

The Reform of Ceremonial Music and the Construction of New Music in the Huizong Period of the Song Dynasty

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Abstract: The Song Dynasty attached great importance to the performance of ceremonial music, and the Northern Song Dynasty experienced six large-scale music discussions. Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty was a renowned artistic emperor with a unique aesthetic outlook on music. His personal aesthetic led to the sixth reform of the Northern Song Dynasty's ceremonial music, which created the Dasheng music with the personal element of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty. After the formation of music, Yuefu was created. Dasheng Fu and Dasheng music can be said to be the pinnacle of Song Huizong's personal pursuit. He attempted to fulfill his political ideals by playing Dasheng music. It can be said that the sixth reform of the Northern Song Dynasty was a self-performance by Song Huizong.

Keywords: Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty; Dasheng Music; Dasheng Fu

In the first year of Chongning (1102), Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty summoned his ministers to reform the classical music and create new music. This set off another peak in the history of the Northern Song Dynasty in the revision of music, and the Northern Song Dynasty went through six reforms of ceremonial music, as the saying goes, “the ceremonial music of the Song Dynasty, from Jianlong to Chongning, where six changes were made”.¹ The Northern Song Dynasty attached great importance to the performance of ceremonial music, and all the emperors hoped to build a new generation of music, and from the period of Emperor Taizu, as soon as the new emperor came to the throne, he would reform the sound and rhythm of ceremonial music. Before Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, the Northern Song Dynasty underwent five music reforms: the “He Xian Music” formed by He Xian during the reign of Emperor Taizu of the Song Dynasty, which modified the music of Wang Pu and Dou Yan of the Later Zhou Dynasty. The “Li Zhao Music” during the reign of Emperor Renzong of the Song Dynasty, which utilized the Shen Gu standard to modify the music that did not conform to the ancient system. At the same time, the Emperor Renzong of the Song Dynasty also had a debate around the standard of chime, and the “Li Zhao Music” was refuted, and then the “Ruan Yi and Hu Yuan Music” were formed. During the Yuanfeng reign of Emperor Shenzong of the Song Dynasty, the officials discussed the tone of the ceremonial music, which led to the formation of “Yang Jie and Liu Ji Music”. They conceptually proposed the theory that human voice determines the tone, emphasizing the importance of sound, and the “Fan Zhen Music” that went through three dynasties of Renzong, Shenzong, and Zhezong.

Throughout the Northern Song Dynasty, emperors dedicated themselves to establishing a generation of music. Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty named new music as “Dasheng” in the fourth year of Chongning (1105), established Dasheng Fu, and separated music from the Tai Chang Si, then ceremony and music were first divided into two parts.¹ The reason for establishment of the Dasheng Fu reflects the mentality of Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty in attempting to compare with wise monarchs. “Sheng” originally meant brightness and magnificent, and the *History of Song* further explained the origin of the name “Dasheng”: Once Yao had *Dazhang*, while Shun had *Dashao*. The music of the ancient emperors had different names.

Now I want to follow the example of the emperors a thousand years ago and form the music system of this dynasty. It is appropriate to give the new music the name *Dasheng*.¹ From the way of naming Dasheng Fu, it can be seen that Emperor Huizong had a strong political intention in the process of establishing new music. It was this mentality of Emperor Huizong and the practice of integrating politics into music that promoted the emergence of Dasheng Fu and the establishment of Dasheng Fu. In addition, the fundamental thought of the Song Dynasty was Confucianism, and the core of Confucian music education was to educate

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the people through music. At the same time, only the wise monarch and the people could enjoy perfect music when the country was peaceful and prosperous. Therefore, the first task of Emperor Huizong after he came to power was to revise the existing music. After the reign of Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty, the primary task was to revise the existing ceremonial music and create a new music that belonged solely to the dynasty to showcase the new political atmosphere, narrate his own political discourse and maintain his own monarchy. Based on this, the construction of new music in the reign of Emperor Huizong began.

1. Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty Established the Keynote of the New Music Reform

There have always been divergent opinions on the evaluation of Emperor Huizong of Song. Zhang Dun, who had served as the prime minister of the Northern Song Dynasty, believed that Emperor Huizong of Song was frivolous and could not shoulder the important responsibilities of a monarch.¹ The term ‘frivolous’ is enough to summarize the style of handling affairs that Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty valued himself and acted freely. Scholars in the Southern Song Dynasty even characterized him as a person who was stupid and incompetent, and it seems that the literati and politicians have always had a low evaluation of Huizong. Emperor Huizong did have serious deviation in political direction, which led to the Jingkang Incident in the Northern Song Dynasty. However, when he first entered the political stage, he also had great ambitions in politics. As an emperor who paid attention to etiquette and was proficient in art, he actively participated in the construction of new music. Guiding the new music style with political identity, he used it to showcase his political ideals as an enlightened ruler.

Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty had a passion for art, and his lifelong focus was on calligraphy, painting, and other areas. He created slender gold, which has been highly praised by literati and literati throughout history. There are countless literati who have learned to imitate the slender gold, but no one can imitate the core of Song Huizong’s own calligraphy. In addition, Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty was good at playing the guqin and had high musical accomplishment. He often used musical performances to complement political performances, indicating that he valued Confucian music more for its practical function - etiquette and music to regulate human behavior. He once painted the *Rui He Tu* to demonstrate that playing new music can move the heavens, soothe all things, and attract flocks of cranes to fly.



Figure 1 *Rui He Tu* in Liaoning Museum Collection

It can be seen that Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty himself attempted to use artistic aesthetics to promote political ideals, while music performances were actually political performances. Therefore, guided by the political purpose of maintaining monarchy and shaping the image of the monarch, Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty promoted the sixth ceremonial music reform of the Northern Song Dynasty. The Northern Song Dynasty underwent six music reforms, none of which were not related to politics. The emperors of the Song Dynasty attached great importance to the political effects of the ceremonial music, in order to stabilize their rule through the educational role of etiquette and music, and Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty was no exception. But in the first year of Chongning (1102), Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty faced a situation which there were many errors in the melody system of the ceremonial music, and the instruments used to play the ceremonial music were damaged and without a unified standard. When musicians played ceremonial music together, they often followed their own methods, and the musicians who taught them were nowhere to be found. Many musicians actually did not know how to play the ceremonial music.¹ According to the current situation, the revision process of the ceremonial music was urgent. Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, who had the ideal of formulating a generation of music, pushed for

another peak in the Northern Song Dynasty's revision of melody of the ceremonial music in the first year of Chongning (1102).

Ceremonial music was used in occasions such as royal sacrifices and celebrations, which were particularly serious and solemn, with the aim of demonstrating the supreme nature of imperial power. After the new emperor ascended the throne, he would organize musicians to perform ceremonial music to connect with heaven and pray to his ancestors, thereby promoting the legitimacy of his accession and demonstrating his political governance. So after Emperor Huizong ascended to the throne, Cai Jing collaborated with Wei Hanjin to create a generation of music centered around Emperor Huizong himself. Cai Jing agreed with Wei Hanjin's statement, breaking the standard of the "Lei Shu" method that had been discussed by the officials before, and instead adopting the method of Xia Yu using his own body as the standard, adopting the finger length of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty as their music standard. The ceremonial music was established, named *Dasheng*, and has been widely circulated among palace orchestras and the people of the world. The music during the Chongning period was called Wei Hanjin Music.¹ The use of the length of the emperor's finger to determine the pitch of the chime is a highly personal way of making music, elevating the status of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty to the same level as heaven, which was conducive to combining imperial and divine power, and further consolidating the political rule of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty. This was the political selfishness of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty during the music reform process.

In short, due to his supreme political identity, Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty elevated his intervention in music to the level of the ceremonial music. The method presented by Cai Jing and Wei Hanjin, which used the length of the emperor's fingers to determine the pitch of the chime, greatly satisfied the psychology of Emperor Huizong, firmly imprinting his individualism in the process of new music production. At the same time, Emperor Huizong also noted the theory in Confucian music education that music can influence people's thinking. He used new music as a political means to strengthen governance, using music to educate ministers and the people and thus maintain governance. It can be seen that in the process of promoting the production of new music, the personal intention of Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty was very obvious. It was his personal aesthetic view that facilitated the production of new music and accelerated its completion. The sixth music reform of the Northern Song Dynasty mixed politics, imperial power, and music, becoming a music reform activity oriented towards achieving political goals.

