they portrayed as a seditious usurper, Dorgon declared, on June 8, a three-day mourning period for the Chongzhen Emperor. He then held ceremonious funerals for the Ming emperor and members of his family who died in the rebellion and promised to protect Ming ancestral tombs on par with Qing’s own imperial standard.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In addition, rather than purging Ming functionaries as enemies, Dorgon appropriated the Ming’s governmental and symbolic apparatuses. On June 7, he announced that all former Ming officials, heavily persecuted under Li Zicheng, might resume their ranks within the new government. They would enjoy special tax breaks, as would the well-off gentries.[[4]](#footnote-4) And when the Qing imperial court in Mukden (Ch. Shengjing) finally decided in July to relocate to Beijing and make it the new capital, Dorgon determined that the seven-year old Shunzhi Emperor first perform sacrificial rites to the suburban temples on the first day of winter (the first day of the tenth month, which in that year fell on October 30) in person, before he would formally ascend to the throne in the Forbidden City. The other rites would be performed by proxy, since the scattered locations of ritual sites made visiting all of them in one day impossible.[[5]](#footnote-5)

On August 15, Dorgon further decreed that all details of these rites, from costumes and regalia to movements and music, should follow Ming protocols.[[6]](#footnote-6) Monetary and logistical concerns were cited in this decision, and it would take less than a year before Dorgon notoriously forced, under threat of death, male Han subjects in all conquered territories to shave their heads and change their manners of attire compliant with Manchu and Qing customs. Most other aspects of Ming sacrificial rites remained relatively intact, however, and later shifts in their practices and narratives were more continuous than abrupt.[[7]](#footnote-7) Besides, on that specific day of October 30, 1644, less than five months after the Qing captured Beijing, the symbolic meaning of the young Shunzhi Emperor prostrating in tribute to the same deities of Heaven and Earth—at temples and mounts built, consecrated, and used by former Ming emperors and against a background of music, dance, and ritual movements carried out just as in the still-remembered Ming times—would be hard to miss for former Ming subjects, many of whom would have been invited (read: required) to participate as spectators or helpers, as in the old days.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Records show, however, that on October 25 Dorgon did implement one specific change—the only one he would make before the big day—to the ritual program otherwise inherited from the Ming. It was suggested to him by two of his most trusted Han advisors, who were also instrumental in ensuring Beijing’s political transition: Feng Quan (1595-1672), a former *jinshi* (the highest degree in imperial civil examinations) and official of Ming whom Dorgon made special effort to recruit; and Hong Chengchou (1593-1665), who led the Ming army against the Qing in the critical Battle of Songshan and Jinzhou (1641-1642) and surrendered after a crushing defeat. They argued:

Previous dynasties gave auspicious names to the pieces of music that accompany [sacrificial rites at] the suburban temples and the temple to soil and grain, in order to illustrate the characteristic of their dynasty’s reign. The Liang dynasty [502-557] used [the character] *ya* [elegant], Northern Qi [550-557] and Sui [581-618] used *xia* [the legendary first dynasty, the Xia], Tang [618-907] used *he* [harmoniousness], Song [960-1279] used *an* [secure], Jin [1115-1234] used *ning*, Yuan [1271-1368; Mongolian Empire] used *ning* in ancestral temples and *xian* [complete] in suburban temples, and the late Ming used *he*. Our dynasty purged the bandits and pacified the rebellions and thus inherited the world under Heaven, and it is appropriate that [the names for the said pieces of music] be changed to *ping*.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Feng and Hong’s suggestion, along with their rationales, was promulgated by Dorgon in an imperial edict.[[10]](#footnote-10) And thus, five days later, all of the nine pieces of music that accompanied the Shunzhi Emperor at the Temple of Heaven to the south of Beijing’s Inner City and the eight pieces at the Temple of Earth to the north—as well as the six each accompanying his proxies at the Temple of Soil and Grain and the Ancestral Temple, both right next to the southern wall of the Forbidden City—bore *ping* in their two-character titles. The piece accompanying the first movement at the Temple of Heaven was titled *shiping* “initial *ping*,” the second movement *jingping* “auspicious *ping*,” the third movement *xianping* “total *ping*,” and so on.[[11]](#footnote-11)

This change of title may seem trifling, yet it would almost always be mentioned in official chronicles and statutory digests that recorded this paramount ritual event. The edict as quoted above, for example, is recorded in *Da Qing Huidian Zeli* (“Precedents for the Collected Statutes of the Great Qing,” hereafter DQHDZL), an encyclopedic digest of precedents for all statutes and regulations of the Qing government, published in 1764 by the great-grandson of the Shunzhi Emperor, Aisin-Gioro Hung Li (1711-1799), the Qianlong Emperor.[[12]](#footnote-12) In contrast, although it can almost certainly be inferred that the lyrics to the sacrificial music performed on October 30, 1644 must have also been altered from Ming time, such alteration is nowhere stated in any extant record.

Thus, at this microscopic moment in historical records that nonetheless marked the Qing’s formal takeover of the “Mandate of Heaven” from Ming, the Qing declared a vision for its reign over its new subjects, specifically through the latter’s familiar discourse of sacrificial music and the music historiography of successive dynasties. Yet what did *ping* mean? Most current scholarly literature translates or understands it as “peace” when discussing this particular moment.[[13]](#footnote-13) Though not completely mistaken, meanings and grammatical functions of an individual character are often elusive and largely contextual, and Feng and Hong’s recommendation indeed points to different shades of nuance: the Qing acquired its legitimacy as successor of the Ming, they wrote, only through *xue kou ping luan*. In this phrase comprising two parallel verb constructions, *xue kou* literally means “chopping off” or “slashing off” the bandits, and *ping luan* “flattening” or “evening” the chaos. Read this way, that is, in association with its adjectival meaning “flat” “even” and their cognate verbal meaning “to flatten” “to even” specifically as used in Feng and Hong’s rationale for adopting it as the titular character for Qing’s sacrificial music, *ping* did not merely mean the state of “peace” or “peacefulness” but rather the action of “making peace”—*through* war.

This nuanced reading is further confirmed by Qing sources in the Manchu language, a Tungusic language spoken by the Qing emperors and aristocrats as mother tongue. Adapted by Nurhaci in 1599 to the Mongolian alphabet that was in turn revised by Hong Taiji in 1623 to accord with the language’s pronunciational particularities, Manchu—not Chinese—served as the official language of the court and government of the Later Aisin Khanate and the Qing Empire.[[14]](#footnote-14) While I am yet to locate Manchu-language sources of sacrificial music from the Shunzhi era, [[15]](#footnote-15) *Lülü Zhengyi Houbian* (“Supplements to the True Doctrine of Musical Tuning,” hereafter LLZYHB), a compendium of ritual music and dance, music history, organology, music theory, and musical aesthetics published by the Qianlong Emperor, record all the Chinese and Manchu titles of Qing’s sacrificial music. Here *ping* is not translated as *taifin*, a Chinese loanword (from *taiping*, *tai* meaning “grand”; *taifingga* is the adjective form in Manchu) that comes closest in Manchu for the meaning of “peace,” “peacefulness,” or “peacetime.” It is translated instead as *necin*, the adjective meaning “even” and “flat.”

Besides reaffirming the prominence of such connotation, this translation also connects *ping* as used in titles of sacrificial music to those in the titles of many non-musically related treatises produced by the Qing government. These especially included chronological compendia of records related to military campaigns in the frontiers, matters for which the Manchu language was deliberately used by the Qing court as an exclusionary channel of communication—that is, excluding the many Han officials—with the frontline troops. In these contexts, *ping*, used in the verbal sense, correspond in Manchu to a cognate of *necin*: *necihiyembi*, which means “to even out,” “to flatten”—and, by extension, the military and political (if not also imperialist) sense of “to subjugate,” “to suppress,” and thus “to pacify.” For example, *Beye dailame wargi amargi babe necihiyeme toktobuha bodogon-i bithe* commemorating the 1687-1689 military campaign against the Dzungar Khanate published in 1710 by the Shunzhi Emperor’s son, Aisin-Gioro Hiowan Yei, the Kangxi Emperor (1654-1722), translated in Chinese as *Qinzheng Pingding* *Shuomo Fanglue* (“Records of the emperor’s personal military expedition to pacify and settle the northwestern deserts”).[[16]](#footnote-16) And *Jungar-i ba-be necihiyeme toktobuha bodogon-i bithe* for the 1755-1753 campaign that finally eliminated the the Dzungars once and for all, published in 1772 by the Qianlong Emperor, translated as *Pingding Zhunga’er Fanglue* (“Records of the pacification and settlement of the Dzungars”).[[17]](#footnote-17)

What the music announced on October 30, 1644 in the Temples of Heaven and Earth was thus not simply the return of order and peace following a new dynasty: it was also the dawn of an empire.

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This dissertation examines how diverse musical activities associated with the Qing court participated in the Qing’s empire-building during the heyday of its power, roughly from 1680 to 1830, henceforward the “long 18th century.” Different from previous literature on music during the Qing era, I do not center my account on one specific genre or topic of music, or situate it within a currently established tradition or mode of music-historical narration. Instead, by adopting a fluid and expansive approach to what constituted “Qing court music,” I bring it to dialogue with recent trends in Qing historiography, which highlight the Qing’s trans-Eurasian empire-building and annexation of vast and varying frontier regions—truly in the sprit of *ping* (*necin*, *necihiyembi*)—as its most distinct and consequential character. Examining a broad spectrum of sources that are yet to be considered together or analyzed under the rubric of “music,” I trace music’s multivalent roles in Qing’s political and ideological engagements with its frontiers, processes that laid significant foundations to what has come to be known as “China,” a term I have laboriously avoided so far in this proposal.

The rest of this proposal will comprise four sections …

[Here is a bullet-point outline of what will become a prose outline of the four sections]

1. A review of what “Qing court music” comprises, and arguing that approach to its definition and content must be in dialogue with recent historiographical trends in Qing history, which has not only questioned the Qing/Qing history’s equivalence with “China”/ “Chinese history” but also suggested the importance of the Qing in the making of “China” as a multiethnic nation-state, in particular the Qing’s engagement (military, administrative, economic, and cultural) with its frontiers —
2. An attempt to theorize the frontiers, given its recognized importance in Qing history by recent historians of the Qing. Recognition of the lasting legacies of Frederick Jackson Turner specifically in the theoretical distinction of “frontier” from “boundary” and the failure of maintaining such distinction in analytical praxis and the recognition of the gradual collapse of this distinction as an overall historical trend—
3. A case study of the preface to one of the earliest Chinese-language treatise on Western music theory, in light of the challenge of conceptualizing the frontier. Argument that the Qing court should be understood as a frontier. A “frontier reading” of this preface as a music-historical text produced by the Qing, in relation to its understanding and manipulation of history and geography, in particular its encounter with various “others” at the frontier of time, place, and knowledge.
4. Chapter summaries [omitted]

*From Qing to “China,” from Qing court music to “Chinese Music”*

[Specifics of “Qing court music]

As codified in its various statutory compendia such as the DQHD and *Da Qing Tong Li* (“Comprehensive canon of the rituals of the Great Qing,” published by the Qianlong Emperor in 1756), all rituals at the Qing court were accompanied by music with specifically prescribed ensembles, genres, melodies, and lyrics according to the occasion—be it sacrificial rites, ceremonious processions, imperial banquets, and political, diplomatic/tributary, military, and festive routines and occasions. Despite its routineness, the Qing court treated the matter of ritual music very seriously, to the point that in 1742 the Qianlong Emperor, merely the seventh year of him in power, was compelled to establish an independent Ministry of Music in the imperial government to take care of such matter that was previously in the charge of the Ministry of Rites. By the time of the Qing, the Six Ministries—Personnel, Revenue, Rites, Defense, Justice, and Works—had been a conventional organization of central governments in regimes ruling China proper for more than a millennium. Clearly, for the Qianlong Emperor, at least, ritual music was more than a background to important courtly events. Indeed, often referred to as *yayue* or “elegant music” “orthodox music,” proper ritual music was considered—or at least pretended—to be of continuous descent from the legendary sage and righteous kings. It was thus laden with Confucian philosophies of music and rulership. A lively discourse on proper rites and ritual music and on historical ritual practices also flourished among Han literati during the Ming and Qing periods, not only testifying to the symbolic power and ideological weight of ritual music but also providing ample sources for ritual music during the Qing as well as previous epochs.[[18]](#footnote-18)

