

## Reviving Literacy in Chinese Court Music from the Zhou Dynasty: The Case of a University in China

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### ABSTRACT

Chinese court music from the Zhou Dynasty holds immense cultural and historical significance, reflecting ancient China's sophisticated societal ethos, rituals, and values. The study's objective is to investigate the reviving of literacy in Chinese court music from the Zhou Dynasty at a University in China. The study encompasses a comprehensive literature review exploring ancient Chinese music, educational practices, and cultural preservation efforts. The research primarily focuses on the efforts made at a university in China to reconstruct and promote ancient court music, collaborating with cultural institutions like museums and performance venues. Three key informants include experts in Chinese court music, educators specializing in ancient music education, and students engaged in court music programs. Data analysis involves thematic analysis of qualitative data gathered through observation forms, interview forms, and questionnaires. The research results reveal the significant educational role of court music in moral education, virtue cultivation, and societal harmony. Suggestions for future research include exploring innovative pedagogical approaches, expanding collaborative partnerships, and evaluating long-term sustainability strategies for preserving Chinese court music heritage.

**Key words:** Chinese Court Music, Zhou Dynasty, Educational Initiatives, Preservation, Pingdingshan University

### INTRODUCTION

The ancient Chinese court music from the Zhou Dynasty is a testament to China's rich cultural and artistic heritage. With its roots deeply embedded in centuries-old traditions, this musical form offers a glimpse into ancient Chinese society's sophisticated court life, rituals, and beliefs. However, despite its historical significance, the knowledge and literacy surrounding Chinese court music have gradually waned over time. As a result, there is a pressing need to revive literacy in Chinese court music, particularly from the Zhou Dynasty era, through targeted educational initiatives (Hayford, 2017; Bruhn, 2022; Gilgan, 2022; He & Sornyai, 2023).

Chinese court music has a long and illustrious history, dating back to the Zhou Dynasty, which spanned from approximately 1046 BCE to 256 BCE. Music was pivotal in court ceremonies, religious rituals, and cultural festivities. Instruments such as bells, drums, flutes, and stringed instruments were meticulously crafted and utilized to create intricate musical compositions that reflected the social and spiritual ethos of the time (Trehub et al., 2015; Piacentini, 2021; Peng, 2023).

However, the transmission of knowledge and understanding of Chinese court music faced challenges as dynasties changed, cultural practices evolved, and historical upheavals

occurred (Leung, 2018; Wu & Boonsrianun, 2023). The lack of comprehensive educational programs and initiatives focused on Chinese court music has led to a decline in literacy and awareness among contemporary audiences, including students, scholars, and the general public (Zarrow, 2015; Reimers & Chung, 2019).

The diminishing literacy in Chinese court music poses a significant challenge to preserving and appreciating this cultural heritage. Without adequate educational interventions and initiatives, there is a risk of losing valuable insights into the musical traditions, techniques, and cultural contexts that defined the Zhou Dynasty era. Moreover, more structured educational frameworks are needed to allow individuals to engage meaningfully with Chinese court music and its historical significance (Montagu, 2017; Lin & Lian, 2018; Norton & Matsumoto, 2018).

The study's objective is to investigate the reviving of literacy in Chinese court music from the Zhou Dynasty at a University in China. By examining educational strategies, curriculum development, pedagogical approaches, and collaborative initiatives, the research aims to shed light on effective methods for transmitting knowledge and fostering appreciation for Chinese court music among diverse audiences.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to revitalizing and preserving Chinese court music

heritage. By identifying best practices in educational interventions, curriculum design, and pedagogical techniques, the research can inform policymakers, educators, cultural institutions, and music enthusiasts about the importance of incorporating Chinese court music into educational frameworks (Ho & Ho, 2018; Wang & Webb, 2023).

Furthermore, reviving literacy in Chinese court music can bridge the gap between traditions and contemporary understanding, fostering a sense of cultural continuity and identity. It also provides opportunities for cultural exchange, collaboration with international scholars and institutions, and the creation of innovative educational resources that enhance accessibility and engagement.

### Research Question

- How can educational initiatives and strategies effectively revive literacy in Chinese court music from the Zhou Dynasty era and foster a deeper understanding and appreciation among contemporary audiences?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this research on reviving literacy in Chinese court music from the Zhou Dynasty at the University in China delves into various aspects of ancient Chinese music, educational practices, historical records, and cultural preservation efforts. It combines scholarly works, historical texts, and contemporary studies to understand the topic comprehensively.

