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REVIEW ARTICLE

The Graphic Notation in Chinese Traditional Music Notation History

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ABSTRACT

Graphic notation plays an important role in the development of traditional Chinese music notation. Music notation is the most important method of recording and preserving music, and the study of ancient Chinese music notation can provide a deeper understanding of Chinese musical culture. However, despite the fact that graphic notation is one of the major notation methods preserved in ancient China, there is still limited academic research on the far-reaching importance of graphic notation. Based on this, this research employs a qualitative approach combining historical, functional, and musicological analyses to explore the classification and function of the ancient Chinese graphic notation, as well as the relationship between the ancient Chinese graphic notation and the ancient Chinese musical styles, by reviewing and analysing a number of ancient musical scores, theoretical texts, and treatises. Findings highlight the multifaceted significance of ancient Chinese musical notation in the preservation and understanding of China's musical heritage. The diversity of notation, from Jianzi notation to visual symbols and written descriptions, reflects their adaptability to a wide range of instruments, genres and styles, serving to guide performances, preserve works and support improvisation. Beyond technical performance, these notations serve as tools for music education, preservation of traditional compositions and performance practices, and cultural expressions, bridging the gap between written and aural traditions. Moreover, their consistency with traditional Chinese musical principles, such as pentatonic structure and improvisation, underscores their role in capturing the aesthetic and cultural essence of the era. Taken together, these findings attest to the enduring importance of ancient Chinese musical scores in the understanding and preservation of this rich heritage.

Contribution/Originality: This study classifies and examines the functions of ancient Chinese graphic notation, and explores the relationship between the form and historical background of graphic notation and the way of ancient Chinese music creation.

1. Introduction

The diverse ancient Chinese musical notation system fully demonstrates the creativity and profound cultural heritage of traditional Chinese music. These systems, which predate many of their Western equivalents, used a wide variety of symbols, characters, and graphic expressions to record and transmit musical ideas and mode of performances (Chen, 1985). From the simple *Gongche* notation（*工尺谱*）to the more complicated Jianzi notation (*减字谱*) of the *guqin*, these notations not only keep the technical details of the music but also the aesthetic and philosophical value of the time. However, the introduction of Western culture in the mid-19th century marked a turning point in the history of Chinese music. The Western stave notation system and numbered musical notation gradually replaced the traditional notation and became the standard of formal music education in China. Nevertheless, some traditional forms, such as the Jianzi notation, have survived and are still in use today despite this transformation.

The academy has concentrated on Chinese ancient notation for few decades. The studies mainly cover historical classification, functional analysis, and comparisons with Western notation systems. But still lack of fully exploration on the Chinese ancient graphic notation, as well as the relationship between such graphic notation and ancient Chinese musical styles. Graphic notation is a category of Chinese ancient notation that using curves, symbols, and other visual elements to represent music. In terms of musical inheritance, it can accurately record technical details such as pitch and rhythm, and take Jianzi notation of *guqin* as an example, providing a guarantee that repertoire will be passed on across time and space (Chen, 1985). On the aesthetic and philosophical levels, the symbols and lines of notation embody aesthetic principles such as symmetry and balance, and contain philosophical concepts such as *yin* and *yang* and the five elements (Chen, 1985; Wang, 2006). At the same time, it is also a unique symbol of Chinese music culture, which demonstrates the national charm in cross-cultural exchanges and maintains cultural diversity. For these reasons, this study aims to fill these gaps by systematically examining the classification, function and stylistic significance of graphic notation in Chinese music history.

As a result of this, three research questions have been highlighted:

i. How do we classify the ancient Chinese graphic notation?
ii. What is the role of ancient Chinese graphic notation in Chinese music history?
iii. What is the relationship between the ancient Chinese graphic notation and ancient Chinese musical styles?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Historical and Classification Studies

Early studies on Chinese musical notation predominantly centered on its evolution and systematization. Chen (1985) presented one of the most detailed frameworks, organizing notations according to their texture (such as graphic or character-based), attributes (like scale or tablature), and function (whether vocal or instrumental). In a similar vein, Wang

(2006) introduced a classification system that emphasized the wide-ranging nature of Chinese notation, covering tablature, scale-oriented methods, and graphic representations. These works underscore the flexibility of Chinese notation systems in capturing the intricate details of various musical styles.

Beyond the general categories, research has been conducted on particular systems. Zhao (2018) delved into *Gongche* and *Suzi* (*俗字谱*) notations' origins, development, and interplay, shedding light on their functioning within the cultural and historical backdrop of that time. Building on this, Wang (2021) explored the distinctive curve notation, looking into its historical importance and real-world uses.