While the curtains closed on the Qing more than a hundred years ago,[[19]](#footnote-19) the aura of its *yayue* as bearing lineage traceable back to some time immemorial and as key to a regime’s righteousness and legitimacy only seems to have enjoyed a recent revival. The Temple of Heaven, though defunct in its ritual function, has resumed performances (more in the presentational sense of the word) of sacrificial rites in summer 2014. Music and other details of the ritual are reconstructed from textual, visual and material evidences left by the Qing court.[[20]](#footnote-20) Of course, although the Qing took much from the Ming and is a convenient mediator for studying ritual music as a historically continuous genre, it would be grossly mistaken to posit the Qing as merely a transmitter of a “three thousand years old” *yayue*. [[21]](#footnote-21) As shown in the extensive example that opens this proposal, even the simple act of changing the titular character of sacrificial music into *ping* (*necin*, *necihiyembi*) served ideological functions specific to its political context. The gradual yet traceable revisions Qing made to court rituals and music inherited from the Ming, for example accession rituals for new emperors, also reshaped narratives and discourses of the empire and its rulership.[[22]](#footnote-22)

A distinct aspect of ritual music at the Qing court is its incorporation of various music of (for the lack of a better characterization) non-Han traditions. Given that the Qing emperor and aristocracy and much of its ruling class were Manchus, it is hardly surprising that Manchu music, both for shamanistic rites and for festivities and entertainments, would become part of the court’s routine. Yet the Qing also drew music from old and newly conquered regions and tributary protectorates around its frontiers, bringing musicians and instruments from Mongolia, Dzungaria, East Turkestan, Tibet, Nepal, Burma, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Korea. Like Ming-inherited ritual music or *yayue*, such “other” music was also formally codified in the Qing’s ritual protocol. The Qianlong Emperor’s LLZYHB specifies their occasions, often for various kinds of banquets and diplomatic/tributary ceremonies, along with lyrics, melodies, and instrumentations. This means that these non-Han traditions were not simply exotica consumed by the court as it pleased but part of the court’s ritual music establishment—as well as the statutory, textual promulgation thereof.

The systematic presence of non-Han music and musicians was not without precedents, especially during the Tang dynasty (618-907) whose lavish taste for “other” music were very well documented and studied during the Qing era. It was also during the Tang dynasty, however, that after the calamitous mid-8th century rebellion by Sogdians and Turks, non-Han music as well as other cultural practices became viewed with outright suspicion if not hostility. Generations of poets and playwrights even popularized the attribution of the disaster to the Tang emperor’s indulgence in lavish non-Han music (as well as his love for a favorite concubine). The Qing, however, saw no qualms against the eclecticism of its ritual music. Quite to the contrary, its aggressiveness in acquiring such “other’s” music as part of its conquests in the frontiers was particularly well documented and publicized. As previously discussed, campaigns at the frontiers were often accompanied by publications of compendia of relevant records to demonstrate the emperor’s military prowess and diplomatic wisdom. Also frequently published were geographic surveys—*zhi* “gazetteers”—of newly conquered territories. Several of them—for example *Huangyu Xiyu Tuzhi* (“Illustrated Gazetteer of the Imperial Western Territories,” hereafter HYXYTZ) commissioned in 1756 following the conquest of Dzungaria and East Turkestan, and *Xuxiu Taiwanfu Zhi* (“Updated version of the Gazetteer of the Taiwan prefecture,” hereafter XXTWFZ) commissioned in 1762 to update previous gazetteers of the island, which still had a very strong indigenous population—feature what may be best described as musical ethnographies. Not only do their dedicated chapters on music gloss on recorded music histories when available and describe musical practices of the locals and their instruments, but they also transcribed many indigenous songs, spelling out their original lyrics phonetically with Chinese characters in addition to providing translations. Besides these official geographic projects that portray the “imperial experience” of the frontiers, individual travelers also wrote about their own encounters. After their annexation in the 1750s, Dzungaria and East Turkestan in the northwest frontier became “popular” destinations for disgraced officials exiled from the court, and many of them put their experience to writing. Although music was rarely a prominent topic in itself, it often appears in emulations of the poetic trope of “exotic music from the frontier” common in the much-studied poetries from the early and mid Tang.

Similar to non-Han music, dramas, which always involved singing and instrumental music (*hua ju* “spoken theater” was only introduced from the West in the early 20th century), were also rarely considered appropriate for a righteous ruler and indeed frowned upon by high society. Many Qing emperors considered them effeminizing, morally dubious, and potentially subversive and even prohibited their performances in Beijing’s Inner City where Qing aristocrats and the Eight Banners troops and their families garrisoned and lived (thus the misnomer of the Inner City as “Manchu City,” for the Eight Banners troop also included certain Han and Mongols).[[23]](#footnote-23) Nevertheless, not only did the Qing court spend lavishly for theater performances, but it also gradually made them take on functions of ritual music and eventually incorporated them into the formal courtly routine—thus not unlike the many kinds of non-Han music.[[24]](#footnote-24) By the end of the 18th century, staging an hours-long drama as part of a political, military, or diplomatic or tributary ceremony became established practice.[[25]](#footnote-25) As a well-studied example, the Qianlong Emperor welcomed the British diplomatic mission led by George Macartney in August 1793 with a lavish drama. Revised specifically for the occasion, the piece is packed with political innuendos and references to the event itself. Incidentally, it is entitled *Sihai Shengping*—*shengping* probably translated in Manchu as *mukdendere necin* (lit. “rising and even/flat”); *mukdembi* is also a cognate of Mukden, name of the Qing empire’s first capital. What is more, through the power of its taste and unique capacity of regional outreach, the Qing court fostered the prosperity of commercial theater houses in Beijing, which could draw on talents representing various local genres and styles from across the realm. This milieu gave rise to the so-called *jing ju* “Peking Opera” during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.[[26]](#footnote-26) During the 20th century, thanks to the entrepreneurship of various individuals and schools of performances, Peking Opera became an internationally renowned genre of music from China.[[27]](#footnote-27) Both the Republic and People’s Republic of China currently refer to it as its *guo ju* (“national drama”) and maintain theater troops and academies directly within its bureaucracy.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Legacies of the Qing court’s enthusiasm for music theater are not limited to nurturing what is now arguably the most readily recognizable heritage of “Chinese music,” however. Like in the case for ritual music and non-Han music, the Qing court left behind a considerable amount of sources for current scholars and performers. Yet it is not just that program books, play scripts, archival records, costumes, props, statutes, theater houses, and temples have survived from the Qing thanks to its temporal proximity and to the relative peacefulness of Beijing’s handovers amid several regime changes during the first half of the 20th century. The Qing court also actively collected, edited, copied, and published numerous volumes of scores for musical dramas, which provide current scholars foundation for researching not only Qing court theater or Peking Opera but also musical dramas that flourished at other times and places. The most monumental of such project is the eighty-volume *Jiu gong dacheng* (“Grand compendium of [arias in] nine modes,” hereafter JGDC), commissioned by the Qianlong Emperor in 1714 and completed in 1746. It contains close to 4500 arias, dating from across the preceding millennium and representing various regional styles and genres. As for *yayue*, besides the detailed scores, instrumentations, and ritual directions in LLZYHB, the Qianlong Emperor also commissioned *Shijing yuepu quanshu* (“Complete book of musical scores for the *Classic of Songs*,” hereafter SJYPQS), a compilation of melodies for the three hundred and five songs originally compiled in the Confucian *Shijing* “Classic of Songs.” Dating back to at least the 5th century BCE and supposedly selected and edited by Confucius himself, these songs thus embodied the ideals of righteous music suitable for a sage ruler and the narrative of *yayue*’s ancient origins. More than just a mere collection, however, SJYPQS also claims to have rectified the melodies of these ideologically laden songs, in particular by getting rid of melismas.

These monumental collections of music, all published by the Qing court’s own printing house located at Wuying Palace inside the Forbidden City, suggest that musical scholarship, often glossed over in current research under the rubric of “court music,” was nonetheless a quintessential aspect of the Qing cout’s engagement with music. Not only was the systematic studying of musical texts—including both scores and writings about music and its use—an important component of ritual and theatrical music, as has been shown at various occasions above. What is more, the Qing’s diligence at publishing musical monuments such as JGDC and SJYPQS also reflects the larger intellectual trend of *kaozheng xue* “evidential scholarship” during the long 18th century, which emphasized textual criticism and empirical research, as opposed to philosophical inquiry, of intellectual and cultural history.[[29]](#footnote-29) While most influential scholars in this movement were Han literati in the Yangtze Delta Region, which was the Qing empire’s most prosperous region and major source of taxes and government functionaries, the impact of *kaozheng* was felt strongly at the Qing court in Beijing, which seized research, scholarship, and publication as a crucial apparatus for its empire-building and governance. Besides projects such as chronicles of military campaigns and gazeteers of newly conquered frontier regions whose political functions are hard to miss, the court patronized numerous scholarship projects that followed closely *kaozheng*’s emphasis on studying, collecting, editing, and commenting on historical texts. In 1773, the Qianlong Emperor commissioned the *Siku Quanshu* (“Emperor’s Four Treasuries,” hereafter SKQS), a 36000-volume collection of books that cover almost every aspect of scholarship, including music. Compiled by more than three thousand scholars and another three thousand copyists employed by the court, SKQS preserved many otherwise lost and dilapidated texts, giving current scholars easy access to numerous texts representing thousands of years of knowledge.[[30]](#footnote-30)

In addition to being part of grand intellectual undertakings such as SKQS, scholarship on music was in itself a much prized enterprise at the Qing court. The two epitomes of Qing court musical research are *Lülü Zhengyi* (“The True Doctrine of Musical Tuning,” hereafter LLZY), an officially treatise on music theory and organology commissioned by the Kangxi Emperor and published in 1714; and, produced by scholars working at the “LLZYOffice” under the new Ministry of Music, LLZYHB, the Qianlong Emperor’s one-hundred-and-twenty volume out-of-proportion “supplement” to his grandfather’s five-volume LLZY. In addition to detailed choreographies, lyrics, and melodies for ritual music, LLZYHB also contains extensive discussions on court music of all previous “Chinese” dynasties from the semi-legendary Zhou (c. 11th century BCE) to the Qing’s predecessor the Ming; tuning measurements adopted by these dynasties; historical and philological research of numerous tune titles used for arias; an organological encyclopedia, which also covers several non-Han instruments; and detailed explanations of music-theoretical tenets.

Most extensively discussed by current scholars in relation to treatises on music produced at the Qing court, however, are those by Christian missionaries from Europe who served the court as officials, astrologers, interpreters, and connoisseurs of Western science and arts, including music. Portuguese Jesuit Tomás Pereira (1645-1708) and Italian Lazarist Teodorico Pedrini (1671-1746) are commonly considered to have written the earliest Chinese and Manchu-language treatises on Western music theory. One of them was even included as the last volume in the Kangxi Emperor’s LLZY, and it discusses the classic *musica practica* topics of Guidonian syllables and mensuration. While not published by the Qing court, Jean-Joseph Marie Amiot (1718-1793)’s seminal treatise *Mémoire sur la musique des chinois* (1779) also came from the intellectual milieu of the Qing court where the French Jesuit served from 1750 until his death. The most authoritative European discussion of “music of the Chinese” up until the mid 19th century, Amiot’s treatise drew upon numerous texts—duly listed at its beginning—made easily available only thanks to the Qing court’s active participation in “evidential scholarship.”

