

Winds and the Ways of the Wu: Toward a Ritual Performative Synthesis in Early China

Dallas McCurley
Queen's College, CUNY

In the course of the Zhou dynasty (1046–221 BCE), a court ritual performance was devised known as *yue*, that synthesized music, dance, and hand-props.¹ As explained in the *Liji* (*The Book of Rites*):

Yin [music] is born from the *xin* [heart/mind] of a person. A person's *xin*, being affected by objects, moves. This movement takes shape in sound. Sound causes reciprocal resonances, which cause modulations. The completion of a set of modulations is called music. When to musical sound and dance performances are added shields, axes, feathers, and oxtails it is called *yue* (樂). (71)

The *Zhouli* (*The Rites of the Zhou*)² states that it is within the power of *yue* to “order the spirits, unify the states of the nation, harmonize all people, make courteous the hosting of guests, reach to the nobles in far-off posts, and vitalize all living creatures” (34). For this remarkable power, many and complex (and often contradictory) explanations were given in the early classical texts.³ There was general agreement, however, by the late Warring States (480–221 BCE, the closing period of the Zhou) that the aim of court *yue* was to project powerful organizing influences into a cosmos of comparably intricate order. This was in line with the characteristic practice of Warring States thinkers, to propose highly elaborate conceptual systems for understanding the world and acting correctly in it. An example, and indeed the most enduring, of such systems was known as *wuxing* (五行 ‘five phases’),* which proposed earth, wood, water, metal, and fire as the identifying elements of processes each of which had an associated color, planet, season, cardinal direction (five including the center), etc. One phase succeeded or overcame the previous one, and in turn gave rise to its own successor. A new ruler’s first task was to find out through omens which phase was in ascendancy, since to get this wrong could prove disastrous; to get it right was to come into alignment with the current ways of what is usually translated as

* A glossary of terms is located at the end of this article. [Ed]

‘Heaven’⁴ (*tian* 天 lit. ‘Sky’), that is, ‘to imitate *tian*.’⁵ While the system of correlations informing *yue* will be seen to differ somewhat from that of *wuxing*, *yue* was also believed to contribute to correct alignment with *tian* by functioning as a patterned order intimately sensitive to the ways of the cosmos. But more than that, it was held up as a performative activity vital to maintaining cosmic order. The paradox was fundamental: *yue* at once imitated *tian* and regulated *tian*; a slide into chaos was never far over the horizon.

There were ample reasons for this last belief. The Zhou dynasty proper (known as ‘the Western Zhou’) had been driven from its capital in 771 BCE and never regained its former power. The subsequent Spring and Autumn period (771–480 BCE) saw protracted fighting among what had been enfeoffed Zhou statelets; the Warring States period was named for the seven great states emergent from the Spring and Autumn, now embarked on a fight to the finish. The *Zhouli*, one of the principal sources on *yue*, may have been less a description of actual practice anywhere than a desperate bid to restore ‘the rites of the Zhou’ on the assumption that these had produced the etiquettes of behavior that had made the Western Zhou a Golden Age for many who came afterwards, and that whichever state carried out this restoration would receive the mandate of *tian* (天命 *tianming*) that the Zhou had enjoyed (and technically, still did enjoy). Nonetheless, the *Zhouli*—and other contemporary ritual primers such as the *Lushi chunqiu* (*The Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lu*)—predicated their idealized recommendations on a pooling of “whatever was known to [the compilers] about earlier administrative practice” (Falkenhausen 281). Above all, these texts took for granted the bureaucratic systems that had first been adumbrated during the Shang dynasty (c. 1600–1046 BCE) and were a decided and complex reality of the Warring States.⁶ In order to understand the power that certain Warring States ideologues ascribed to the synthesis of music, dance, and hand-props that was *yue*, it is necessary to realize, first, that these bureaucratic systems, highly rationalized as they were, functioned on the premise that administrative order could make direct contact with the numinous; and second, that within these systems, *yue* adopted a number of motifs and methods that shamans had used for millennia in mediating between their communities and the numinous surroundings in a world where there was no concept of ‘the numinous’ as different from ‘the natural’.