2.2. Translation and Cultural Studies

The study of Chinese ancient notation translation and interpretation are another important field. Lin (1957) and Tashi (1993) made notable contributions by translating Tibetan Buddhist musical notations and analyzing their structure and usage. These studies highlight the spiritual and cultural dimensions of Chinese musical notation, emphasizing its role in ritualistic and ceremonial practices in religion. Meanwhile, some scholars performed a comparative study of Chinese and Western notation systems (Yang 2006; Sparks, 2023). In a subsequent work, Wang (2005) examined the standardization of musical notation for various percussion instruments. Several studies also examine the notation of modern musical compositions, including explorations into techniques used to notate electronic music (Liu, 1997). Several researchers also focused on the diverse notations, symbols, and performances found in contemporary Chinese traditional instrumental compositions, including Wang (2018)'s collection of contemporary guzheng notation. Nonetheless, there is a scarcity of studies that exclusively examine ancient Chinese notation, and a comprehensive summary of ancient Chinese graphic notation is lacking. Additionally, there are limited analyses of ancient Chinese music styles based on the morphology of graphic notation and ancient Chinese graphic notation itself.

2.3. Western Graphic Notation and Its Influence

The emergence of graphic notation in Western music in the 20th century provides an interesting point of comparison. Western graphic notation has been defined as a system that uses symbols, lines and shapes to allow freedom of interpretation, reflecting the experimental spirit of avant-garde composers (Massi, 1993). Robert and Robert (1975) emphasised its use in arbitrary works where the performer has the flexibility to interpret the score. These studies emphasise the creative potential of graphic symbols as a medium of artistic expression and provide parallels with their Chinese counterparts.

2.4. Gaps in Existing Research

Ancient Chinese musical notations have been the subject of much research in recent years, yet there are still many gaps. To start, graphic notations have received less attention in previous studies compared to numerical and textual notations. Graphic notation has not been thoroughly studied in relation to the larger scope of Chinese music history, although specific systems such as curve notation have been explored. Similarly, uncharted territory is the connection between graphic notations and the musical genres of ancient China, particularly the ways in which the former affected the latter.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach combining historical, functional, and musicological analyses to synthesise the research questions. The historical evolution of graphic symbols is traced and their visual and functional characteristics are identified through a systematic study of primary and secondary sources, including ancient manuscripts, treatises, and scholarly analyses. The study constructs a fine-grained categorical framework to analyse the morphological features of notation, such as curves, symbols and structural elements, as well as their roles in guiding performances, preserving musical expression and expressing cultural values. By matching specific graphic notations to corresponding musical styles, the study explores how these systems influence, and are influenced by, stylistic features such as melodic fluency and rhythmic structure in, for example, court music, folk traditions and religious works.

4. Data Analysis

4. The Classification of Chinese Graphic Notations

4.1.1. Drum Notation

The drum score, also known as the "*Ritual Drum Score*", recorded in the Book of Rites, is the earliest extant Chinese musical score, employing circles and squares to notate the rhythms of '*Lu drum*' and '*Xue drum*' in Zhou dynasty. The book "*Shi Lin Guang Ji*"(*事林广记*), produced in the early years of the Song dynasty by Chen Yuanliang, contains a drum score represented by the symbols "○" and "●" . The book "*Yue Lü Quan Shu*" (*乐律全*) by Zhu Zhai Yu from Ming dynasty includes two works about drum score that precisely document the rhythms of "*Dou Ye Huang San Shi Er Pai Gu Ban Jie Zou Pu* (*豆叶黄三十二拍鼓板节奏谱)*" and "*Jin Zi Jing Er Shi Si Pai Gu Ban Jie Zou Pu （金字经二十四拍鼓板节奏谱）*". The book "*Wen Lin Ju Bao Wan Juan Xing Luo (文林聚宝万卷星罗)*" by Xu Huiying from the Ming dynasty complied numerous drum works using a performance notation system where circle represent the drum, the dots for tone trope, 'X' for the edge of the drum, density for speed, sparseness for slowness and oppositional symbols for the clapper. The book "*Wen Miao Si Dian Kao* (*文庙祀典考*)" by Pang Zhonglu, from the Qing dynasty, had recorded a type of drum score from 'Wen Miao drum score', in which the circle represents the right hand and the square for the left hand (Chen, 1982; Chen, 1985).

Graphic notation is also frequently used in contemporary Chinese percussion compositions. For instance, Chinese renowned composer Guo's "Drama" for three pairs of cymbals and player voices (Op.23) and "Parade" for six Beijing opera Gongs (Op.40). There are 36 distinct symbols and six distinct voice instructions in the score of "Drama," and the graphics in "Parade" are more complicated; striking points, damping points, sticks, and players are all denoted by symbols (Guo, 2009).