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[This sub-section will link the above review of the potential “content” of “Qing court music” with recent trends in Qing historiography. A rough prose summary is provided below]

Following my strategic refrainment from using the word “China,” I will argue that scholars interested in the equally tricky umbrella term “Chinese music” during the Qing period, be it musical encounters between “East and West” or court music theater, must exert critical pressure on the notions of “China” and “Chinese music.” To this end, I suggest that a yet lacking rapprochement be needed between studies of “Chinese” music and culture at large and recent trends in Qing historiography. Indeed, reactions to these historiographical reappraisals, which have come to be known, somewhat notoriously in the People’s Republic, as “New Qing History,” tend to focus on their challenge of the term “China,” an aspect ripe for politicization in the current geopolitical climate. Often highlighted are their rejection of Sinocentrism and the narrative of *longue durée* Sinicization in Chinese historiography, their demystification of Chinese nationalism, and their emphasis on Manchu and Inner Asian aspects of Qing’s imperial success. My critical assessment of a broad spectrum of recent historical narratives will show, however, that their most important insight is not only the anachronism or nationalist baggage of the term “China” but also how the Qing saw much of the very making of “China” as it exists and is understood nowadays: namely, as a multiethnic nation-state that still attempts to integrate diverse natural, economic, and cultural regions. They trace how the Qing conquered and “domesticated” such various territories and peoples, often through locally and temporally determined policies and rhetoric that bore unintended consequences in the longer term and would be inherited by the subsequent Republic and People’s Republic, albeit amid different political realities and ideological vocabularies. It was also to the Qing era, indeed largely thanks to sponsorship and support by the Qing court, that much of the foundation of “Chinese music” as studied and practiced nowadays can be traced. What I propose, however, is not simply to take this temporal co-relation as potentially causal and thus borrow recent narratives on Qing’s imperial projects—consisting both of military conquest of vast territories and peoples and of the latters’ political, economic, social, and cultural “domestication”—as a historical background for understanding diverse Qing court musics. Instead, what this dissertation attempts at is that a fluid approach to the ontology of “music”, as is (or should ideally be) practiced in current Anglo-North American musicologies would offer precious insights in heeding decades of calls since the burgeoning of “New Qing History” in the 1990s: constructing an integrated Qing frontier history.

*Theorizing the Frontier*

[Bear with me the utter lack of citations here, but everything is attributed in the body, and I am truly more concerned with showing I’ve actually done my readings than plagiarizing anyone …]

From May to October, 1893, the World Columbian Exposition held in Chicago’s Jackson Park and Midway Pleasance welcomed numerous visitors from around the United States and the world. It celebrated the 400-year anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s fortuitous discovery of the “New World” in 1492. Meanwhile, on July 12, 1893, when the Exposition was still drawing enthusiastic midsummer crowds, somewhere else in the windy city, Fredrick Jason Turner read a paper at the meeting of the American Historical Association entitled “The significance of the frontier in American history.” And just as the Exposition commemorated the beginning of a new era for the American continent, Turner’s paper attempted to mark an historic end to it and reflect on its implication. He began by quoting the US census report for 1890, which suggested that the westward movement of American settlements had broken “unsettled” lands into such pocketed isolation that a “frontier line” of settlement could no longer be spoken of. “Up to our day,” then reflected Turner on the report, “American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West.” “And now,” he later declared at the paper’s end, “four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history.”

Turner’s emphasis on the significance of the frontiers in American history did not come from nowhere. Instead, it specifically contested the then dominant historiography that emphasized America’s roots in the Old World: inheritance of belief systems and social organizations from Europe and exploitation of slave labor from Africa. Turner not only suggested that such historiography offers only a limiting view constrained to the East but also contended that “the true point of view in the history of this nation [America] is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West.” It is not, however, the extraction of economic resources (especially lands and mines) from the “unsettled” West that substantiated Turner’s frontier-focused historiography. Rather, he devoted much of his paper to pondering on origins of the “American character,” or “the vital forces” behind social institutions that “call these organs into life and shape them to meet changing conditions.” Such adaptable vitality, Turner argued, arose from the westward expansion of American settlement where pioneering individuals continuously encountered “primitive conditions” at the frontiers and had to start anew the entire process of society building, industrialization, and wealth accumulation. Rather than a linear process of industrialization, Turner posited the cyclical re-exposure to simplicity and rebirth of industrial civilization at the frontier “furnish[ed] the forces dominating American character”—so long as, of course, that the “unsettled” lands continued to appear on ever west-pushing horizon. And thus the final closure of this frontier, when “primitive conditions” had been all but exhausted, also marked the closing of an American era shaped by its westward expansion and opened the question of the future of the frontier-defined “American character.”

The ethnocentrism and social evolutionism in Turner’s “frontier thesis” is hard to miss. Since as early as the 1920s, historians of America have been challenging Turner’s problematic points of view while trying to rescue his emphasis on the importance of the Western frontiers in American history with alternative frameworks. As I have discussed in my literature view above, comparable to Turner’s revision of American historiography, a turn to the frontier regions is one of the most important trends in recent research in Qing history. In addition to New Qing History’s emphasis on Qing’s military successes in Inner Asia, economic and social historians have looked at the similar and different policies the Qing implemented to optimize its effective control over varying frontier regions amid changing geopolitical climates as well as their deliberate and unintended consequences. Cultural historians, especially historians of geography, have also analyzed and interpreted the ideological processes through which these newly incorporated distant territories were “domesticated” in the Qing rulers’ worldview. While a relatively under-theorized concept in Qing historiography—and perhaps also in “Chinese” and Eurasian historiography—, a handful of historians of the Qing have examined the concept of frontier in their works. In these cases, almost as a rule comparisons are drawn to the American western frontiers, specifically regarding the two frontiers’ historical significance to their respective “centers,” and references are frequently made to Turner as foundational figure to the studying of frontiers. And just like their contemporary counterparts in American history, historians of the Qing have sought to jettison Turner’s ethnocentrism by proposing more multicultural models (more on this later).

I argue, however, that despite their explicit disavowal, key aspects of Turner’s conceptualization of the frontier contributive to the ideological baggage of his “frontier thesis” has nonetheless persisted in recent histories of the Qing—indeed not just as some inconsequential remnant but rather instrumental to the advancement of frontier in Qing historiography. I should make it clear in advance that I do not intend at all to guilt the frontier-turn in Qing historiography for not having completely rid itself of Turner’s problematic legacies; I will argue later in this session that the inerasable ghost of Turner’s “frontier thesis” is precisely what makes frontier a productive perspective for further research and contemplation. I specifically suggest that both Turner’s and current historians of the Qing’s understandings of the frontier, as well as the latter’s critical revision of the former’s, are based on a complicated relationship between “frontier” and “boundary.” Although both define frontier in contrast to some form of boundary, both frontier historiographies end up unable to sustain the former’s distinction from the latter, in ways that may be characterized as culturally essentialist and ethnocentric. What is more, both frontier historiographies also explicitly posit, with touches of nostalgia and lament, the transformation of the former into the latter as an overarching historical trend.

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Besides trying to liberate an American historiography from (a literal) Eurocentrism, Turner explicitly distinguishes the American frontier from the European one. He characterized the latter as “a fortified *boundary line* running through dense populations” (emphasis mine). The American frontier differs not only because of its sparse population but also because of the consequent vagueness of where such a “boundary line” falls at all. One may further argue that it is not only about the scantiness of population but also the lack of ability as well as willingness on either side of such a boundary to enforce some absolute sovereignty demarcated thereby, as in Europe. And thus, for Turner, (the American) frontier is “elastic,” ambiguous and porous, and perhaps possibly describable as “multicultural” (though a turn of phrase he never used). Indeed, only through the coexistence of different modes of living, production, and making-sense thereof was Turner’s much-prized return to “primitive conditions” possible for the American settlers at the frontier, who are themselves certainly not “primitive” in Turner’s eyes. Rather than the “line” as in boundary, Turner loosely defined his American frontier as “*the whole frontier belt*, including the Indian country and the outer margin of the settled areas of the census reports” (emphasis mine).

Yet clearly, at the precise moment Turner attempts to capture frontier’s elasticity through the metaphor of the “belt,” his resort to “outer margin” and “Indian country” collapses such belt back to the linear conception of boundary based not on ambiguity but binary difference. For Turner, the “frontier belt’s” sparseness in population is not merely a quantitative characteristic but also speaks of its marginality: in his words “margin of […] settlement” and “[lying] at the hither edge of free land.” Such frontier is thus defined as the margin and periphery to a center—which is also the “center” in his ethnocentrism, the unspoken yet unambiguous “by whom” of such settlement and “for whom” of such free land. What is more, although the “Indian country” is relegated as part of this frontier qua margin and periphery, the recognition of the existence of some conceptually unified people opposite the “settled and free” center makes possible the conceptualization of frontier as marginal and peripheral to not just one but two centers (however superior one may be considered over the other). Situated between multiple such centers that are differentiated through binary notions such as “settled” vs. “unsettled” or “free” vs. “Indian,” the frontier “belt” no longer differs from the boundary “line” qualitatively. Just as boundaries are negotiated, marked, and defended by regimes ruling from the centers, Turner’s frontier also degenerates into a zone of gradation, the mapping of which as ambiguous or “multicultural” must resort to the clearly differentiated centers.

Like Turner, historians of the Qing when contemplating theoretically on the concept of frontier attempt to distinguish it from boundary. Mark Elliot pursues the “frontier” and “boundary” distinction through a series of etymological analyses of comparable concepts in Chinese- and Manchu-language sources from the Qing. He argues that the Manchu word *jecen*, which bears both senses of a guarded “boundary line” and of a more ambiguous “frontier zone,” gradually shifted towards he latter in actual usage. James Millward also defines “frontier” of the Qing in stark contrast to the expensively erected and heavily guarded Great Wall of the Ming, broadening its geographic research loosening its bondage to specific places into a process of engagement and integration. Matthew Mosca distinguishes the Qing’s “frontier policy” in the long 18th century from the “foreign policy” it formulated during the 19th century in reaction to external pressures. Qing’s “frontier policy,” Mosca argued, lacked any “common idiom” for its different frontier zones where “on the ground administration […] relied heavily on indigenous power holders following their local political traditions.” In other words, frontiers cannot be uniformly defined through one center, for it involves fusion with something “other” (indigenous, local). In stark contrast, “foreign policy” is marked by a “standardized lexicon of world geography” whereby the Qing understood itself as “one among many entities in competition” and against a single “unified outside world” and thus increasingly engaged with other powers in the language of clearly demarcated sovereignty.

Though drawing from a similar distinction in Turner (a commonly acknowledged source of reference), this geographic vocabulary of a frontier “zone” in contrast to a boundary “line” in recent Qing histories, I observe, serves specifically to dispense with Turner’s ethnocentric baggage. Yet it is also precisely in such move that the fluid and ambiguous frontier slides back into the clearly delineated boundaries of difference, in a manner not unlike the analogous conflation in Turner. Post-Turner historians of the American West have challenge Turner’s preconceived marginality of the frontier in relation to the center by making the frontier a proper region in itself worthy of studying for its own characteristics. A highly comparable shift of narrative perspective onto the frontier itself took place in studies of Central Asia, a field, as I have previously shown, exerted considerable influence on New Qing History. The Central Asian region, especially the Eurasian steppe, is traditionally considered peripheral to and often contrasted to the surrounding settled areas that each have their own continuous traditions of history-writing (China, Persia, India, etc.). Historical sources accounting for the Central Asia frontier thus also come almost exclusively from these surrounding areas that understandably perpetuate xenophobic and racist biases. Writing in the early 20th century, Owen Lattimore argued, however, that the Central Asian frontier should be not considered mere margin of history but a “zone of contestation” between nomadic powers and their sedentary neighbors. Subsequent scholars heeded this call for a historiographical elevation of the “native” perspective of the frontier. Thomas Barfield, for example, examined the Central Asian nomadic powers’ self-aware symbiotic relationship with regimes in China-proper in a *longue durée* history of their interactions from the 3rd century BCE until the 18th century Qing. In his recent study of Qing’s conquest of Dzungaria and Turkestan, Peter Purdue similarly portrays the Dzungar Khanate as an equal competitor as an equal competitor to the Qing and Romanovs by examining comparable techniques of empire-building, such as cartography and resource allocations.