2. The Formation of Dasheng Music and Dasheng Fu

As mentioned above, in the first year of the Chongning reign of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, the melody of the ceremonial music was chaotic, the instruments were damaged, and the musicians did not know how to play the music. So, Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty sought out people who knew the rhythm of music from all over the world and attempted to revise the music. This nationwide search for people who knew the rhythm resulted in Cai Jing finding Wei Hanjin and Liu Bing to revise the music standard together. Afterwards, Dasheng music appeared. The rhythm production of Dasheng music is based on the measurement of body length.

The music method of using body length as a standard has existed since ancient times, as Liu Bing once said, "The Yellow Emperor had a three-inch long musical instrument named 'Xian Chi', and its tune was called 'Dajuan'. The length of the chime's reed pipe used to play 'Dajuan' is nine inches. This standard, used until the Tang Yu era, has not changed. But when there was a big flood, many of the instruments were washed away. Later on, Dayu learned the method of the Yellow Emperor, using sound to set the rhythm and using his own body as a scale. He used the three segments of his left middle finger, which is three inches, to call it 'Jun Zhi' and used it to make instruments representing the 'Gong' sound. Next, he used the three sections of his ring finger to create a "Shang" sound instrument, and the three sections of his little finger to create a "Yu" sound instrument. The index finger represents 'people', and its voice is "Jue"; the thumb represents 'national affairs', and its sound is 'Zhi'."²

Cai Jing sought out Wei Hanjin, catering to the psychology of overachieving of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty. Wei Hanjin meticulously developed the theory of using body as the standard and finger length as the pitch of melody for Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty. Wei Hanjin suggested that the benchmark for Dasheng music rhythm, which is the length of the chime tube, can be customized

by connecting the lengths of the three fingers of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty. Wei Hanjin embedded the factor of imperial power into the standard of musical rules, and compared Huizong with Da Yu, which was highly favored by Huizong. Therefore, this theory was being promoted nationwide and comprehensively. In addition, the reason why this music making method won the favor of Emperor Huizong of Song and had a nationwide effect was also related to the fusion of music making standards with Taoist principles - the unity of humans and nature. The rhythm of the ancient king resonated with nature, and using the length of his body to set the standard for rhythm was a way of combining with nature. Wei Hanjin said, "During the reign of the Yellow Emperor and Xia Yu, music performance followed a simple and straightforward method, derived from nature. Therefore, those skilled in music are based on sound. If they obtain their sound, the form, number, and system will also be formed from the sound."²

With the completion of the Huangzhong rhythm, each of the twelve rhythms had its own place. In the fourth year of Chongning (1105), a new music test was performed at the Chongzheng Hall, and the sixth music reform of the Northern Song Dynasty was preliminarily completed. In September, when the new music was practiced in the officials to pay respects to the emperor, the new music attracted several cranes.

In the year of Xinmao, this new music was given the name "Dasheng" and an official office was established to take in officials.¹ The establishment of the Dasheng Fu was originally for the purpose of accepting the Dasheng new music. In the same year as the new music was played in court, the Dasheng Fu was also established. Moreover, the functions of the Dasheng Fu were exclusively in charge of music, and even absorbed the music attributes of the original Taichang Si. As a result, another organization specialized in music emerged outside the Jiao Fang. The actual performance effect of Dasheng music reached a high level of communication between music and nature, and the flying of cranes was seen as an auspicious sign. Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty used this performance effect to prove the stability, political democracy, and public happiness of the Northern Song Dynasty under his rule. But it is unknown whether the crane at this time was attracted by the new music, and this auspicious sign was nothing more than a personal performance by Emperor Huizong. He repeatedly "recruited" cranes to create momentum for the Dasheng music, and in the third year of the Zhenghe reign (1113), when the National Academy was learning to play Dasheng music, cranes also flew in.² It can be seen that the best effect of Dasheng music performance was to attract the arrival of cranes, but this supernatural auspicious event was likely led by Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty. Its main purpose is still to highlight himself. Music performance was actually a political performance, and auspicious signs were also political farce.