The complexities of the ‘correlative cosmology’ of *wuxing* were predicated on a codification of similarities, as the *Lushi chunqiu* makes clear: “Clouds [atop] a mountain [look like] a jungle; clouds [above] water [look like] fish scales; drought clouds [look like] leaping fire; rain clouds [look like] waves of water” (678). But similarities went beyond the merely visual. It appears that at least from the Chinese late-Neolithic, performers of ritual music and dance used ‘like to like’ codifications to integrate themselves physically into the accepted order of the cosmos, in order to bring about specific desired results. This is indicated, for example, in the remains of meter-long wooden drums discovered in prestigious graves at the Longshan-era (c. 3000–1800 BCE) site of Taosi in Shanxi Province. These drums were “mainly decayed, but from their traces it has been possible to infer that they were covered with crocodile skin” (Rawson 43). Specifically, they were covered with the skin of *alligator sinensis*, a member of the crocodilian order historically distributed throughout China. Similar drums have been found elsewhere in Shanxi and in Shandong (Liu 148). Both these provinces take as one of their borders part of a tributary of the Yellow River, known for its dramatic lurches between flooding and drying up.

Clearly, these climatic lurches would have concerned the agricultural communities of the late Neolithic era as vitally as they did those of the Shang and later dynasties. It is known that from the Shang and Zhou onward, the alligator was associated with land as well as water and so believed to be well placed to mediate between them; it was said to roar with “a voice like thunder before a change in the weather” (Glum 253). For both these reasons, its skin was used as membrane for drums beaten by shamanic performers in rituals to bring rain in times of drought; in all likelihood, these drums supplied the beat for accompanying dances. The instruments thus took their place in an associative nexus occurring in the progression from alligator to thunder-roar to rain. If the shaman-drummer, in a form of mimetic magic, could produce as many elements of that nexus as possible—if he could beat the alligator’s tautened skin to imbue the sound the drum made with the spirit of the beast whose roar presaged thunder—then surely the rain would be forced to come to complete the pattern.

Arguably a comparable mimetic magic was already employed at Jiahu, a large village settlement in present-day Henan Province founded *c.* 7000 BCE. Here several flutes were uncovered that to date remain the world’s oldest playable musical instruments. They were made from the wingbone of the red-crowned crane, a species of bird that migrates north in winter, returning south to breed in spring. Jiahu was an agricultural community whose people would have been alert to the cycle of seasons; might the crane-bone flute have been used in attempts to hasten the advent of birds and season alike? If so, the operative association would have been based at least in the flutes’ material—like, again, calling to like, the wingbone flute to its kin in the whole and distant birds, the associative nexus activated. It is possible that the shaman-flautist led a communal imitation of the mating-dance of these dramatically beautiful birds, which involves “bowing, jumping, running, stick or grass tossing, and wing flapping” (ICF par. 5). In any case, the summoning of the cranes would have been a major operation of sacred magic. It is perhaps unsurprising that the earliest Jiahu flutes were unearthed in the graves most richly supplied with burial goods, indicating the interment of men⁷ who had held high status in the community. A charismatic shaman-flautist who could mediate between the community and the vital numinous forces of the world would have enjoyed a renown plausibly extending into political influence, and his wondrous musical instrument would have been fittingly placed in his grave, at his continued disposal for the afterlife.

In attempting to bring about rain, certain Shang and, later, Zhou shamans seem to have used dance props to invoke a different precursor of rain than thunder, that is, the wind. In Shang oracle bone inscriptions, which were used to record divinations seeking advice from ancestral spirits,⁸ the notion of ‘rain dance’ (‘rain dancer’, ‘rain dancing’) is represented by the graph 𠂔 *wu*. What is depicted as hanging from the arms of the rain dancer is also shown being held out by two hands in a graph 𠂔 meaning both ‘to offer’ and ‘to perform.’ Scholars disagree about what is being offered here: flutes, plants, furs, and feathers have all been proposed (Tong 33). The earliest Chinese etymological dictionary, the Han-dynasty *Shuowen jiezi*, says that the Zhou graph 𠂔 (*wu*, a type of shaman),⁹ derives directly from 𠂔, adding that the 𠂔 “brings down the spirits by dancing” and that the graph “images a person dancing with two [long] sleeves”; engravings on bronze ritual vessels of the Warring States indeed picture dancing shamans tossing their long sleeves aloft to stream in the air. Whether the Shang rain dancers wore