In addition to these attempts at “native perspectives” at the frontier in defiance of convention historiographies favoring sedentary cultures, in shifting their narrative focus onto the frontier regions in their won right, Qing historians have specifically emphasized the ambiguity, fluidity, and fusion—against in distinction from delineated boundaries particularly in matters of cultural practices and ethnic identities. C. Patterson Giersch’s study of the Qing’s southwestern frontier in the 18th century describes a “middle ground” where varying peoples and groups at the the Qing-Burmese borderlands in Yunnan creatively exploit various centrally imposed and locally available cultural, ethnic, and social categories to construct shifting and expedient identities in a relatively unregulated world of economic and social transactions. Writing about 19th century Yunnan, David Atwill also appeals to local networks of occupations, economic transactions, social organizations, and interactions with Beijing-appointed authorities in describing the ambiguity of identities, soon to be exploited by different parties in the “Chinese Muslims” or “Hui” revolt in the 1850s. Moving to the highland frontiers in the Hunnan province, Donald Sutton adopts the “middle ground” framework in describing Han migrants during the 17th century who flexibly adopted local “Miao” habits and practices in navigating their way through a still ambiguous system of governance (ruled by *tusi* or local chieftains in local customs, though with their hereditary titles nominally granted and confirmed by Beijing as a temporary compromise). The same “middle ground” is described by Purdue for the northwestern frontier zone, who posits a “liminal space where cultural identities merged and shifted, as peoples of different ethnic and linguistic roots interacted for common economic purposes” and as “core ethnic identities had to bend to fit rigorous geographical conditions.”

Yet it is not difficult to see, however, that attempts to conceptualize the frontier as a region with its own characteristics and even *longue durée* history and and as a fluid and porous world still depends on recourse to its surrounding centers that are furthermore defined through mutual differentiation through the vocabulary of boundaries. The positing of any “native perspective,” be it attempts to salvage agencies of Central Eurasian steppe empires from biased records of their sedentary competitors or to construct historical narrative from the former’s point of view only reinforces the distinction between “nomadic” and “sedentary,” “native” and “imperial,” “local” and “central,” etc. The deterioration of the impulse to the frontier’s ambiguity is particularly suggestive in Purdue’s description: while admittedly focusing on the frontier, he nonetheless paints an image of people bringing “different ethnic and linguistic *roots*” and “*core* ethnic identities” (emphases mine)—roots and cores residing nowhere else than the surrounding areas preconceived as central in defining what they are. As for Giersch’s “middle ground” framework, even barring too much a reading into the semantics—“middle” between what?—, descriptions of the creative processes of frontier identity’s ambiguity and construction seem impossible without analyzing them as—analyzing almost in the Greek etymological sense of “breaking down”—composite of preconceived categories of “Han” “Miao” “Hui” as well as groups defined through their languages and religions. Part of its is of course for inevitable convenience—in the same way that I find no better alternative but to use the term “China proper,” even though how “China” was a concept constructed concepts that drew huge part from legacies of the Qing’s long 18th century is precisely a central aspect of this study. Yet it poses the question whether we can approach the frontier at all without considering it geographically margin or logically consequent to the centers, as anything other than perhaps a “blurrier” version of boundaries, as anything other than a hard line turned into a somewhat more flexible gradation. It poses the question whether there can be a “frontier study” not conceptually or historiographically subservient to the “cores” or “centers” at all.

What makes Turner and historians of Qing’s inability to truly distinguish “frontier” from “boundary” or free it from the “center” of ethnocentrism in their praxis even more fascinating, I argue, is that their historiographical narrative in many ways explains the futility of their theoretical exercise. While defining the “frontier” as distinct from “boundaries” and “centers,” both narrate frontier’s history as its fateful incorporation into the latter system: the frontier’s ultimate closure by the encroaching sedentary civilizations and its eventual fragmentation into clear-cut boundaries guarded by none other but the distant centers. As mentioned earlier, Turner self-consciously situated his paper at what according to him signaled the final closing of the American frontier, as suggested in the census report of 1980. No sooner had he attempted to conceptualize the frontier as distinct from European borders and to recognize the frontier’s significance in defining the “American character,” however, that he declared such quintessential frontier experience and process as a bygone era. Given the quasi-moral values he ascribed to the frontiers as a place of renewal and rebirth, his “frontier thesis” reeks of pessimism—or at least an uncertainty about the future of the frontier-driven and defined America. Though Turner seemed nowhere concerned with any multicultural or multiethnic fluidity, his prized “primitive conditions” only available through the marginality of the frontiers had become an irretrievable past with the latter’s settlement and administrative, economic, and cultural incorporation into the “center.”

While nowhere close in stating any moral preference for the frontier, historians of the Qing nonetheless depict a similar process of the frontier’s closure, specifically how sedentary powers carved up hitherto frontier lands where pastoralists, merchants, goods, and ideas roamed relatively unregulated and imposed—deliberately or inadvertently—clear cut boundaries and categories of identities. Purdue characterized the Qing’s 18th century engagement with the northwestern frontier precisely as “an effort to seal off this ambiguous, threatening frontier experience once and for all by incorporating it within the fixed boundaries of a distinctly defined space, and by drawing lines that clearly demarcated separate cultures.” He specifically highlights how the Qing and Romanovs signed border treatises recognizing each other’s sovereignty over fixed territories at the frontiers and thus collaborated in closing in on the free-roaming frontier zones. Though tending more to complex interactions of various factors than to any superimposed ideology, historians of the southwestern frontiers similarly observed the closing of the “middle ground” as a general trend in the 18th and 19th centuries. With the quadrupling of populations in China proper between 1680 and 1830, systematic migrations of Han families, often with support of the state at times of famine and natural disasters, reoriented frontier regions’ economic, social, and cultural networks towards their places of provenance. Ensuing conflicts between these new migrants and the local non-Han and earlier Han-migrant communities and the state’s general preference of the former group for reasons of more effective and cost-saving governance hardened identity distinctions and, shown for example in Giersch’s study of 19th century Yunnan, gave rise to a Han identity based on exclusivity and distinction from the various “others.”

The result of these frontiers’ closures is summarily captured in Mosca’s narrative “from frontier policy to foreign policy,” as stated in the title of his monograph. It was a shift towards what can be understood as nationalism whereby the Qing perceived itself externally as one among many and internally as exercising absolute and uniform sovereignty over the many peoples and ethnicities within its borders—regardless of the local networks at the frontiers that might engage parties outside. This physical and conceptual sealing of the frontiers into boundaries is of course what I previously spoke of as the material and symbolic foundations the Qing laid for the current Chinese multiethnic nation-state. The frontier, despite whatever historiographical focus on its proper importance and its ambiguity, fluidity, and porousness, is no more.

*Frontiers of Music History*

[Same disclaimer re: the lack of footnotes]

What faces frontier historians, then, is the challenge of writing frontier histories on the other end of the historical narrative of frontier’s closure. Although the perceived difference of the frontier—be it a somewhat ethnocentric “marginality” or the pre-closure characteristics of fluidity—is not automatically “lost” to anyone living in the legacies of its closure, I have tried to show that a persistent impasse in conceptualizing the frontier is that between its theoretical distinction from “boundary” on the one hand and the inevitable collapse of such distinction both in analytical praxis and in self-aware historiographical narration on the other. Put simple, despite the intention of historians of the Qing (I will not even go into how frontier’s perceived fluidity maps neatly along certain strands of postmodern politics), the frontier appears destined to remain marginal to the “centers” and its studying to follow, analogous to the historiography of “closure,” the carving up of its ambiguity into clearly-defined “cores and roots” understood as originating from such centers.

Is frontier history then a doomed and futile enterprise? Should historians be complacent with frontier’s conceptual secondary status to “core” regions or continue to hold onto its distinct characteristics that seem to have eluded us both historically and conceptually?

There is no pretense that I can offer any satisfactory answer here within the framework either of this proposal or the eventual dissertation. Nevertheless, one move seems particularly promising, not because of an abstract analytical necessity (although it would seem cliché) but because of the specific histories of the Qing that have been recently produced. As I have outlined in the literature review, New Qing History, especially the works by Evelyn Rawski and Pamela Crossley, problematized Qing’s equivalence with “China” by pointing out the Qing’s adoption of various different models, narratives, rhetoric, and roles in constructing its multicultural and multiethnic empire. They have specifically shown how the Qing emperor out of expedience in dealing with different constituencies of the empire wore “different hats” that bring difficult cultural practices and discourses of rulership: Manchu prince, “Chinese” emperor (Son of Heaven), Mongolian Khan, and a bodhisattva in the *Dge lugs pa* school of Tibetan Buddhism. Other scholars have questioned what they perceive as too instrumentalist and pragmatist a reading of the Qing’s exploitation of various ideologies. In a review of major Manchu-focused studies in Qing history entitled “Who Were the Manchus?”, R. Kent Guy asks: “if Manchus were able to be all things to all people, or at least nearly all known people, which were the poses and which were the realities?” Against Rawski and Crossley’s constructivist reading of the formations and reformations of Manchu identity as politically expedient at different points of the empire’s agenda, Mark Elliot deems the term “ethnicity” still useful in the Manchu case and describes the various institutions and practices that suggest an “ethnic coherence” around the admittedly heavily manipulated Manchu identity. The danger of depicting the Qing as utterly flexible in (literally and figuratively) speaking different languages to different subjects, it seems, is to posit as though it does not have any ideology and embodied beliefs at all.

But what if such ideology—here recognized not just as self-aware beliefs but also as leaving traces in praxis—is not the identification with some over categories whose boundaries can be constructed or manipulated for various ends, but precisely such ambiguity, fluidity, and flexibility of the frontier? What if the Qing court, center perhaps of the empire’s political, economic, and cultural decisions yet ever so engaged in the conquest and incorporation of vast and varying frontier regions, is nonetheless itself considered a frontier where “cores” and “roots” of identities met and interacted? What if frontier, both for its historical importance and for its conceptual affinity to the unmapping of clear-cut categories, is adopted as a core experience of Qing history, in a way that analyses may roam free (as though in a frontier zone) geographically without being confined to any one “center” or “margin?”

Not to further burden this point with abstract unpacking, below I demonstrate some of the fruitfulness of a “frontier reading” of Qing ideologies through some scattered interpretation of one specific text on music history produced by the Qing court during the 18th century. Angela Zito’s analyses of practices and discourses of sacrifice at the Qing court have demonstrated the potentials of revealing embodied beliefs in the court’s seemingly pragmatist amalgamation different ideological systems, and it is my conviction that the particular ways in which sundried musical traditions functioned in Qing court’s musical practices and discourses may offer precious insight onto the Qing’s “frontier ideology.”

[Below is the case study proper, rather unincorporated at this point; same disclaimer for citations]

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In the summer of 1712, which is the fifty-second year of his reign, the Kangxi Emperor commissioned a series of treatises on musical tuning, mathematics, and calendar. Three of his sons were made their chief editors: his third son In Cy (1677-1732; also, and hereafter, Prince Cheng), who was himself an important patron of learning; fifteenth son In U (1693-1731; later made Prince Yu of the second rank); and sixteenth son In Lu (1695-1767; later made, and hereafter, Prince Zhuang), who would later become a quintessential figure for matters musical under the Qianlong Emperor. They were ordered to lead a team of Han scholar-officials, most of whom were recent *jinshi* and were then in charge of clerical matters at the imperial court and government, and work every day at a dedicated hall in Changchun Yuan; the latter was the court’s summer retreat, which the Kangxi Emperor built in 1684 in imitation of the gardens he saw on his tour to the prosperous Yangtze River plains during the same year. Drafts of their work, the decree further specified, were to be sent forth daily for the emperor’s personal review, corrections, and amendments.