Although there was a strong sense of self-worship when Huizong made music and played new music, Dasheng New music was still the only orthodox and official music in Huizong Dynasty. The *History of the Song Dynasty* clearly classified this new music, also known as Dasheng Music, as ceremonial music. However, Dasheng music has always been criticized for its musical standard of using the length of the fingers to determine the length of the reed tube of the chime. Scholars from ancient and modern times have not given high praise to Wei Hanjin himself. Zhu Xi once said, "During the reign of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, the ceremonial music made by Wei Hanjin, a soldier with lettering on his face, was fabricated. However, nowadays, it is indeed this kind of music that the imperial college students learn."³ Yang Yinliu, a modern scholar, also believes that this method of creating music is extremely absurd. Dasheng music, which originated from the method of determining pitch with finger length, is often considered a product of catering to Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty. However, its subsequent performance duration contradicts the term "absurd". As court ceremony music, Dasheng music played for a long time until the Ming Dynasty. Zhu Zaiyu once said that Dasheng music still existed after many dynasties, especially since Jin and Yuan Dynasty, Dasheng music was honored. After Song Dynasty, the ceremonial music only changed its name, and its core was still Dasheng music.⁴ This was contrary to what Zhu Xi and others believed to be the absurdity of musical rhythms. Dasheng music has withstood the test of time and reflects a lasting vitality of life.

The reason why Dasheng music is not limited by time is related to the fact that Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty did not fully adopt the theory of finger length of Wei Hanjin, which was greatly discounted in practical practice. In specific performances, the emperor's fingers cannot be revealed to outsiders, and the length of the emperor's fingers can only be roughly estimated. It can be seen that the pitch was not entirely determined based on the length of the fingers of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty. Secondly, it is

recorded in the *History of the Song Dynasty* that Liu Bing secretly tested the length of the reed pipe, and the result was that the finger length of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty was indeed longer than that of the reed pipe.

At the same time, the *Encyclopedia dealing with Reference notes* points out that the true creator of Dasheng's music rhythm was Liu Bing, and the calibrator was the musician. In the specific performance stage, the musician can use experience to change the non-standard parts of Dasheng music with the rhythm.⁵ While Liu Bing was producing the rhythm of Dasheng music, he also made Dasheng chimes, which played the role of "standard tone" and could determine the pitch of Dasheng music. The calibration of standard tones and pitches laid a scientific theoretical foundation for the sixth reform of the Northern Song Dynasty's ceremonial music, and the casting of Tripods and instruments based on rhythm also provided the possibility for Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty to pursue the music of a generation.

Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty issued an edict to celebrate the completion of the casting of the Dasheng chime. The reason why Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty cared so much about the completion of the Dasheng chime was that the foundation of the Song Dynasty's establishment was Confucianism. Confucianism in the pre-Qin Dynasty was committed to restoring the construction of ritual music in the Zhou Dynasty. The Chime was one of the representatives of metal instruments in ancient music, and metal instruments ranked first in the ancient music, which can be regarded as synonymous with palace ceremonial musical instruments. As time passed until the reign of Emperor Huizong of the Northern Song Dynasty, the study of epigraphy, the theory and practice of chime music had all developed. Therefore, Liu Bing was able to promote the emergence of the Dasheng chime and establish standard tones for new music. The casting of the Dasheng chime was given a mysterious and supernatural origin by Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty - the divine grant of monarchy. Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty issued an edict ordering the Dasheng Fu to imitate a set of Jing chimes belonging to Songgong Cheng which were excavated in Yingtianfu at that time and made the Dasheng chime.

