

Music, the Ancestor of Medicine

By Mu Jie, The Epoch Times
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(Hector Mata/AFP/Getty Images)

Pleasant music works to cultivate one's temperament, to purify one's mind, and to deliver a sense of beauty. But has it ever occurred to you that the creation of music was originally intended as a medicine to cure?

The origin of music can be traced back to the creation of Chinese characters by Cangjie (2650 B.C.), a legendary figure in ancient China. The Chinese character "Yao," which means medicine, is derived from the character "Yue," which means music. The character Yao is composed of two parts: a radical, meaning grass or herb, and the character for music. In addition to carrying the meaning of medicine or cure, this character can stand for music itself, happiness, or enjoyment. Music is therefore the ancestor of medicine. Cangjie, according to one legend, created the Chinese character Yue based on an historic event, in which Huangdi (Yellow Emperor) defeated Chi You (war deity). In ancient China, soldiers commonly beat war drums on the battlefields to inspire their bravery and gain the advantage.

After the fight between the Yellow Emperor and Chi You, the beating of the war drums knocked Chi You's soldiers unconscious. To cure the defeated soldiers, the merciful Yellow Emperor created a metal object in the shape of a bell, which is now called a musical instrument.

The middle of the bell-type metal was made of bronze, tied to silk strings on both its sides; the metal object was placed on a wooden frame to play. Based on a shape of seal characters, an ancient style of Chinese calligraphy, the middle part of the character Yue is "Bai," which means white and symbolizes metal—one of the five elements.

The ancient Chinese believed that everything in the universe, including the human body and even sound, was composed of the five elements of metal, wood, water, fire and earth. Of the five elements, metal corresponds to the color white. Cangjie invented the character Yue based on this bell-type metal. For what purpose was the metal object created? It was used to evoke a spirit

from the dead, or to call back the souls of Chi You's soldiers. According to legend, after the war, Chi You's soldiers were lying on the ground, stunned by the war drums. Once their souls were healed, the soldiers came back to life.

Music, therefore, was used for healing. Later, herbs were found to contain healing effects, and one radical was thus placed on top of "Yue" to become "Yao." As a result, the primary purpose of music in ancient China was to cure people of illness.

Researchers in the field of medicine have been conducting research into medical properties of music. While in his or her mother's womb, a baby can develop a reaction to music. Of the five human senses, human's ability to hear is the first one to "be enlightened." Unborn babies in their mothers' wombs can listen to the mothers' heartbeats, breathing, and talking. That's why modern parents give their babies prenatal education, such as exposing pregnant mothers to music. Clinically elegant and relaxing music helps reduce stress levels, ease breathing and nourish the organs.

One American scientist discovered that music is composed of waves of resonance, which can both influence one's feelings and resonate with the human body. Meanwhile, music contains a variety of rhythms, while our body movements tend to follow musical rhythms. In consequence, changes of musical rhythms work to accelerate and regulate our biorhythms. Hence, some capable doctors would carefully select music of various rhythms to cure patients of various symptoms.

Ancient music was classified into Qingyue and Yayue (elegant music), which served the purpose of purifying one's soul and mind. It was believed that good music had a beneficial effect on the human body. This was why ancient music was always of a slow tempo, for the purpose of letting people calm down. After listening to music, one is supposed to achieve spiritual tranquility instead of emotional excitement that seems to drive people out of their mind. Confucius once said that music should in fact be elegant.

Even in 1950s, people who were fond of music tended to be more easygoing. But now things have changed. There is something in modern music that provokes one's demon nature. Some people even dance or twist their bodies crazily to the music, seemingly going wild or even lose consciousness with excitement. The demonic music can even cause people to display agitation, feel depressed or tend to lose their temper, which, in fact, brings great harm to health and achieves no healing effect.

The music in the Chinese New Year Spectacular showcased in recent years is bright, pure, elegant and melodious with a definite classical slant. Listeners have said it touches their hearts—perhaps because it engenders kind thoughts and respect for our higher selves.

Many Spectacular performers have said that their practices are really a process of cultivating their hearts and minds. Positive feedback from audiences has been received—"After watching your performance, my illness is cured." Perhaps we should credit part of this miracle to music.