### Ancient Chinese Music

The literature review begins by exploring the rich history of Chinese music, mainly focusing on court music during the Zhou Dynasty. It delves into ancient musical instruments, notation systems, and performance practices as documented in historical texts such as *The Book of Songs*, *The Book of Rites*, and other classical Chinese literature. This section establishes a foundational knowledge of court music's musical traditions and cultural significance during that era (Ma, 2019; Yang, 2023).

### Educational Practices in Music

The review also examines the evolution of music education in China, highlighting traditional teaching methods, apprenticeship systems, and the transmission of musical knowledge across generations. It discusses the importance of formalized educational programs in preserving and revitalizing ancient musical traditions, emphasizing the role of universities and academic institutions in this process (Tang & Sornyai, 2023; Yao, 2024).

### Cultural Preservation and Revival

Another critical aspect of the literature review is the discussion of contemporary China's cultural preservation and revival efforts. It explores initiatives undertaken by cultural

institutions, museums, and universities to revive ancient music, reconstruct musical instruments, and promote awareness of traditional Chinese culture among the younger generation. This section analyzes the effectiveness of such initiatives and their impact on reviving literacy in Chinese court music (Choatchamrat, 2021; Shen & Chou, 2022; Wu & Chuangprakhon, 2024).

### Research Theory

This study's research theory is rooted in cultural heritage preservation, educational pedagogy, and historical reconstruction. It adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing insights from musicology, archaeology, education studies, and cultural anthropology. The theory posits that by integrating educational programs, performance activities, academic exchanges, and collaborations with cultural institutions, it is possible to revitalize and enhance literacy in Chinese court music from the Zhou Dynasty (Penna, 2018; Nielsen, 2020).

Overall, the literature review and research theory provide a robust framework for investigating the reviving literacy in Chinese court music from the Zhou Dynasty at the University in China. It integrates historical knowledge, contemporary practices, and theoretical perspectives to guide the research methodology and analysis.

## METHOD

### Scope of the Research Site and Content

The scope of this research encompasses various aspects related to reviving literacy in Chinese court music from the Zhou Dynasty at Pingdingshan University in China. The primary research site includes Pingdingshan University and its efforts in reconstructing and promoting ancient court music. This involves studying traditional musical notation, historical documents, and archaeological findings and collaborating with cultural institutions like museums and performance venues, as shown in Figure 1.

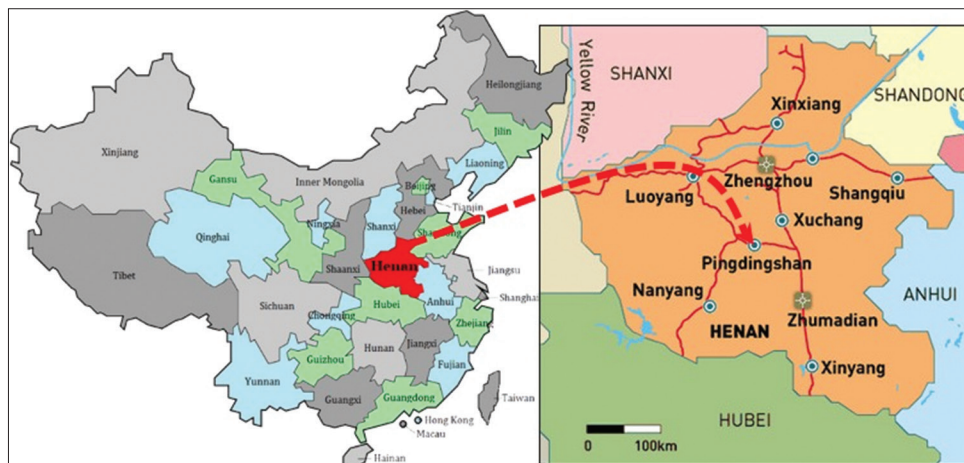
This research delves into the multifaceted efforts to revive literacy in Chinese court music from the Zhou Dynasty at Pingdingshan University in China through endeavors, performance activities, academic engagements, and collaborative initiatives with cultural institutions. The exploration encompasses various dimensions crucial to understanding the comprehensive approach undertaken by Pingdingshan University in promoting and preserving this ancient musical tradition, as shown in Table 1.