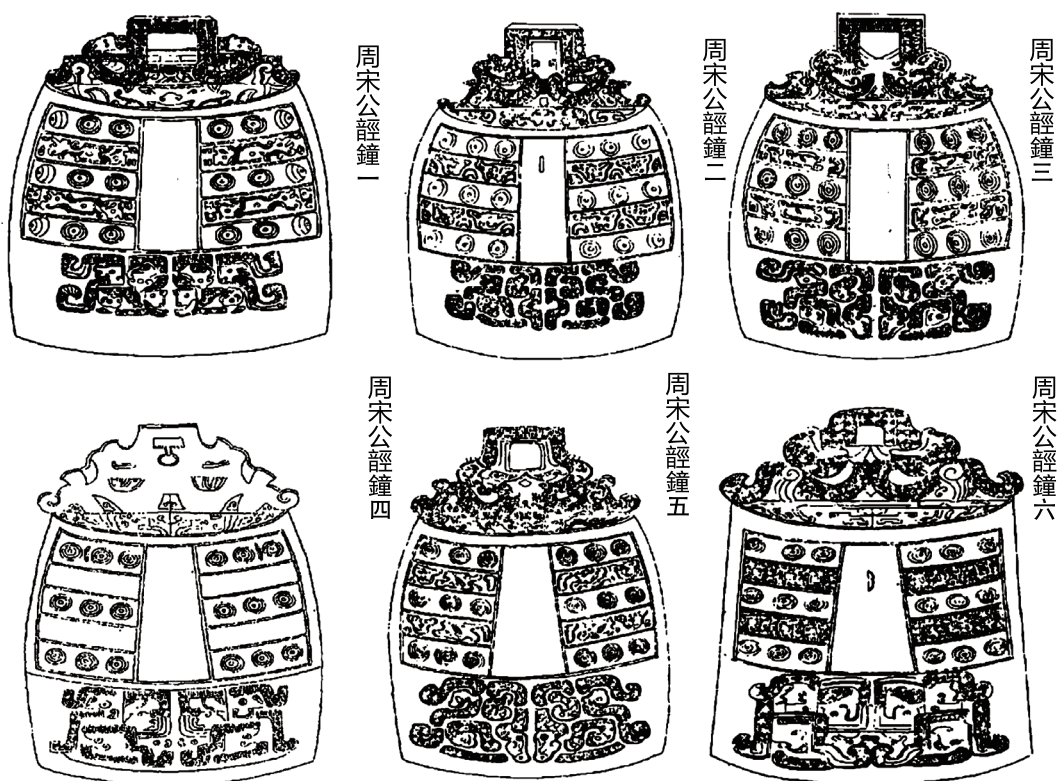


Figure 2 Jing Chimes Belonging to Songgong Cheng

In summary, the Dasheng rhythm is not an absurd product, which can be proven from the following two aspects. Firstly, based on actual performance experience, the musicians changed the unreasonable part of the theory that the length of the reed tube was determined by the fingers. Secondly, Liu Bing's production of the Dasheng chime achieved standardization of Dasheng music. These all made the success of Dasheng's music rhythm scientific and practical. On the surface, the Da Sheng musical rhythm is to sing praises and cater to the emperor, which is the peak of the personal pursuit of Emperor Huizong. However, in reality, it has its own implementation purpose. Before Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, there were five music reforms in the Northern Song Dynasty, adhering to the concept that music must first be determined by the Huangzhong, so courtiers argued with each other during discussions on music production. However, Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, relying on his political identity, simply resolved the invalid disputes in the court, avoiding the possibility of music discourse gradually evolving into political games in the music reforms, instead ensuring the implementation of new music, and there was no longer a situation where the emperors of the previous dynasty used both old and new music. Moreover, due to the fact that Dasheng music was played according to the rhythm by musicians from the palace music department during the actual performance process, Dasheng music can ensure the rationality and musical standardization of its performance, and remains a scientific music performance mode. Therefore, it could be passed down as palace music for a long time until the Ming Dynasty.

3. Dasheng Instruments with Political and Ethical Factors

During the reign of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, the music system was changed, the rhythm was standardized and adjusted, and on this basis, musical instruments were also changed. Dasheng Fu repaired, supplemented and perfected the musical instruments used in the Northern Song Dynasty. In the fourth year of the Dagan era (1110), Liu Bing summarized the drawbacks of the previous dynasty's ceremonial music in the *Book of Music*, striving to accelerate the process of building a new generation of music. Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty was overjoyed and personally wrote the *Dasheng Music Record* in the same year to praise the performance of Dasheng music, providing political support for Liu Bing's next musical instrument reform. Based on the ideal model of "harmonizing the Eight Tones", Liu Bing created twelve Da Sheng music diagrams, dividing Da Sheng instruments into eight parts: metal, stone, string, bamboo, gourd, clay, leather and wood, fully practicing the ancient "eight tones" music theory.