sleeves extending beyond their fingers as elements of costuming, or held plants, furs, or feathers as dance props, any kind of continuous movement would have given these a sinuous, floating effect, effectively making visible the wind that (like the alligator's roar) was traditionally known to foreshadow rain. In that case, the flute, the single non-flexible object among those proposed as candidates for the mysterious offering in 𪛗, would be easily explained. For the sounds produced on the flute could have been thought to make the wind not visible but audible, and so themselves to play an appropriate part in rites urging, in the wake of the wind, the first eddies of rain required for a good harvest.

For the Zhou *wu*-shamans, the function of invoking rain in times of drought came under the more generalized remit of averting pollution and catastrophes; their services were thus required on an ad hoc basis to deal with, for example, spirits carrying disease or unquiet ghosts at funerals. Nonetheless, *wu*—who numbered women as well as men—were afforded little prestige. Not only were they commoners (as opposed to lineage aristocrats), their methods, which probably involved some form of spirit possession, also seem to have been distrusted. There was, further, a tendency to associate these shamans with what the Zhou took to have been the unbridled behavior of their Shang predecessors. In a passage mainly concerned with excoriating the Shang, the *Shangshu* (*Book of Historical Documents*)¹⁰ remarks: “If you are to have constant dancing in the palaces and drunken singing in the halls, I call this the *wu feng* (巫風 ‘the *wu* wind’ or ‘the way of the *wu*’)” (10). The Zhou elite needed the *wu*, people who ‘brought down the spirits by dancing,’ but did not enlist them in the great rites of state, and placed them under the direction of *siwu* or ‘*wu* managers.’ The latter—perhaps indeed from as early as the Western Zhou—were full-time officials in the Division of Invokers of the Ministry of Spring (*Zhouli* 38-39). They were not practitioners but elite theorists and prescribers of ritual practice, who on account of the kings’ reliance on them for guidance on how to conduct vital affairs of state, had themselves gained “access to political power and economic benefit” (Cook 241). It was another division of the Ministry of Spring, the Great Department of *Yue*, which took charge of the court ritual dances that are the main focus of the present paper. Before turning to these, however, it is worth gleaning some sense of how the bureaucratic planners intersected with actual ritual practitioners by considering the *Zhouli*’s rendition of a performance by the exorcist known as the *fangxiangshi* (方相氏 lit. ‘direction-orienting master’). This was not a *wu*, but the figure who at the annual *danuo* (大雩 great exorcism) at New Year’s Eve led the “sending off [of] the accumulated pollution and evil influences of the past year” (Lewis 186).

The *fangxiangshi* appeared as the demonic theatricalized in order to drive off demons, another form of ‘like to like’ communication. On his head he wore:
 a shaggy skin having four eyes of gold, and [he] is clad in a black upper garment and a red lower garment. Grasping his lance and brandishing his shield, he leads the many officials to perform the seasonal exorcism, searching through the great buildings and driving out pestilence. (*Zhouli* 48)

The four-eyed beast mask would have presented, above all, an ability to see in the four cardinal directions at once; here came a ferocious figure whose scrutiny was total, from whom there was no hiding. It chimed with the action the *fangxiangshi* performed at great funerals, where, the *Zhouli* says, he “goes in front of the coffin and on its arrival at the

tomb, when it is being inserted into the burial chamber, he strikes the four corners of the chamber with his lance and expels the evil spirits” (48). During the *danuo*, the *fangxiangshi* would also have struck with percussive violence into the corners of chambers to summon forth and expel all demons. These gestures would probably have been accompanied by musicians’ drumming, to intensify the calculated savagery of the performance.¹¹