In just a bit over a year, in the winter of 1713 and 1714, Prince Cheng et al presented to the emperor the first completed treatise of the series, the aforementioned *Lü lü zheng yi* (“The True Doctrine of Musical Tuning,” hereafter LLZY). Apparently pleased by their first product, the emperor granted the entire series the title *Lü li yuan yuan* (“Origins of Tuning and Calendar,” hereafter LLYY). The emperor might not have known, however, that he would not live to see the official completion of the series, despite the swift production of LLZY. It would take another seven years for Prince Cheng’s team to finish the treatise on mathematics, *Shu li jing yun* (“Essence and Treasures of the Principles of Mathematics,” hereafter SLJY, 1721). And by the time they produced a draft of the treatise on calendar, *Li xiang kao cheng* (“Compendium on Calendar Observations and Celestial Navigations,” hereafter LXKC, 1722), it was less than half a year before the Kangxi Emperor would die in December, 1722. And thus when the Yongzheng Emperor formally promulgated LLYY and ran it through the imperial press during the first year of his reign (1723), the imperially sponsored intellectual project also became a tribute to his late father.

The reason why LLZY on musical tuning was finished so much earlier than LXKC on calendar and SLJY on mathematics probably had less to do with the Kangxi Emperor’s particular fondness of music theory but with its significantly shorter length. Together, LLYY amounts to 100 volumes. LXKC spans a total of 42 volumes, from volume 1 to 42. SLJY takes an even longer span of 53 volumes, from volumes 48 to 100. Flanked and dwarfed in the middle is LLZY, which consists of a mere 5 volumes. Nonetheless, one aspect of the seemingly outshined LLZY does standout immediately upon reviewing the organizational structure of LLYY, which is laid out in the series’ preface. Both LXKC and SLJY are divided into two parts: a *shang bian* “upper part” and a *xia bian* “lower part,” each bearing its own subtitle. LLZY, despite its miniscule length, however, comprises three parts. Besides its two-volume *shang bian*, which discusses general theories and measurements of tuning, and its two-volume *xia bian*, which discusses the measurements and tunings of specific instruments, it also contains a single-volume *xu bian* “sequal.” The preface to LLYY describes this volume, hereafter LLZYXB, as addressing “origins of the mutual harmonies and correspondences of the scale of five principal and two altered degrees.” A quick read through LLZYXB suggests, however, that it is in fact a treatise on Western music theory, indeed one of the earliest Chinese-language text to introduce such matter. Its “upper” portion introduces staff notation—staff lines, clefs, and sharp, flat, and natural signs—and Guidonian syllables and solmization system (*ut*, *re*, *mi*, *fa*, *sol*, *la*, and *si* transcribed respectively using Chinese characters as *wu*, *le*, *ming*, *fa*, *shuo*, *la*, *xi*. Its “lower” portion then teaches mensural notation—different note shapes, mensuration signs, and rhythmic proportions.

The fact that LLZY contains some knowledge of Western music is by no means unusual. Under the Kangxi Emperor’s reign, several Western missionaries, most of them Jesuits, served the Qing government as officials of at Qintian Jian (“Imperial Bureau of Astronomy” in charge of maintaining the calendar and calculating auspicious times), interpreters, and even diplomats. The Kangxi Emperor also frequently discussed mathematics and sciences with the Western missionaries, who keenly introduced him to Western learnings on these subjects in hope of winning favors for their evangelical mission. Not only was the emperor known for his passion and fluency in these matters, but he even had some of his sons, including Prince Cheng, study with the Westerners. Thus, both LXKC and SLYJ build upon a lot of then recently introduced Western knowledge, for example Tycho Brahe (1546-1601)’s celestial observations and Ignace-Gaston Pardies (1636-1674)’s rendition of Euclidean geometry in *Elements de geométrie* (1674).

What sets LLZYXB from the other 99 volumes of LLYY is not its inclusion of any “Western” content, however, but the outright flagging of such content as “Western.” Indeed, most theories, observations, arguments, demonstrations, and data in LXKC and SLYJ, regardless of their sources of origin, are presented as matters of fact: that is, without identifying which of them are, so to speak, “Western” and which “Chinese.” The “upper” and “lower” parts of LLZY follow such unmarked tone in their presentation of tuning theories and measurements—even though, despite its extensive references to historical texts and seemingly complete confinement to traditional discourses, some of their most provocative teachings have been suggested as bearing heavy imprints of Western missionaries’ teachings. LLZYXB, in stark contrast, markedly points out, both in its own preface and frequently in the prose of its individual chapters, that the teachings it introduces are *xifa* “Western method” or are from *xiyang*, a common term referring to Western European countries. Its preface specifically attributes them to Tomás Pereira (1645-1708; Chinese name Xu Risheng), the Jesuit from Portugal (transliterated in as *bo ‘er du ha ‘er* in Chinese characters) who arrived at the Kangxi Emperor’s court in 1672 and played a quintessential role in the Qing’s negotiation of the Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689) with the Russian Tsardom, and to Teodorico Pedrini (1671-1746; Chinese name De Lige), the Lazarist from Italy (*yi da li ya*) who arrived in 1611. Besides, not only does LLZYXB contrast its teachings at times with *zhongfa* “Chinese method,” but it also contains annotations of the main text that “translates” “Western” concepts into “Chinese” equivalents: pitch names and scales, for example, are compared to those in the *gongche* notation system. Following publishing conventions, these annotations are printed in-text in a smaller font. [below on the “Chinese rite controversy” as a concurrent event]

Such conspicuous segregation of Western music theory, which is moreover prominently marked as “Western,” from the rest of LLZY is remarkable in light of the political climate around the time of the treatise’s compilation. After years of disputations among the Europeans and correspondences between the Kangxi Emperor and the Holy See, in 1704 Pope Clement XI banned Christians in the Qing empire from participating in any traditional ritual practices, arguing that Confucian, ancestral, and imperial rites are all religious in nature and thus incompatible with Christianity. This was fiercely opposed to by the Jesuits, who had accommodated Chinese Christians’ practicing of traditional rites as a secular activity, following precedent set by Matteo Ricci (1552-1610). Though having embraced Christian missionaries at his court (then all Jesuits) and issued an edict of toleration of Catholicism in 1692, the Kangxi Emperor met the Papal Legate that formally communicated the decision with furor and coerced that all Catholic missionaries in the Qing follow the so-called “Matteo Ricci rule” under the pain of banishment. While Tomás Pereira’s (un)timely death spared him from the turmoil and dramas of Qing’s souring rapport with missionaries, Teodorico Pedrini arrived at the Qing court in Beijing at the height of the so-called “Chinese rite controversy” in 1711. To make matters worse, not only was he the first and then only non-Jesuit (he was a Lazarist) Catholic missionary to establish himself at the Qing court, he also stood out as a stubbornly loyal voice to Rome regarding “Chinese rites”—that is, in defiance both of his missionary colleagues and the Kangxi Emperor. Although he earned initial favors, the Jesuits succeeded in discrediting him in front of the emperor, and the hostility between him and the Jesuits reached such a dramatic outburst when he was imprisoned at the French Jesuit quarters in 1721, only to be released in 1723 by the newly ascended Yongzheng Emperor.

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So what explains LLZYXB’s existence as a markedly “Western” and segregated part of LLZY, in contrast to the syncretism in the other two treatises of LLYY and in spite of the Kangxi Emperor’s rising suspicion towards the Catholic missions and Pedrini’s inconvenient politics? One may argue that the content of LLZYXB, unlike the “Western” astronomy and mathematics in LXKC and SLJY, is rather incompatible with the rest of LLZY and its overall thematic of theories and measurements of tuning. Indeed, if considered a mere translation of a treatise on music theory produced by Western Europeans at the turn of the 18th century, LLZYXB would comfortably fall under the *musica practica* tradition of music theory, which was geared towards teaching the rudiments of pitch and rhythm to novice, such as choirboys in Catholic churches and pupils at Lutheran schools. Since at least the late 15th century, *musica practica* was a genre distinct from *musica theorica* (also known as *musica speculativa*), which engaged mathematical and speculative matters of tuning and musical cosmology—precisely what is covered in the “upper” and “lower” parts of LLZY (albeit following a more traditionally “Chinese” discourse). And even if the first half in LLZYXB on Guidonian syllables and solmization, which is a system for learning pitch heights and intervals, may be counted as bearing some connections to tuning (a matter broadly concerned with pitches), such consideration would be an ungraceful stretch for the rhythmic proportion and mensural notations discussed in its second half.

This, however, only begs the question why such largely irrelevant “Western” contents of LLZYXB were incorporated by Prince Cheng et al into their compilation of the imperially commissioned LLZY at all. To understand its raison d’être and its many curious configurations within the Kangxi Emperor’s ambitious scholarly project, I argue, one must look beyond the simplistic narrative of LLZYXB as fruit of the “arrival” of “Western” music or sciences in China, the historiographical framework within which scholars have been trying to make sense of this text for the past few decades. This does not mean at all that LLZYXB should not be considered part of the exchanges between “Western” and “Chinese” sciences under the auspices of the Qing court. Quite the exact opposite, if anything, scholars need to look much more into the potential connections and comparisons between musical tuning in LLZY and the “harder” sciences of astronomy and mathematics in LXKC and SLJY. Although these subjects all witnessed vivid exchanges between Catholic missionaries and Qing literati and were compiled into LLYY by the same team of scholars, historians of science working on “Western” astronomy and mathematics at the Qing court rarely pay any attention to music, while music historians fascinated by LLZYXB as one of the earliest Chinese-language text on Western music often pay nothing more than a lip service to concurrent scientific exchanges as its background. Yet what also needs to be addressed, first and foremost, is the Qing’s active role in sponsoring and shaping LLZYXB and its supposedly “Western” knowledge. Historians working on other fields of knowledge at the Qing court, including not only the aforementioned mathematics and astronomy but also geography and cartography have long problematized the dichotomy between Catholic missionaries (not unlike their commemoration in hagiographical traditions) as active givers of advanced knowledge on the one hand and the Qing emperor, aristocrats, and scholar-officials as passive albeit enthusiastic receivers of such knowledge on the other. Besides the ethical concerns of restoring “agency” to the “Orientals” and correcting teleological, Eurocentric views of the history of science, this move allows for considering knowledge-production as part of the Qing’s empire-building apparatus, in congruent with recent shifts in Qing historiography I have previously outlined.

Indeed, so far I have insisted on using scare quotes around the demonyms “Western” and “Chinese,” because both categories, marked or unmarked, were—and still are—constructed out of processes that may be be characterized as, though still for the lack of a better word, “hybrid.” Current research suggests, rather convincingly, that LLZYXB is largely based on an earlier text, *Lülü Zuanyao* (“Compendium of Elements of Music,” hereafter LLZuY). Not only do the two texts share most of their contents, but they are also organized in the same two-partite structure—first part on Guidonian syllables and solmization, second part on rhythmic proportions and mensural notations, *à la musica practica*—, and individual chapters within this structure also proceed in highly comparable orders. While none of the extant copies of LLZuY, available in Chinese and Manchu languages, indicates any date or author, a few bibliographical records in Europe and the description of a “book” by Pereira in LLZYXB’s preface have led to the broadly accepted conclusion that Pereira was its author. This would logically date the book to sometime before his death in 1708, four years before LLZY was even commissioned by the Kangxi Emperor. Circumstances of the book’s come-about may complicate the meaning of such “authorship,” however, which in current contexts may reek of an anachronistic sense of exclusionary intellectual property. For one, Prince Cheng is in fact indicated in one of the extant versions of LLZuY as its editor and compiler (*zuanji*), and even if such status could be deemed inferior to that of the “author,” his name remains the only one to be formally associated with the text. Besides, several historical records and documents suggest that when Pereira taught the Kangxi Emperor and Prince Cheng Western music theory and practice, they would have their attendants take down notes, both in Chinese and Manchu. Although no solid evidence yet indicates direct connections between these notes and the extant text of LLZuY, the many glosses and marginalia in one of the extant manuscript of LLZuY, whose red ink limits their possible penmanship to the Kangxi Emperor and Prince Cheng, further suggest a context of readership, […]. [Below’s a section on how LLZuY became LLZY, transitioning to the preface to LLZY that frames this intellectual project]

From LLZuY to LLZYXB, the Qing ruling elites’ shaping of “Western” music only becomes clearer. Indeed, although many scholars assume that Teodorico Pedrini was the one who revised LLZuY into LLZYXB so that it could be incorporated into LLZY and in turn into LLYY, little direct evidence suggests it was the case, and it appears as though most postulation of this kind relies solely on the faulty logic that a treatise on “Western” music must have been authored by a “Westerner.” Not only was Pedrini’s name nowhere mentioned in relation to the LLZY or LLYY projects in official records of the Qing—except for a line in the preface to LLZYXB that acknowledges his presence at the Qing court in succession to Pereira and the concordance of his teachings to those of Pereira, without, unlike in the latter’s case, mentioning any writing of his—but it is also difficult to imagine how Pedrini’s fluency in Classical Chinese could have enabled him to take principal charge of the task just a year after he arrived in China. This is not to say that Pedrini played no role in LLZYXB. Compared the first portion of LLZuY, the first portion of LLZYXB has at its end an additional chapter on the seven-syllable solmization system, which was a relatively recent development in Western musical pedagogy expanded out of the six-syllable system presented in LLZuY. This was very likely introduced by Pedrini to the Qing scholars and, as I will elaborate later, plays a huge role in the Qing scholars’ framing of Western musical knowledge. Indeed, my point is precisely that considering Western missionaries as one among many players in this imperially sponsored project enables much deeper and richer appreciations of the roles music played in the complex political and epistemological ecologies of the Qing court. To put simplistically, just as the missionaries hope to use “their” musical knowledge to advance their evangelical cause, such knowledge, especially in the processes of their production, also took part in the Qing’s building of a vast empire across layers of historiographies and geographies. And the latter aspect has so far remained unexplored.