The selection of Dasheng musical instruments was not accidental. Each of the eight instruments has its own political implications, and their formulation standards are complex, with multiple implications such as the *Yin-yang* and five elements, the interaction between heaven and humans, and political ethics. For example, the origin of music is related to rhythm, but it requires the use of the *xiao* to present it perfectly. The pitch is adjusted according to the call of the phoenix, with each *xiao* corresponding to a sound. *Xiao* is composed of multiple pipes with different rhythms and is woven into a musical instrument. The pipes of *xiao* vary in length and look like the wings of a phoenix, emitting a clear and pleasant sound, just like the song of a phoenix. Arranging these pipes into *xiao* is like imitating the state of a phoenix in flight. When the phoenix flies, the music of *xiao* also follows the high and unrestrained sound; when the phoenix stops, Sheng's music becomes gentler and more melodious.

Music is a tool that connects heaven and rulers. While following the number of *yin-yang* to convey the performance to heaven, it also reflects the supremacy of imperial power. The ultimate result and core of all musical instruments is imperial power. As the new music of the Huizong dynasty, it not only showcases the style of the new dynasty but also has the meaning of being comparable to ancient sages. The frequent appearance of the phoenix in instrument performance carries dual meanings. On the one hand, it serves as an auspicious sign representing the peaceful and prosperous times of the country. On the other hand, Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty gained inspiration from the concept of "successful performance of the Xiao Shao and the appearance of the Phoenix" and boasted as ancient sages. The Da Sheng instruments also wore a political cloak. Guided by this concept, there were a total of 38 Dasheng new musical instruments in the Hui Zong Dynasty, all imitating ancient styles. Under the overall control of the Huangzhong rhythm, they played music that could sense heaven and reach the acme of perfection.

As a product of the sixth music reform, the essence of Dasheng music is Taiyue (one of ceremonial music). Therefore, the performance of Dasheng music aims to replicate the paradigm of the Zhou Dynasty's

education as the main purpose in selecting the types of Dasheng musical instruments, with the goal of educating people with music, and thus serving his political rule.

The number of instruments in Dasheng music is numerous and carefully classified, but the performance of each type of instrument is based on serving politics and highlighting the idea of respecting imperial power. For example, the stone part of instruments carries a sense of centralization. The use of Dasheng instruments carries a strong political significance, closely related to the ruling interests of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, reflecting the ideology of monarchs and ministers, and affirming the sanctity of imperial power. In addition, the use of musical instruments by Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, compared to the practices of ancient sages, was precisely a personal boast, which could to some extent strengthen his prestige.

Throughout history, any movement called “retro” is not simply about restoring the ancient system. Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty also used the name “retro” to develop music with his own personal element. Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty was originally a renowned artistic emperor, proficient in music theory and skilled in playing the guqin. Therefore, he was able to integrate himself based on existing ceremonial music rhythms. He collaborated with Wei Hanjin, Cai Jing, and others to create a generation of music. Although the method of making music used by Emperor Huizong’s new music, which used the length of fingers to determine the length of the reed, has always been criticized, believing that this method is absurd and ridiculous, and is a way for officials to flatter and cater to emperor. But in actual performance, Liu Bing and the musicians transformed the new music into a music with operability and scientificity. At the same time, before Emperor Huizong, although there were five music reforms in the Northern Song Dynasty, they did not achieve the ideal model of the emperor at that time. The creation of new music instead became a stage for political confrontation between the ministers of the Northern Song Dynasty. However, Emperor Huizong simply resolved invalid disputes by deifying himself, creating music with full political significance, effectively strengthening imperial rule.

Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty was well aware of the role of Confucian family music education in governing the hearts of the people. The new music achieved the actual performance effect of “harmony between heaven and man”, indicating that Huizong was an emperor in line with the will of heaven, which could pacify the hearts of the people and establish prestige among them. Afterwards, Emperor Huizong revised Dasheng music several times in terms of rhythm, instruments, and other aspects, incorporating his own governing philosophy and personal preferences. He turned the process of formulating new music into a prolonged political activity. It can be said that Emperor Huizong, who loved art and was proficient in politics, used the production process of Dasheng music to achieve his political views. Each performance of Dasheng music was actually performed on the political stage.

Acknowledgements: This paper is supported by the National Social Science Foundation of China “Study on Music Department and Song Ci” (18BZW053).

Declaration of Interest Statement: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest. I promise that I have no conflict of interest.

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