A reader of the *Zhouli* account is recurrently if indirectly reminded that the *fangxiangshi* was a state functionary. There was nothing *ad hoc* about the *danuo*; it was a major, pre-scheduled ritual event, an essential prelude for auspicious continuance in the New Year. Underwriting the exorcism’s magic were the power, resources, and systematic planning of the bureaucratized state. The *fangxiangshi* and “the many officials” went methodically “searching through the great buildings.” In each, the performance was standardized, effectively choreographed. Derk Bodde adds that the graph for ‘searching’ has a connection with “a rope or cord, so that this clause may perhaps be understood in the sense of roping off” the buildings once the exorcism had been done, to symbolically secure them, one by one, against return of the evil influences (78). By New Year’s morning, all the significant enclosures had been cleared, the demons driven, at least for a time, outside the city limits.

Like the Jiahu flautists, the Taosi drummers, and the Shang rain dancers, the *fangxiangshi* was a spatial operator. All four performer types integrated themselves into the natural/numinous cosmos by simultaneous appeal to eye and ear, variously using musical instruments, dance movements, and hand props believed to be magically attuned to the spirit targets of communication. While the flautists, drummers, and rain dancers called across distance—to faraway cranes, to thunder as yet unheard in a silent sky, to wind unfelt in a still atmosphere—the exorcists worked at close quarters to bring to bear a directly purifying ferocity in a planned sequence of demarcated spaces. The *fangxiangshi* and his many officials also enjoyed a religio-political support that was bureaucratically more developed than any support system the other performers had available to them. This found its most elaborate performative development, as the *Zhouli* indicates, in the court ritual dances. Reference will also be made to the *Liji*, an overtly Confucian compilation declaring, in the name of Confucius, that the highest responsibility of court leaders was to oversee *li* (禮 ‘ritual’) and *yue* (the music-dance-props synthesis) (70). The *Liji* nonetheless drew the bulk of its performance materials from Warring States texts—that is, from before the decree of Han Emperor Wu (r. 140–87 BCE) that Confucianism would henceforth constitute the state’s official ideology.

It has already been mentioned that *yue* adopted a number of shamanic motifs and methods, but through the transforming organizational resources of a state bureaucracy. They were shamanic, first, insofar as they proposed to mediate between the community and the numinous surroundings through ‘like to like’ sacred magic. Unlike *wu* shamans, however, the dancers were not commoners but young aristocrats—selected, in the *Zhouli*’s phrase, from among “the sons and brothers of the nation [i.e. the nobility]” (21). They performed their mediatory magic, moreover, not through any form of spirit possession but through prescribed and repeatable movements taught to them in the court academy known as the Eastern Institute, under the charge of the Great Department of *Yue*. In the case of the Neolithic shaman-flautists, the Neolithic (and subsequent) alligator-skin drummers, the Zhou *wu*, and even the Zhou state functionary *fangxiangshi*, what made the rite effective

was most immediately the charisma and virtuosity of the lead performer. In the case of the court ritual dances, however, efficacy lay above all in the performances themselves, rather than in the performers who were necessary for their realization but individually replaceable. In turn, those performances were believed to have power because they functioned, in a sense, as nodal points in a grand spatio-temporal network.

The *Zhouli* states that the major set of ritual dances is known as ‘the Six Dances.’ These are to be performed during sacrificial addresses to the major powers of the cosmos and the dynasty’s ancestral founders (35). Each dance is to begin with a different *yang* note struck on a bell, followed by a voice singing the corresponding *yin* note; the dance associated with this particular *yang-yin* combination then gets under way. In the course of the dance, specific numbers of musical modulations occur in connection with the spirits addressed, there being six kinds of the latter (the feathered beings, the short-haired beings, the scaly beings, the furry beings, the shelled beings, and the stars of the celestial order) (35). The first three of the Six Dances are the *yunmen* or ‘cloud-gate,’ performed in sacrifices to the spirits of the celestial realm; the *xianchi* or ‘celestial pond,’ performed during sacrifice to the Earth Power; and the *dashao* or ‘great succession,’ danced in sacrifices to the ‘four distant objects.’ Each has its own type of drum (respectively, thunder-drums, celestial drums, and great drums), flutes made of a different kind of bamboo (solitary, young, and northern), and stringed instruments made of materials taken from different sacred mountains; and they are to be performed, respectively, on a dry mound at the winter solstice, on a marshy mound at the summer solstice, and in the ancestral temples during temporally unspecified rites. The text then breaks off this specification of details. Perhaps they were already missing when a copy of the text was presented to the same Emperor Wu who made Confucianism the state’s official ideology.¹² Regardless, the Six Dances were clearly intended to work as an intricately cross-referencing performative system understood to be comprehensive in its intersection with the sacred. The coordination of multiple specifications of detail with representative spirit addresses and times and places of performance, made for a system imitating the cosmos that was believed to function according to a cross-referencing of elements at least comparable to that mapped by correlative cosmology. Like the shamanic performances mentioned earlier—with all the differences just elaborated—the system of the Six Dances was designed for physical integration into the accepted order of the cosmos in order to make things happen (specifically, to restore the ‘rites of the Zhou’ and with them the retrospectively immaculate ordering of the dynasty’s opening period).