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This brings us back to how LLYY’s preface summarizes LLZYXB as the *xu bian* of LLZY: “origins of the mutual harmonies and correspondences of the scale of five principal and two altered degrees.” While seemingly off-key (pun intended), this brief description points to, at least in the music-theoretical and music-historical register, how the LLZY/LLYY project attempts to frame the knowledge narrated in LLZuY and LLZYXB, without however fully incorporating it as a matter of fact within the unmarked narration of knowledge as in LXKC and SLJY. I purposefully chose the word “frame” over “indigenize,” both for the aforementioned reason that such knowledge was not simply “foreign” or “imported” and, as I will show, that who was “indigenous” at the Qing court is a productively complicated matter.

In a richly fortuitous way, the preface to LLZYXB articulates how the markedly “Western” content of the treatise relates to the issue of “five principal and two altered degrees.” A feature absent not only from LLZuY but also from any other treatise, part, or volume of the entire LLYY, the 464-character preface begins with an extensive quote—amounting to 118 characters, more than a quarter of the entire text—from the *Book of Sui*, the dynastic history of the Sui Dynasty (581-618) compiled based on official records kept by its official historians by its successor, the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Following conventions of official historiography that mostly modelled after Sima Qian (145/135 BCE-90 BCE) and Ban Gu (32 CE-92 CE), the completed *Book of Sui* consists of chronicles of the deeds of emperors (*benji*), biographies of important individuals and tributary/foreign polities (*liezhuan*), and thematic histories of different aspects of the dynasty’s rule, policies, and practices (*zhi* or *shu*), from penal codes and astronomical observations to geography, bibliography, and music. While the chronicles and biographies were commissioned by the Taizong Emperor of Tang (598-649) in 626 and completed in 636, the thematic histories, there including the three-volume *History of Music*, were commissioned by his son the Gaozong Emperor (628-683) in 641 and completed in 656 (more on this later).

The quotation/paraphrase in question comes from the second volume of the *History of Music* in the *Book of Sui*, a passage that recounts a famous debate on music theory that took place in 588 among the Sui’s first ruling emperor Yang Jian (541-604), posthumously known as the Wen Emperor of Sui, and many of his high-raking officials and most trusted courtiers. Since Yang Jian’s regnal title is *kai huang*, the debate has come to be known as *kai huang yue yi* “discussion on music during the years of *kai huang*.” In 581, Yang usurped the throne of the (northern) Zhou dynasty (557-581), a polity based in the Guanzhong plains ruled by a Xianbei (a proto-Mongolian people) family and its circles of Xianbei and Han nobles, who, during the Zhou and its preceding (northern, then spit into eastern and western) Wei dynasties (386-550/557) saw considerable amount of mutual acculturations and assimilations, spontaneous or superimposed. For years to come, Yang’s new regime would only control territories inherited from the Zhou dynasty, falling short of crossing the Yangtze River, the last defense of the (southern) Chen dynasty (557-589). It would take eight years before the Sui would, conventional historiography goes, “unify” “China” for the first time since the end of the 3rd century by conquering the Chen and concluding the so-called “Northern and Southern dynasties” period (420-589), which saw confrontation between regimes based on the Wei River and Yellow River plains and those based on the Yangtze River plains.

Just a year after Yang proclaimed himself emperor, in 582, the question of what kind of music and how music should be played at the sacrificial rites to the Heavens, Earth, Soil and Gran, and ancestors of the Yang family was brought to his attention. A nobleman and official named Yan Zhitui (531-591) told the emperor: “it has been long since rituals and music have fallen into utter disrepair, and today the orthodox music [*yayue*] used in sacrificial rites even employ sounds of the *hu*. I suggest we base our music on past practices of the [southern] Liang and investigate ancient classics and statutes [to further rectify this matter].” The emperor was unimpressed and debunked: “the music of the Liang is the sound of a dead regime [or, a sound that leads to the collapse of a regime], so for whatever reason should we use it?” During subsequent years, the emperor ordered practicing musicians at the court to fix the problems raised by Yan and consulted his more learned courtiers and officials for a solution—all, however, to no avail, so that as long as seven years after Yang usurped the (northern) Zhou’s throne, as a temporary compromise for the impasse the latter’s music was still being played at rites that were supposedly bringing celestial favors to the new Sui. This infuriated the Wen Emperor, who was only narrowly stopped from punishing several officials in charge of music and rites. To come up with a solution to this pressing problem, in 588 the emperor convened what seemed to be from descriptions in the *Book of Sui* a conference on music theory, inviting connoisseurs beyond officials already in charge of the matter and his close circles of advisors.

It is in this context that the passage that would be quoted in the preface to LLZY more than a thousand years later occurs in the text of the *History of Music* in the *Book of Sui*. Before proceeding to the quoted material, however, I would like to reflect on these series of events that led thereto as well as on the way in which they are narrated in the *Book of Sui*. Though not excerpted into the preface to LLZY, they discursively contextualize what is used by the preface to construct what turns out to be a curious *longue durée* reading of music history. It will involve not only the Western missionaries (Pereira and Pedrini) but also the so-called *hu*, a common term during the Sui and early Tang eras referring to foreigners coming from the northern and northwestern frontiers—that is, in relation to the Guanzhong plains where both two polities, as well as their preceding northern dynasties, were based. [below’s a section on the ethical/political importance of music according to Confucian thought; how such thought and its tracing of perfect music to the ancient sage rulers are broadly adopted in official music histoires; and how these histories are almost always narrated as histories of loss and degeneracy]

To begin with, the problem confronting the Wen Emperor might seem purely technical, specifically relating to tuning. While dispensing with its details, the *Book of Sui* does use the terms *yin lü* (“measurement of music”) and *sheng lü* (“measurement of sound”) to describe the matter as discussed by the emperor and his officials, and subsequent proposals at the music theory conference also address issues of tuning. Obviously, however, it was also of political gravity, as seen from the emperor’s impatience not only for fixing the “disrepaired” music but also, specifically in doing so, for coming up with new kinds of music in order to set his new Sui regime apart from the (northern) Zhou. Such is also clear in his rationale for rejecting Yan Zhitui’s suggestion of adopting the late (southern) Liang’s music: that the latter is *wang guo zhi yin*, which can be either understood as the music of a dying or already perished state that reflects such abysmal fate or as a perverse, degenerate kind of music that causes its doom. Although this specific and rather literate turn of phrase was given to the Wen Emperor by editors of the *Book of Sui* or Sui’s clerks who took down the original records, it is indicative of the conceptual framework as well as its accompanying dilemmas both for the emperor’s music forum and for its narrativization in the subsequent history. This turn of phrase is traceable to the *Record of Music*, likely from the 2nd century BCE, the earliest surviving dedicated treatise on music and its ethical and political significance from a perspective then and subsequently understood under the aegis of Confucianism; in the 1st century BCE it would be incorporated into the *Book of Rites*, a core text in the Confucian canon.

A key argument laid out early in the *Record of Music* is that music, not only in its moral propriety but also in the correctness of its tuning, bear on the fate of a regime. Immediately after establishing the origin of music to the human spirit’s reaction to the physical world, the text recasts this tenet of musical philosophy in the context of ideal rulership. It pronounces that for the ancient sage rulers, music, thanks to its ability to create harmoniousness among society, forms the wholeness of their wise reign together with rites (*li*), governance (*zheng*), and punishment (*xing*). Because of music’s association with the human spirit, the music of a realm also bears on the latter’s well-being or lack thereof. And thus,

“music of a well governed society is peaceful and happy, and its governance is harmonious; music of a chaotic society is resentful and enraged, and its governance is unruly; music of a dead state is mournful and wistful, and its people are stranded.”

These connections become more specific, furthermore, as the text associates the five degrees of the musical scale—*gong* (equivalent of *do*), *shang* (*re*), *jiao* (*mi*), *zhi* (*sol*), and *yu* (*la*)—each with a component of society; these are indeed the “five principal degrees” referred to by the summary of LLZYXB in the preface to LLYY. Thus,

“if *gong* is out of tune then the governance of the society is neglected, and the ruler is arrogant. If *shang* is out of tune then society is in decline, and the officials are corrupted. If *jiao* is out of tunethen the state of the society is worrisome, and the people are indignant. If *zhi* is out of tune then the realm is mournful, and its affairs are toilsome. If *yu* is out of tune then the realm is in peril, and its resources are deficient. When the five are all out of tune, and one jars with the other, such is described as dissolute, and thus the demise of the state is soon.”

Granted, it may appear that the relation between the *gong* degree and a state’s ruler is merely metaphorical. For the two specific moments of history under question here, however, tuning is particularly foregrounded as the linchpin for music’s effect on the well-being of a regime. Rather like the Wen Emperor’s eagerness to solve the “disrepair” of tuning, the Kangxi Emperor’s LLZY may also be considered a project of “tuning the nation”: the entire treatise opens with the cosmological and political *gravitas* of correct tuning, followed by series of measurements for the pitch of *huang zhong* (literally “yellow bell”) and how other pitches are derived from this fundamental pitch, each carrying their own laden meanings and effects.

The above detour to a text from the 2nd century BCE during the discussion of one from the 7th (to be quoted, not to mention, in one from the 18th) may seem to posit an uncritically static picture of the history of musical thoughts. Nevertheless, the narrative of ancient sage rulers—usually from the “three sovereigns and five emperors” down to the early Zhou dynasty (c. 1045-256 BCE, not to be confused with the northern Zhou)—making perfect music in service to their quasi-paradisiacal realms would become a very common trope with which official histories of music open their accounts. Not only does Sima Qian, whose *Record of the Grand Historian* (94 BCE) set the paradigm of official histories, open his *History of Music* with this narrative, he also quotes much directly from *Records of Music*, including the above cited passage on the five degrees. Subsequently, the *History of Rites and Music* in Ban Gu’s *Book of Han* (82 CE), the *History of Music* in Shen Yue (441-513)’s *Book of [Southern] Song* (493), the *History of Music* in Wei Shou (507-572)’s *Book of [Northern] Wei* (554), the *History of Music* in Fang Xuanling (579-648) et al’s *Book of Jin* (648), and indeed Yu Zhining (588-665) et al’s *History of Music* for the *Book of Sui* all follow Sima’s example by beginning their histories with reflections on the ethical and political significance of music and the utopic examples set by the ancient sage kings. Indeed, in all of the so-called “twenty-four official histories” (a name given by the Qianlong Emperor in 1739) that have a *History of Music* (or shared with rites), that of the *Book of [Southern] Qi* is the only exception to this pattern.