### Selection of Key Informants and Research Tools

This study delves into reviving literacy in Chinese court music from the Zhou Dynasty at Pingdingshan University in China. It aims to explore various aspects such as educational programs, music creation, academic exchanges, and collaboration with cultural institutions. Three key informant groups will be involved: experts in Chinese court music, educators specializing in ancient music education, and students engaged in court music programs. The research will utilize

**Table 1.** Key areas of research

Key Areas	Description
Educational Programs	Investigating the development and implementation of educational programs dedicated to teaching and training musicians in the art of ancient court music. This includes courses such as "Ancient Chinese Court Etiquette Training," "Ancient Chinese Palace Appreciation," "Ancient Chinese Court Dance Rehearsal," and more offered at Pingdingshan University.
Music Creation and Performance	Examining the process of creating and performing court music compositions inspired by historical records such as <i>The Book of Mountains and Seas</i> , <i>Rites</i> , <i>Book of Rites</i> , and <i>Book of Songs</i> . This involves composing music chapters like "Ancient 'Ying' Country Winds and Clouds" and "The Book of Songs" and performing them in concert settings.
Academic Seminars and Exchange Activities	Analyzing the participation of Pingdingshan University's court orchestra in academic seminars, conferences, and performance exchange activities nationally and internationally. This includes events like the China Yale International Academic Exchange Conference, the APSE academic conference in Cambodia, the Beijing Traditional Music Festival, and collaborations with the Beijing Dance Academy.
Collaboration with Cultural Institutions	Exploring collaborations between Pingdingshan University, museums, historical sites, and cultural institutions to exhibit ancient musical artifacts, host performance events, and promote the revival of court music. Examples include partnerships with Pingdingshan Museum, Xuchang Museum, and Pingdingshan Cultural and Art Center.
Research and Practice	It investigates the methodologies used in researching and reconstructing ancient musical instruments, notation systems, and performance techniques. This includes studying historical literature, archaeological findings, and practical training in music ensembles focusing on Zhou Dynasty court music.



**Figure 1.** The map of the research site  
 Source: Chinafolio (n.d.), Zhangjiajie Holiday (n.d.)

observation forms, interview forms, and questionnaires to gather comprehensive data and insights from these critical informants, as shown in Table 2.

### Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis in this research aims to uncover deep insights into the reviving literacy in Chinese court music from the Zhou Dynasty at the University in China. Through thematic analysis, recurring patterns, themes, and nuanced perspectives will be identified from the qualitative data collected through observation and interview forms. Themes may include the challenges faced in teaching ancient court music, the perceptions of educators and students regarding the effectiveness of educational programs, and the cultural significance of reviving Chinese court music. These themes will be carefully analyzed and interpreted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the

revival of court music literacy, contributing valuable insights to the research objective.

## RESULTS

### The Educational Function of Court Music During the Zhou Dynasty was Significant

The educational role of court music during the Zhou Dynasty encompassed moral education for society, emphasizing the intertwined nature of morality, ethics, and music. Virtue was considered the spiritual essence, ritual as the guiding principle for conduct, and music as the cultural expression vessel. These elements collectively formed the bedrock of the legal system during the Zhou era, illustrating the profound impact of court music beyond mere entertainment, as shown in Figure 2.

The significance of virtue in gentleman's self-cultivation and state governance cannot be understated. As highlighted

**Table 2.** Selection of three key information and research tools

Key Informant Groups	Research Tools
Experts in Chinese Court Music	- Observation Form: Documenting insights during performances - Interview Form: In-depth discussions about court music
Educators specializing in Ancient Music Education	- Observation Form: Recording teaching methods and practices - Interview Form: Exploring educational strategies - Questionnaire: Gathering feedback on curriculum effectiveness
Students participating in Court Music Programs	- Observation Form: Noting student engagement and progress - Interview Form: Understanding Student Experiences - Questionnaire: Assessing learning outcomes and perceptions



**Figure 2.** Children should play drums before going to school  
Source: Renya Wang, from fieldwork in September 2023

in the Book of Rites University, it emphasizes that the path to enlightenment lies in cultivating virtue. However, being intangible, morality requires more than mere written language to propagate; it necessitates tangible mediums for implementation and demonstration. In this regard, rites and music serve as carriers and conduits for moral education. They embody and reflect moral principles through the fiery essence that connects heaven and earth. The impact of good music resonates deeply within individuals, fostering qualities such as ease, integrity, love, courtesy, dignity, and respect in their behavior, speech, and actions, thereby earning them admiration and esteem, as shown in Figure 3.