This recalls the fundamental paradox that was earlier noted of *yue*: it at once imitated *tian* and was needed to regulate *tian* in a time of crisis. The paradox can be further explored through two considerations. The first is that of the motif of wind, associated with performances to bring rain by both Shang rain dancers and Zhou *wu*, and transformed in the world of court ritual by correlative thinking. The second is that of the various props carried by the ritual dancers, which, while not mentioned in the *Zhouli*, are in the *Liji* referred to as the main identifying marks of two categories of dance; they also function to align these dance categories with the seasonal cycle and its implications for appropriate types of performance.

The wind was sometimes called upon to provide a numinous origin for musical, and by extension political, order; at other times, itself insufficiently ordered, it

required musical regulation, and this again was held to merge with political order. Thus in one of the origin-stories for music found in the *Lushi chunqiu*, the ‘Yellow Emperor’ Huangdi, first of the legendary sage-emperors, orders his minister Linglun (lit. ‘Regulatory Musician’) to standardize musical pitches. The minister intuitively cuts a section 3.9 *fen*¹³ in length between nodes of a bamboo that is “thick and weighty with a hollow center” (285). Blowing into this section, he realizes that he has found a basic tone from which eleven others can be mathematically generated. He cuts eleven more pipes but still has to determine the order in which they are to be arranged. He then hears a bird singing with its female partner. The bird is a *feng* (風, meaning both ‘phoenix’ and ‘wind’); the female partner is called a *huang*. Taking the six *yang* notes of the *feng* and the six *yin* notes of the *huang*, Linglun orders the sounds so that *yang* and *yin* notes alternate. The story follows of how Huangdi’s son, Zhuangxiu, delighted by the musical sounds created by the eight winds at his coronation, commands his minister, Feilong (lit. ‘Flying Dragon’), to recreate the sounds of the winds for sacrifices to the high god (285).

In both these accounts, musical order already inheres in the cosmos (whether in the winds or in the paired birds of which one has a name that is synonymous with ‘wind’), needing only to be discerned by the sage’s minister and made playable on instruments. In other texts, the eight winds as original music impart a mathematical beauty to the appropriate insignia of rank. The mid-3rd century *Zuozhuan* (*The Commentary of Zuo* [on the Spring and Autumn Annals]) finds in these winds an explanation of why *yue* dancers, when the ruler is present, line up in 8 rows (佾 *yi*) of 8 dancers each; for a marquis or feudal lord, *yi* are formed of 6 by 6, for great officials, *yi* of 4 by 4, and for lesser officials, of 2 by 2; the number of the winds provides the benchmark whereby the status of the patron will be displayed in choreography (5).