Pertinent to the Wen Emperor of Sui’s trouble with tuning, however, what always follows these eulogies of the ancient rulers and their ideal music in official music histories is precisely Yan Zhitui’s identification of the music problem: “it has been long since rituals and music have fallen into utter disrepair.” While some may take more time than others in reflecting on the moral stories behind the legendary music of the ancient rulers, whenever the chronological mode of narration commences—that is, moving from the pre-dynastic eras to the purported first dynasty Xia (c. 2070-c. 1600 BCE) and to the subsequent dynasties as recognized by historiographical convention—it is always told as a “fall,” so to speak, from that perfect state of music and rulership of the ancients. [A bit more detail and some examples].

What is more, further relevant to the Wen Emperor’s situation is one key event that would come to be highlighted in official music histories as a particular devastating juncture of this metahistory of music’s gradual decay: the so-called *yong jia zhi luan* (“Disaster during the years of Yong Jia”) in 311, when the various *hu* tribes (the so-called “five *hu*”) who had emigrated from the northern and northwestern frontiers overthrew the (western) Jin dynasty (265-316), forcing massive migrations of Han noblemen and gentries from their previous heartlands in the Yellow River and Guanzhong plains to the Yangtze River plains that previously saw fairly limited Han settlement. Several *hu* regimes were established during the following two and a half centuries, some of them able to more or less unify territories to the north of the Yangtze River, such as the (former) Qin (350-394) and the (northern) Wei, while most others warring with one another and causing much economic, social, and political chaos. And thus, the official music histories in the *Book of Song*, *Book of Wei*, *Book of Jin*, and *Book of Sui* all describe this period as an utter disaster for music, leaving properly tuned instruments (especially bells and chimes) into disrepair and disuse and knowledge of music lost and dispersed.

This historical background, as well as its related historiographical convention, sheds light on Yan Zhitui’s suggestion to the Wen Emperor. His taking issue with the sounds of the *hu* being mixed into music used for sacrificial rites and other courtly rituals is rather consistent with the historiographical lamentations of the devastating wars and chaos in the north due specifically to the invasions of the *hu*. Meanwhile, Yan’s recommendation of adopting music of the (southern) Liang in addressing the disrepair of tuning and mixture of *hu* elements, while dismissed outright by the emperor, also makes sense in light of the narrative of the loss of the perfect music of ideal rulers specifically in relation to the “disaster of *yong jia*.” Besides such, another common name for the southward migrations during the early 4th century in response to *hu* invasions and immigrations is *yi guan nan du*, literally “clothes and hat moving southward across the river.” Here, clothes and hat are used as metonyms for, literally, mantle of civilization—as well as the continuation of a genealogy of legitimate rulership. With help of the migrating nobilities, the (western) Jin regime reestablished itself in the Yangtze River plains and retained control for ore than a century (317-420, referred to as the eastern Jin) before yielding to the so-called successive “southern dynasties.” As both the *Book of Jin* and *Book of Sui* make clear, however, together moving southward with the Jin regime, its supporting northern Han nobilities and gentries and their “clothes and hat” were court musicians. And despite the irreversible losses suffered by music during that catastrophe, at least measure of continuity, as described in the two books, was maintained thanks to the knowledge these musicians carried with them.

In line of this music historiography of a successive genealogy from the legendary ancient sage rulers to the pitiful state of the Jin and their successors, albeit a genealogy of fall and decay, Yan Zhitui’s original solution to the Wen Emperor’s music problem would seem natural. If the full potential of music is considered to have only been exercised by the ancients and if such music as it has come down through the genealogy of rulers and chronology of history, in whatever degenerate form, is recognized to have sought refuge in the southern dynasties after the invasions of the *hu*, ancient classics and statues” and “past practices of the Liang” would seem logical places to look for answers for fixing music’s “disrepair.”

As someone who inherited its power from a succession of *hu* regimes in the Yellow River and Guanzhong plains after the so-called *yong jia* disaster, however, the Wen Emperor of Sui understandably disagreed with Yan’s analysis of where the kind of music closest to its legendary pre-fall perfection would be. Not only was the (southern) Liang by then already a “dead state,” but the Sui emperor also already bore ambition to subjugate the last southern dynasty, as he would in 589—so that the genealogy of the southern dynasties’ music, then theoretically at the hands of the Chen, is in its entirety the so-called *wang guo zhi yin*, “music of a dead/dying state.” The last ruler of Chen, who ascended to the throne during the same year as Yang Jian usurped the (northern) Zhou, was also known or rumored to be scandalously degenerate, indulging precisely in that kind of music later recognized in official history as predicting and leading to the downfall of his regime.

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Yet if music in the north is recognized as having been ravaged during the disastrous *hu* invasions and mixed (or even “contaminated,” as some official histories imply) with *hu* elements while music in the south is recognized as ensuing from a dead or dying regime; and if simultaneously the perfect music of ancient sage rulers is recognized as having been lost through generations of degeneracy and disarray, where, then, should one look to fix the disrepair of music, both for the technical problem of tuning and for the moral-political problem of practicing a righteous and correct kind of music?

According to Zheng Yi (540-591), a nobleman, high-ranking official, and political ally of the Wen Emperor, one should look to the northwest. After introducing the background to the emperor’s music conference, the *History of Music* in the *Book of Sui* records Zheng’s proposal, which is the only part (albeit for as long as 118 characters) that the preface to LLZYXB actually excerpts from this source. It is thus also the only opinion put forward during the music debate to be taken up by LLZYXB in framing the teachings of the Western missionaries. Instead of back-tracing the genealogy of music either by adopting, so to speak, a “lesser level” current practice or by looking for answers from texts—which he implies having tried to no avail—, Zheng invokes his experience of listening to a *hu* musician play *hu* pipa as inspiration for his solution of the tuning problem. The *hu* musician in question is Suzhipo, who Zheng suggests (corroborated by fleeting records elsewhere in the *Book of Sui*) was originally from Qiuci, one of the “Western region” kingdoms located on the northern ridges of the Tarim Basin (nowadays Kucha). The identification of Suzhipo as a *qiu ci ren* “person from Qiuci” implies that he was probably native of the Indo-European speaking population then living in that area. According to Zheng, Suzhipo came to the court of the (northern) Zhou in 568 as part of the retinue of the Princess of Turkic Khanate (552-774), who was newly married to the Wu Emperor of Zhou (543-578).

Zheng argues that what he hears from Suzhipo playing his *hu* pipa is essentially what he has been looking for all along as the correct tuning measurements between the seven degrees of the scale; notice that the seven-degree scale contains, in addition to *gong*, *shang*, *jiao*, *zhi*, and *yu*, two *bian* or “altered” degrees, *bian gong* or the altered *gong* (equivalent to *ti*, half-step below *do*/*gong*) and *bian zhi* or altered *zhi* (*fi*, half-step below *sol*/*zhi*). Indeed, when Suzhipo explains to Zheng that he inherited from his family a system of seven modes, Zheng finds that the Qiuci musician’s seven modes and the seven degrees of the “Chinese” scale whose tuning await fixing “as though match each other.” Among Zheng’s transliterations of Suzhipo’s name from his seven modes as recorded in the *Book of Sui*, some, such as *suo tuo li* the first mode and *ban shan* the fifth mode seem to correspond to the scale-degree names in *rag*/*raga* in Hindustani and Karnatic classical traditions—*shadja* and *pancham*, respectively, although unfortunately Zheng’s words as recorded here are the only known source of this so-called “Qiuci music,” barring other pathways for cross-examining these connections.

Further corroborating Suzhipo’s notion of five *dan* with the five pitches *Huangzhong* (the fundamental pitch, rather comparable to C), *Taicu* (D), *Guxi* (E), *Linzhong* (G), and *Yize* (A), Zheng Yi deduced the remaining seven pitches of the so-called “twelve *lü lü*,” the traditional “Chinese” equivalent to the chromatic scale; he likely did so by combining the five aforementioned pitches with the seven scale-degrees qua “tonic” of seven modes. This restored twelve chromatic pitches in turn allowed him to construct a system of modulations and mutations between eighty-four modes—seven modes times twelve pitches equal eighty-four. He thus also restored the meaning of *xuan gong zhuan diao*, a theoretical term describing such deduction of different modes by “rotating” the pitches and the modes to form varying combinations.

Zheng thus purportedly fixed the corrupted tuning of music at the court of Sui and restored and rediscovered lost meanings and contents of texts and theoretical systems that only nominally functioned at his time, namely the system of the “five principal and two altered degrees,” the twelve *lü lü*, and the concept of *xuan gong zhuan diao*. He claimed to have done so, furthermore, not by trying to rid music of *hu* elements, which Yan Zhitui had identified as a cause of the problem. Precisely to the opposite, he argues, while citing little beyond personal experience and inspiration, that what had been lost in the transmission of musical knowledge through genealogical succession of rulers or the passage of texts may nonetheless be retrieved from embodied practices of someone recognizably foreign (*hu*). Indeed, as articulated by Zheng and in turn recorded in the *Book of Sui*, it is through the experience of listening to Suzhipo’s Qiuci music on his *hu* pipa and from the ambiguous intuition of comparing his seven modes to the seven degrees that the corruption since time ancient of correct musical tuning either through gradual degeneracy or catastrophes such as the *yong jia* disaster may be remedied.

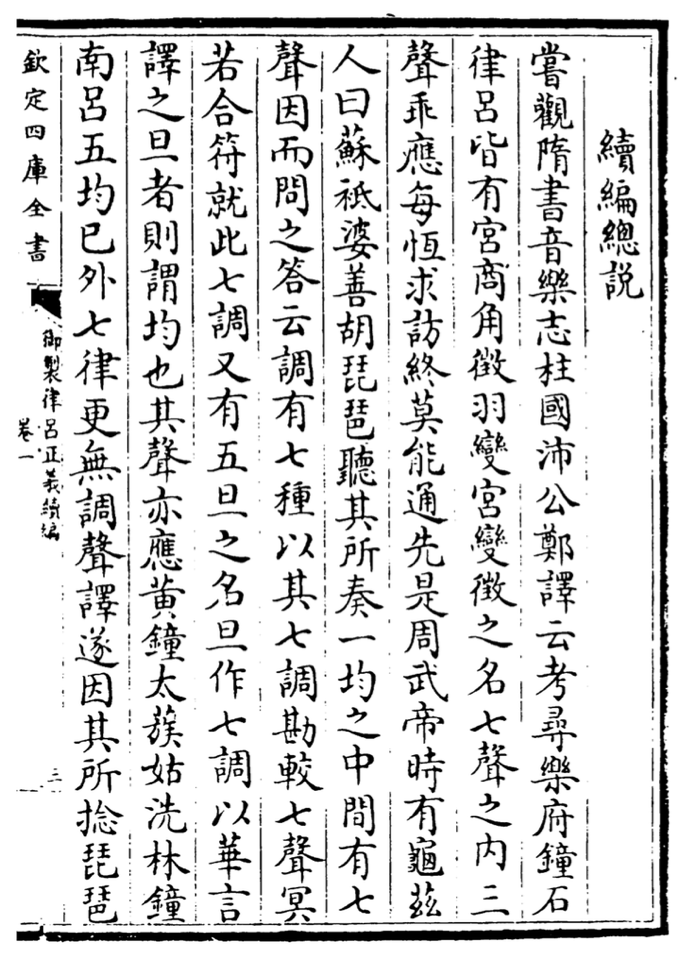
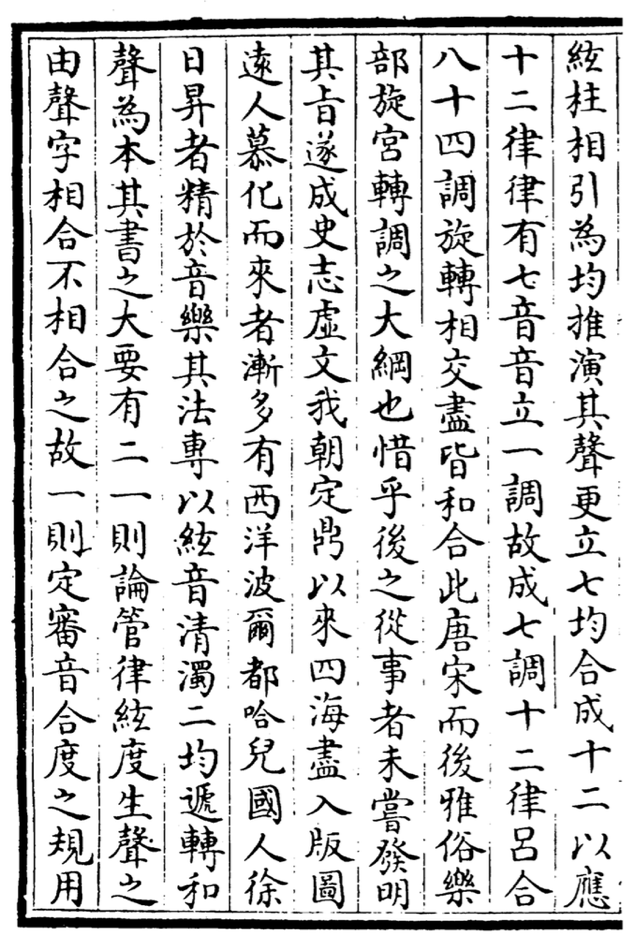
According to the *Book of Sui*, Zheng’s proposal of eighty-four modes derived from Suzhipo’s Qiuci music was not adopted by the Wen Emperor, who was noted here and subsequently as somewhat ignorant in matters musical. On the other hand, subsequent musical and historical scholarship considered Zheng’s theory a quintessential contribution and posited it the foundation system of pitch organization and their tuning and measurement that exhausts all possibilities of pitches and scale-degrees. Such is indeed the narrative adopted by the preface to LLZYXB, which suggests that Zheng’s ended up forming the basis for all music—both the ethically politically significant orthodox music for rites and the various kinds of music for entertainment.