The resurgence of the spiritual education function of court music among contemporary college students is profoundly impactful in several vital aspects. Firstly, it fosters the concept of the “harmony of the mean,” which serves as a foundational principle for constructing a harmonious society. In emphasizing the beauty of neutralization within music, Confucius instilled a consciousness of tolerance derived from Central Plains culture. This mindset is crucial for effectively managing “harmonious coexistence.” It ensures that the theories of “mean,” “harmony,” and “love” remain relevant in modern society, guiding interpersonal relations at various levels, from individuals to nations.

Secondly, emphasizing harmony and order imparts wisdom in the “globalization” theory realm. The historical progression from the Rites of Zhou to the Han Dynasty’s Rites



**Figure 3.** Men’s adult etiquette  
Source: Renya Wang, from fieldwork in September 2023

of Rites demonstrates how rituals were disseminated and adopted as a universal code of behavior. This dissemination facilitated the transmission of thoughts, ideas, and behaviors, shaping societal norms and values. The essence of “harmony without uniformity” within Zhongyuan’s elegant music culture becomes instrumental in navigating the coexistence of diverse cultures and civilizations. Noteworthy philosophers like Confucius and Lao Tzu further underscore embracing diversity and fostering mutual understanding, emphasizing that progress and development stem from mutual exchange, influence, and integration among different cultures. These principles are paramount for maintaining global peace, stability, and security and fostering joint development initiatives, as shown in Figure 4.

Thirdly, the concept of the unity of heaven and earth in Chinese court music education contributes to promoting ecological balance. Rooted in Central Plains culture, this idea of harmonizing man and nature aids in managing the environmental relationship effectively, fostering sustainable development. Ancient masters like Zhuangzi expressed this concept through phrases such as “heaven and earth are born with me, while all things are one with me,” highlighting the interconnectedness between humanity and the natural world. By adhering to these cultural principles, individuals gain a deeper understanding of their role in maintaining environmental harmony.

Fourthly, the revival of Chinese court music aims to preserve traditions, transform customs, and promote the reconstruction of elegant musical practices. Originating from the Zhou Dynasty’s tradition of “making rites and making



**Figure 4.** College students learn standing posture etiquette in court music

Source: Renya Wang, from Pingdingshan University, Henan Province

music,” subsequent dynasties continued this legacy by emphasizing the importance of music alongside rituals. Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei Dynasty recognized the transformative power of music and reinstated the elegant music of the Han nationality. This restoration underscores the significant role that music plays in cultural revitalization. By integrating rites and music, this cultural revival preserves rich Chinese characteristics and spreads these traditions widely among the populace. Adopting the Rites of the Zhu Zi family as a standard folk rite during the Ming and Qing dynasties further solidifies the influence of court music, contributing to the ethical fabric of society, as shown in Figure 5.

Fifthly, exploring new dimensions in music education aims to foster noble character development. Confucius deeply regarded music’s role in shaping social and political life, highlighting its educational significance. He dedicated himself to restoring the rites of Zhou, viewing rites and music as pivotal tools in achieving this objective. Confucius viewed music broadly, encompassing poetry, dance, and other artistic expressions. He even argued that music is more important than rites, as it guides individuals within the rules established by rites. Emphasizing the moral and aesthetic aspects, Confucius believed music should be evaluated based on its goodness rather than mere beauty. This perspective underscores the profound influence of music on societal values and moral cultivation, making it a fundamental component of the contemporary political and artistic landscape.

#### **The Revived Court Music from the Zhou Dynasty at Pingdingshan University in China and Institute**

It is imperative to establish educational programs and institutions focused on teaching and training musicians in the intricacies of ancient court music. This includes delving into traditional musical notation and grasping the cultural context and symbolic meanings embedded in court music. Additionally, promoting the development and reconstruction of Chinese court music culture alongside university campus culture is vital. For instance, the Pingdingshan University court band team engages in activities such as mining, sorting,



**Figure 5.** Students study musical instruments, playing  
Source: Renya Wang, from Pingdingshan University, Henan Province

and inheriting traditional music while continuously innovating and reforming to adapt to contemporary society and the needs of modern college students. Courses offered include “Ancient Chinese Court Etiquette Training,” “Ancient Chinese Palace Appreciation,” “Ancient Chinese Court Dance Rehearsal,” “Ancient Chinese Court Band Training,” “Ancient Chinese Court Chorus Training,” “Henan Folk Music,” “Chinese Traditional Culture,” and others tailored to this purpose, as shown in Figures 6 and 7.