The second view of wind, as something that requires regulation by human performance, finds expression in another *Lushi chunqiu* story, which tells how the legendary Zhuxiang clan used music to correct imbalances in nature actually caused by the winds. The clan fashioned a five-string instrument to attract the *yin* when a wind-borne accumulation of *yang* was preventing fruits and nuts from ripening (284). Correspondingly, the Yinkang clan invented a dance to disperse and guide an accumulation of *yin* that was blocking the watercourses and clogging the people’s bodies (285). In these narratives, the chaos caused by the winds is averted through changes effected by music and dance in the mix of *yin* and *yang*. But the belief was also repeatedly expressed that the wind could be directly ordered, not only by wind instruments such as flutes and pipes, but also through the sympathetic resonances that could be made to emanate from struck bells and chimestones and plucked stringed instruments,¹⁴ and that society could be ordered the same way. In prefacing its claim for musical regulation of the eight winds with the statement “Government imitates music” (128), an early Warring States text, the *Guoyu* (*Words of the Nation*), follows the logic that: musical instruments (through their organized resonances) impart order to the winds; the winds in turn affect people’s behavior by imparting to them the characteristics of the local ‘atmospheric-geographical energy’, the *qi*,¹⁵ that finds a materialization in wind. *Feng* (‘wind’, ‘phoenix’) can also mean ‘customs’ in the sense of the ‘prevailing moods’ sweeping through a region, as in the section of the *Shijing* (*Classic of Poetry*) entitled “Guofeng” (“*Feng* of the Nation”) (Keightley 126). Mark Edward Lewis marshalls textual support for the “*feng*” of “Guofeng” also meaning

“ ‘tune,’ much like the English ‘air’ ” (218). The point is that the graph’s sliding from meaning to meaning reflected a sense of pervasive connectivity between ‘wind,’ ‘airs,’ ‘music,’ ‘mood,’ and ‘custom,’ whereby any one could directly or indirectly influence one or more of the others, which would then radiate their own influences.

The most accurate sense of the paradox that *yue* both imitated and regulated *tian*, then, was that human society was held to partake of a cosmos comprising a web of opposed but complementary forces. When in balance, these provided a fine model for human behavior in imitation of *tian*; but like human society itself, they could slip out of balance and must then be regulated, not least by the *yue* that could go to work simultaneously on human behavior and the play of cosmic forces. In this connection, attention should finally turn to the props that the dancers—at least in the *Liji*—were instructed to carry. According to this text, the court *yue* were broadly divided into the prop-based categories of *yumao* (羽毛 ‘feather-oxtail’) and *ganqi* (干戚 ‘shield-axe’). (While not mentioning these categories, the *Zhouli* does refer to a set of ‘Small Dances’ [35] which were used in training for performance of the Six Dances. Each of the Small Dances required expertise with a different *yumao* or *ganqi* prop.)¹⁶ *Yumao* props, which also included reeds and flutes, were conducive, like the long sleeves and other comparable props of the Shang rain dancers and contemporary Zhou *wu*, to flexible, graceful manipulation; the props of *ganqi* dances—not only axes and shields but also lances and daggers—were hard and reflected military intentions. If it is noted in addition that they could well recall the lance and shield with which the *fangxiangshi* went into public battle against demons in the *danuo*, this is prefatory to making the familiar point that in the ritual dances (which were aristocratic affairs and anything but public), all shamanic motifs were transformed in accord with an arcane and complex system of correlative thinking.

Before elaborating on this, it should first be stressed that while *yumao* and *ganqi* may have designated different performance styles, there is no way of reconstructing these. The only one of the Six Dances of which there is currently extant (in the *Liji*) account of any detail is the *Dawu* or ‘great Wu,’ referring to King Wu, the founding ancestor who led the Zhou armies in overthrowing the Shang. The *Liji*’s laconic ‘stage directions’¹⁷ for this *ganqi* dance suggest a conventionalized choreography of movement sequences alternating with held poses in a stately dance-drama; but it cannot be known whether or not this was characteristic of other *ganqi* dances, or in what way(s) it may or may not have differed from the choreography of *yumao* dances.