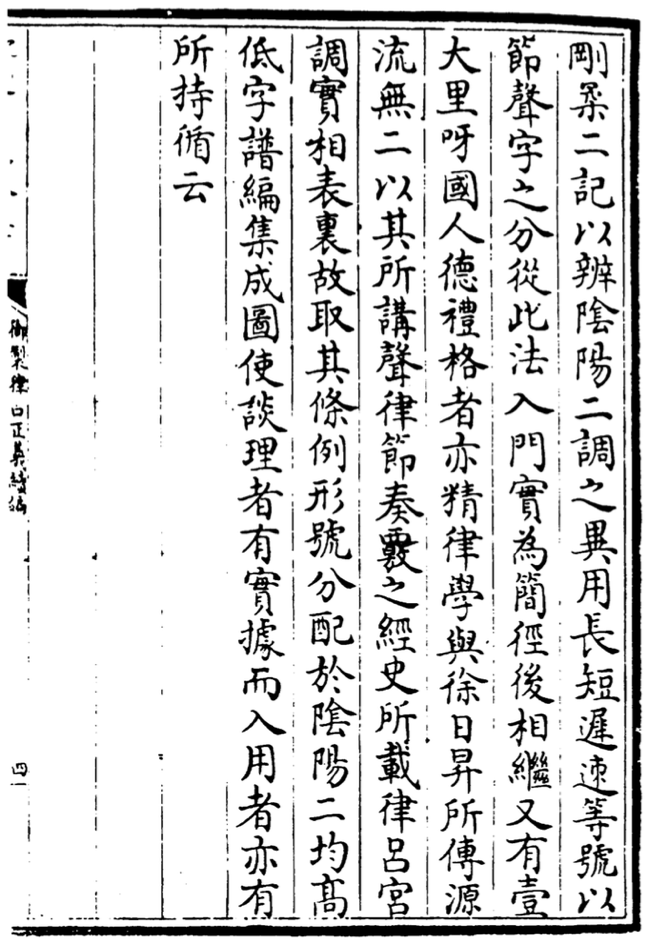
From here on till its end, however, the preface to LLZYXB seems to repeat the narrative of Zheng Yi—except that Suzhipo from the western frontier of the Sui is replaced by Catholic missionaries from a different kind of “West.” Right after quoting Zheng Yi extensively and noting its historical significance, the preface laments—rather like Yan Zhitui and Zheng Yi themselves at the beginning of their discourse—that the essence and meaning of Zheng’s system was again lost due to the lacking of understanding among subsequent practitioners. In an act of historical irony, Zheng’s theory designed to recover […] has become itself “empty words only logged in historical accounts” needing another round of restoration. And as the preface proceeds to summarize the teachings of Pereira and Pedrini, in many ways reminiscent of Zheng’s intuition with Suzhipo it argues that what the missionaries taught are really just a matter of “form and essence” with Zheng’s system. […]

The phrase that transitions the preface from the history of Zheng Yi and Suzhipo to the current event of Pereira and Pedrini further concretizes some connections between the Qiuci musician and the Catholic missionaries across the millennium of years of thousands of miles between them. While the actual sentence—“since the establishment of our dynasty [in Inner China], the territories of all four directions have been incorporated into the realm, and people from far away who come [to us] in desire of being civilized are increasing in number”—may seem innocently propagandist, two specific turns of phrases deserve closer rhetorical analysis. First the specific term for being “incorporated into the relam,” *ru ban tu*, literally meaning “incorporated into population registry and map,” is a term very familiar to the Qing specifically in relation to its conquest of Taiwan (1683) and series of expeditions against the Dzungar Mongols (in the 1680s and 1690s). Even after series of defeats at the hands of the Kangxi Emperor, who lead several expeditions himself, the Dzungar Mongols would remain the Qing’s major security threat (as perceived by the latter themselves) until its complete eradication in the 1750s. [Qiuci/Kucha under Dzungar control] [Qiuci music to remain an imagined matter until the 1750s] [*Huangyu Xiyu Tuzhi*, ethnography of music in Xinjiang, including Qiuci]

[…]

[The primary source, preface to LLZYXB, starts on the next page]





續編總說

嘗觀《隋書－音樂志》，柱國沛公鄭譯云：“考尋樂府鐘石，律呂皆有宮、商、角、徵、羽、變宮、變徵之名。七聲之內，三聲乖應。每恆求訪，終莫能通。先是周武帝時，有龜茲人曰蘇祗婆⋯⋯，善胡琵琶。聽其所奏，一均之中間有七聲。因而問之，答云‘⋯⋯調有七種’。以其七調勘校七聲，冥若合符。⋯⋯就此七調，又有五旦之名，旦作七調。以華言譯之，旦者，則謂均也。其聲亦應黃鐘、太簇、姑洗、林種、南呂五均。以外七律，更無調聲。譯遂因其所捻琵琶絃柱，相引為均，推演其聲，更立七均，合成十二，以應十二律。律有七音，音立一調，故成七調十二律，合八十四調。旋轉相交，蓋皆和合。”此唐宋而後，雅俗、樂部旋宮轉調之大綱也。惜乎！後此之從事者未嘗發明其旨。遂成史志虛文。我朝定鼎以來，四海盡入版圖。遠人慕化而來者漸多。有西洋波爾都哈兒國人徐日昇者，精於音樂。其法專以絃音清濁二均遞轉和聲為本。其書之大要有二：一則論管律、絃度生聲之由，聲字相合不相合之故；一則定審音合度之規，用剛、柔二記以辨陰、陽二調之異，用長、短、遲、速等號以節聲字之分。從此法入門，實為簡徑。後相繼又有壹大里呀國人德理格者，亦精律學，與徐日昇所傳，遠流無二。以其所講聲律、節奏，覈之經史所載律呂宮調，實相表裏。故取其條例、形、號，分配於陰陽二均高低字譜，編集成圖，使談理者有實據，而入用者亦有所持循云。

Introduction to the *Sequel*

Once [we] read *The Memoire on Music* from *The Book of Sui* where Zheng Yi, Duke Pei of the Country of Zhu, said: “[When I] examine the bells and stones of the imperial Bureau of Music, their tunings all have the names of *gong* [equivalent of do], *shang* [re], *jiao* [mi], *zhi* [sol], *yu* [la], *bian-gong* [fi], and *bian-zhi* [ti]. Among these seven scale-degrees [*sheng*], three of them are out of tune. I have always been trying to solve this, but still to no avail. During the reign of Emperor Wu of the previous Zhou dynasty, there was a man from Qizil named Suzhipo {…} who was good at playing the *hu* *pipa*. Listening to what he plays, [I] discovered that the seven sounds are found in each pitch collection [*jun*]. [I] thus asked [him], and [he] replied: {…} ‘there are seven kinds of modes [*diao*].’ Collating his seven modes to the seven scale-degrees, [I] found as though they match each other. {…} In addition to these modes, there are also what are called the five *dan*, and [each] *dan* yields seven modes. Translated into the Chinese language, *dan* means pitch collection [*jun*]. Their sounds also correspond to [those of the] pitch collections based on *Huangzhong* [C], *Taizu* [D], *Guxi* [E], *Linzhong* [G], and *Nanlü* [A]. The remaining seven pitches [*lü*] do not have their corresponding modes or pitch collections. Thus, Yi [I] thus followed the strings of the *pipa* that Suzhipo played, retuned [each of] them alternately as [characteristic pitches of] a pitch collection [*jun*], deduced their sounds, further established seven pitch collections [*jun*], and combined them [with the previous five] to match the twelve pitches [*lü*]. Since each pitch [*lü*] has [a pitch collection consisting of] seven pitches [*yin*], and each pitch [within this collection] generates a mode, and therefore there are, with seven modes in each of the twelve pitches, eighty-four modes. [The seven modes and the twelve pitches] rotate and combine with each other, everything matches.” This was the general framework for mutations and modulations in both highbrow and vernacular musics since the Tang and Song dynasties. What a pity! Practitioners afterwards did not discover or understand its essence. Thus it became empty words [only] logged in historical account. Since the establishment of our dynasty [in Inner China], the territories of all four directions have been incorporated into the realm, and people from far away who come [to us] in desire of being civilized are increasing in number. There was a westerner Xu Risheng [Tomás Pereira] of Portugal who was learned in music. His teachings are specialized in the mutations between clear [raised; with b-natural] and turbid [lowered; with b-flat] pitch collections and harmony in stringed music. There are two main points in his books: one is the causes of the sounds of pipes and strings, and the reasons for their pitch names’ [corresponding pitches’] being in tune or being out of tune; one [other] is establishing to rules of examining sounds and measuring proportions, by using the hard and soft signs to differentiate the two modes of *yin* and *yang*, and by using long, short, slow, fast, and other signs to differentiate between [durations of] notated pitches. Beginning the study of music through these methods is really effective. Later, after him there was also De Lige [Theodorico Pedrini] of Italy who was also specialized in the science of tuning, and [what he taught] compared to what Xu Risheng taught does not differ at all with respect to their origin and genealogy. Comparing what he [taught about pitch and rhythm to what the classics and histories say about tunings and modes shows that they are really just form and essence to one another. Therefore, [we] took his rules, shapes and signs and distributed them to [exemplary] scores in the *yin* and *yang* pitch collections and high and low [frequencies] and compiled them into illustrations [music examples], so that the theoreticians have actual evidence to draw on and practitioners have something to use and follow.

1. The following reconstructions are based on QSG. See also Wakeman 1985. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Crossley 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. QSG SZBJ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. QSG SZBJ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. QSG SZBJ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. QSG SZBJ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. DQHD, ZL. Rawski. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Lam 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. QSG YZ. DQHDZL. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. QSG SZBJ. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. QSG YZ. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Also mention QSG SZBJ. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ye Xiaoqing 2005 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Crossley and Rawski. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This would be a Manchu version of DQHD/DQHDZL [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Perdue [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Perdue [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Lam and Zito. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Complication of the 1916 restoration. As well [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. reports [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. reports [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Rawski [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Goldman. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Nanfu. Shengping Shu. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ye. Ye. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Goldman. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Drama King [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. B. Erlmann. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. K. Guy. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)