Collaboration initiatives have been undertaken by the ancient court orchestra of Pingdingshan University in partnership with Pingdingshan Museum and Pingdingshan Cultural and Art Center. For instance, they participated in the “Public Close Contact with Music and Cultural Relics” event organized by the Cultural Bureau of Pingdingshan City. This event allowed citizens and students of Pingdingshan City to experience ancient court instruments from the Zhou Dynasty, promoting cultural awareness and engagement, as shown in Figure 8.

Another notable collaboration was the “Xu Guo Chime Go Home premiere,” performed by Pingdingshan University’s ancient court orchestra at Xuchang Museum. This performance revived the rites and music of Xu Guo from the Zhou Dynasty, providing a glimpse into ancient musical traditions that date back over two thousand years. This performance was part of the 14<sup>th</sup> Three Kingdoms Cultural Tourism Week of Xuchang, showcasing the rich cultural heritage of Xu Guo and the Zhou dynasty through music and artistic displays, as shown in Figure 9.

In conclusion, reviving Chinese court music from the Zhou Dynasty requires collaborative efforts to reconstruct and preserve this ancient musical tradition. Despite limited direct evidence from the Zhou Dynasty due to its historical distance, efforts such as researching literature on the Zhou Dynasty court band, replicating unearthed ancient instruments, forming a Zhou Dynasty court band, and integrating historical records into music and creation can help revive and promote this cultural heritage. Incorporating these ancient musical instruments and performances into university courses, academic exchanges, and performance competitions ensures the inheritance and promotion of Chinese court



**Figure 6.** Students are at the classroom on-site from the Court Music Orchestra  
Source: Kejie Fang, from Pingdingshan University, Henan Province



**Figure 7.** Students are at the classroom on-site from the Court Music Orchestra  
Source: Kun He, from Pingdingshan University, Henan Province



**Figure 8.** Showcasing court instruments to citizens and primary school students  
Source: Renya Wang, from Pingdingshan University, Henan Province



**Figure 9.** The premiere of "Xu Guo Chime Go Home" performed  
Source: Renya Wang, from Pingdingshan University, Henan Province

music from the Zhou Dynasty among students and the broader community.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research on reviving literacy in Chinese court music from the Zhou Dynasty at the University in China has explored various dimensions of ancient Chinese music, educational practices, cultural preservation efforts, and the impact of collaborative initiatives. The literature review revealed the historical significance of Chinese court music during the Zhou Dynasty, emphasizing its role in court ceremonies, religious rituals, and cultural expression. Scholars such as Ma (2019) and Lin and Lian (2018) have highlighted the importance of protecting intangible cultural heritage and integrating it into educational frameworks.

The research methodology employed a comprehensive approach, including data collection from experts in Chinese court music, educators specializing in ancient music education, and students engaged in court music programs. Observation forms, interview forms, and questionnaires were utilized to gather insights and data, aligning with the research objective of investigating effective educational initiatives for reviving court music literacy.

The research results demonstrate the significant educational function of court music during the Zhou Dynasty, encompassing moral education, virtue cultivation, and societal harmony. Confucian principles, as discussed by Leung (2018) and Ho and Ho (2018), underscore the intertwined nature of music, ethics, and moral values, highlighting the potential of music education in shaping societal values and behaviors. The revival of court music among contemporary college students, as observed in Pingdingshan University's programs, has profound implications for cultural continuity, environmental awareness, and ethical development, aligning with the research's theoretical principles rooted in cultural heritage preservation and education.

In conclusion, the research has shed light on the importance of reviving literacy in Chinese court music from the Zhou Dynasty through targeted educational initiatives. The findings highlight court music's academic, cultural, and ethical significance, emphasizing its potential to foster deeper

understanding and appreciation among contemporary audiences. By integrating ancient musical traditions into modern educational frameworks, promoting collaborative initiatives, and leveraging cultural institutions, the revival of Chinese court music can bridge the gap between tradition and contemporary understanding.

The research's alignment with theoretical principles in cultural heritage preservation, educational pedagogy, and historical reconstruction underscores the interdisciplinary nature of the study. Recommendations for future research include exploring innovative pedagogical approaches, expanding collaborative partnerships, and evaluating long-term sustainability strategies for preserving Chinese court music heritage. This research contributes valuable insights to music education, cultural preservation, and interdisciplinary studies, paving the way for continued efforts in reviving and promoting ancient musical traditions for generations to come.

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