The function of the *yumao/ganqi* division which *can* be reconstructed from the *Liji* concerned preparation and scheduling of the ritual dances. The prop category to which any given dance belonged, signaled at what time of year it should be performed, and the opposing time of year it should be learned and rehearsed. “In the spring and the summer,” the text states, “they study the shields and daggers; in the autumn and the winter they study the feathers and flutes” (40). Elsewhere it is noted that the *yumao* dances “are ordered to be performed” before the ruler and upper ranks of the court in the second month of spring (29); the *Liji* does not complete this with information on when the *ganqi* dances were ordered to be performed, but it can safely be assumed that this was in a month of autumn or winter. These were by no means trivial matters. To correlate the dances to the year’s seasonal cycles was to align them to the state’s policy categories of *wen* and *wu*, which were also correlated to the seasons. *Wen* (文 lit. ‘pattern’

or ‘patterning’) meant the bringing of political order through administrative or diplomatic means; *wu* (武 ‘martiality’) referred to the military or punitive actions that ideally served *wen*. Spring and summer, the seasons of growth leading to harvest, were appropriately the seasons of civil diplomacy; autumn and winter, devoted as they were to withering and death, were the seasons for war and punishment. The basic injunction was given, among other places, in the late Warring States text *Jingfa* (*Classic of Laws*): “Following Heaven’s (ways of) life leads to the nourishment of life; this is called *wen*. Following Heaven’s (ways of) killing leads to cutting down the dying; this is called *wu*” (Yates 62).

In both linking itself to this systemizing mentality of Warring States philosophical schools and harking to the supposedly unified nation ruled by the Western Zhou, the *Zhouli* offered itself as “the blueprint of a hoped-for unified Chinese empire” (Falkenhausen 280). The ritual dances it championed had much to recommend them in terms of mounting a comprehensive ordering of multiple, intertwined levels of human and cosmic practice. *Yue* bore traces of ancient and well-tried ‘like-to-like’ shamanic thinking and practice. At the same time, it instantiated a faith in bureaucratic order, claiming all the resources of such an order for its realization. The complexities of its interrelations, crafted in a composite physicality of music, dance, and props working in consonance, produced a cascade of corresponding resonances of such reach that the spirits were to be ordered, the states unified, people harmonized, guests properly hosted, the far-off nobility incorporated, and all living creatures vitalized.

Glossary

danuo: 大雉 great exorcism

dashao: 大韶 lit. ‘great succession,’ one of the Six Dances

dawu: 大武 lit. ‘great Wu,’ one of the Six Dances

fangxiangshi: 方相氏 lit. ‘direction-orienting master,’ an exorcist

feng: 風 both ‘phoenix’ and ‘wind’

fuwu: ‘five-colored silk-streamers dance’

ganqi: 干戚 lit. ‘shield-axe,’ one of two ritual dance categories

ganwu: lit. ‘shield dance,’ one of the Small Dances

huang: female phoenix

huangwu: lit. ‘imperial dance,’ one of the Small Dances

li: 裡 ritual

maowu: lit. ‘oxtail dance,’ one of the Small Dances

OBG: oracle bone graph

OBI: oracle bone inscription

qi: an ‘atmospheric-geographical energy’ that finds a materialization in wind

renwu: lit. ‘the people’s [i.e. the nobility’s] dance,’ one of the Small Dances

Shangdi: ‘Above-Lord,’ the highest celestial power for the Shang

tian: 天 lit. ‘Sky’

tianming: 天命 ‘the mandate of Sky’

wen: 文 lit. ‘pattern’ or ‘patterning’

wu: 武 ‘martiality’

wu: 雩 OBG for ‘rain dance’ or ‘rain dancer’

wu: 巫 a type of shaman

wuxing: 五行 ‘five phases,’ a correlative theory

xianchi: 咸池 ‘celestial pond,’ one of the Six Dances

yi: 佾 8 rows of 8 dancers in each row

yue: 樂 a court ritual performance that synthesized music, dance, and hand-props

yumao: 羽毛 ‘feather-oxtail,’ one of two categories of ritual dance

yunmen: 云門 lit. ‘cloud gate,’ one of the Six Dances

yuwu: lit. ‘feather dance,’ one of the Six Dances

zou: 侑 OBG for “to offer”; “to perform”

Notes

1. Depending on the context, *yue* in the classical texts can mean either simply ‘music’ (its nearly invariable modern meaning) or the ritual synthesis that is the topic of much of this paper.
2. In the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE) burning of books, the *Zhouli* was especially targeted because the Qin felt that it reeked of Zhou authority.
3. Few of these texts dated to before the Warring States; the *Liji* was not finally compiled until after 79 CE (Loewe 294), although it draws materials on ritual performance from a number of Warring States texts in its section on ritual performance (notably the *Xunzi*, the *Zhouli*, and the *Lushi chunqiu*). All of these texts were compilations of materials by various writers sometimes stretching over several centuries. A more comprehensively framed account of the power ascribed to *yue* and the reasons given for it can be found in McCurley “Performing Patterns.”
4. This will be referred to as *tian* in the present article, to bypass the numerous misleading connotations of ‘Heaven.’
5. See Schwartz 135-382 for a review of the major schools of Warring States philosophy.
6. As Benjamin Schwartz insists, these organizations should not be thought of in terms of a modern bureaucracy: “The names of [Zhou] offices are vague and fluctuating. The holders of offices do not necessarily perform the functions associated with their titles. Offices usually are hereditary within what might be called the lower official nobility.” Still, “apparently on the lower rungs of this official nobility a stratum emerged which actually composed and handled an impressive array of documents [and] were experts in the protocols of ritual, ceremonial, and penal law” (44).
7. As revealed by gravesite excavation and analysis of skeletons.

8. In Shang divination, a hot poker was applied to cattle scapulas (or, often, turtleshell plastrons), causing crack-marks to appear that were taken to be the spirits' response to questions put to them. The circumstances of the divination, including the questions and the resulting prognostication as interpreted and pronounced by the king were then inscribed on the bone or plastron using a second system of codified marks: oracle bone graphs (OBG) that give every sign of constituting a writing system with some history of development, although the details of that history are still unknown. See Wang "The Earliest Writing?" for a recent survey of possible precursors to oracle bone script.

9. This is the second of four graphs in the present paper for which the modern romanization is pronounced 'wu'; see Glossary for this and other early Chinese terms.

10. *The Shangshu* was a Warring States text including documents going back to the Western Zhou.

11. This at least was the case in the Later Han *danuo* as described in the *Hou Hanshu* (3127).

12. Passages missing from the *Zhouli* included the entire sixth section, devoted to the Ministry of Winter, which was concerned with public works. It should be noted that when the text was first presented at the Han court, it caused little stir; for a sketch of its subsequent history see Loewe ed. 26-31.

13. The exact measurement of *fen* prior to the the first imperial dynasty the Qin (221–206 BCE), when measures were first standardized, is unknown.

14. In systematizing texts such as the *Lushi chungiu*, it was claimed that throughout the cosmos, everything both resonated and responded to other resonations (678).

15. There is no Western term that directly corresponds to *qi*. As Schwartz (179-84) shows, it combines aspects of energy and of matter, but a given *qi* also has certain characteristics. Mark Edward Lewis in discussing the term cites the *Shuowen* reference to steam rising off rice, and moves on to wind, and thence to music, "a form of controlled or artificial wind" (219).

16. The *fuwu* ('five-colored silk-streamers dance'), *yuwu* ('feather dance'), and *maowu* ('oxtail dance') all refer to items from the *yumao* repertoire. The *huangwu* ('imperial dance') was done in time of drought; it may have used another common *yumao* prop, reeds (which sprout in rivers and ponds). Dancers of the *renwu* ('the people's [i.e. the nobility's] dance') manipulated long sleeves. The last of the Small Dances was the *ganwu* ('shield dance').

17. These 'stage directions,' which together with means proposed at the time for understanding them are discussed in McCurley ("Patterns" 145-146), and are as follows:

With their shields the dancers present a mountain's firmness. They show King Wu's affairs. They brandish axes and stomp harshly. The great Duke [of Zhou's] wisdom is shown. At King Wu's rebellion, all kneel. It is the formalizing of the Zhou summons. The king's action then begins in the northern mountains.

Again a change: destroying the Shang.

Change: the South.

Change: redrawing the borders of the southern kingdoms.

Change: showing the dividing of the states: the Duke of Zhou is given those on the left and the Duke of Zhao those on the right.

Change: all are again united in obeisance. The Son of Tian fires [his men] into action. Like a team of four horses they cut down [the enemy], spreading abundant awe. (*Liji* 76)

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