4.1.2. Curve Notation

Curve notation, which refers to music that is notated with curved lines, is one of the most influential notation systems in the history of Chinese music. The majority of curved notations were associated with changes in tune and rhythm, and thus were incapable of recording precise pitch and time. Additionally, the literature indicates that curve notation

was closely associated with religious culture. This section will discuss the recorded literature and existing scores on curve notation.

i. Sheng Qu Zhe（*声曲折*）

Curve notation originates from the Han dynasty. The earliest reference to curve notation appears in the book *"Han Shu · Yi Wen Zhi (汉书·艺文志)"*, wherein "Sheng Qu Zhe" represents a tune or a type of musical score based on the tune's high and low notes. The book " *Han Shu · Yi Wen Zhi* " only contained the title of the score; it did not contain the score itself. Numerous Chinese scholars have studied "Sheng Qu Zhe" in a variety of ways. The majority of scholars maintained that it is a curve notation system, while others maintained that it is a symbol notation system. For instance, Tian (1992) stated that "Sheng Qu Zhe" serves to curve the sound's fluctuations. It represents a more primitive, intuitive, and less precise schematic. While it cannot be as precise as a modern music score in limiting the pitch value, but can be used by its people to play a certain degree of memo role. Additionally, Liu (1990) also emphasized the use of "Sheng Qu Zhe" as a curve notation for indicating the direction of tune in the research.

ii. Qi Notation *(契谱)*

"Qi Notation" was first mentioned in the article "Is there a music score in three kingdoms" by Tian (Wang, 2021). In the article, the author addressed that in ancient Chinese, the word "Qi" means score (Tian, 1992). According to the records, "Qi" is related to the music which was recorded in the book "Gao Seng Zhuan *(高僧传)*" by Hui Jiao (A.D. 497-554), Tian (1992) proposed that "Qi" is seminar with "Sheng Qu Zhe" and it is a kind of curve notation to notate Buddhist music.

iii. Fang Fu Notation *(髣髴谱)*

"Fang Fu Notation" is an ancient Chinese term that translates as "seminar" or "as if". It is a type of music score that uses curve lines and symbols to record the fingering techniques of guqin. The score "*Jie Shi Diao· You Lan (碣石调·幽兰)*", which is reserved in Japan is notated with Jianzi notation and Fang Fu notation (Wang, 2021).

iv. Sheng Ming Notation *(声明谱)*

"Sheng Ming Notation", derived from the Indian language "Cabda-cidya", is a Chinese vocal genre that combines rhyme and rhythm. Subsequently, "Sheng Ming" spread to Japan and integrated with local music resulting in the creation of a new region's art. Wang (2021) provided an example of "Sheng Ming." Based on the score, "Sheng Ming Notation" is categorized as curved notation, as it depicts the melody using curved lines and features a score that is intricate in its form.

v. Bu Xu Notation *(步虚谱)*

"Bu Xu Notation" is a type of curved notation which is used to recorded music and it is collected in "*Yu Yin Fa Shi (玉音法事)*", it is also known as line score. According to Pu (2002), only "*Yu Yin Fa Shi*" was recorded with curved notation in Taoist Music. The researches on how to read the score with "Bu Xu notation" had been widely discussed by

the scholars, Sun (1997) considered "*Yu Yin Fa Shi*" is a comprehensive score which include the lyrics, harmonies and tones.

vi. Yang Yi Notation *(央移谱)*

"Yang Yi Notation" is a curve notation system for recording the change of the pitch which was invented by Bu Dun and his disciple Zong Ka Ba for the spread of sing the Scriptures in Tibetan Buddhism (Xiao, 1982). According to Xiao (1982), "Yang Yi Notation" is a basic and incomplete score comprised of several straight lines and various types of curved lines. The formal score contains seven straight lines, four of which are black and three of which are red. The curves were colored green on the straight lines.

vii. Yuan Qiang Notation *(圆腔谱)*

"Yuan Qiang Notation" was recommended by Zhang (1989) in his article "About the Yuan Qiang notation of Gao Qiang", which addressed that there was a unique notation that was widely used in Chinese Opera. From the 1770s to the 1950s, Gao Qiang was referred to as "Yuan Qiang Notation." The "Yuan Qiang Notation" consists of curved symbols with circles that are placed next to the words to indicate the cadences' length and rhythmic changes (Wang, 2021).

4.1.3. Other Graphic Notations

Additionally, there are some other graphic notations from Chinese history, for instance, the graphics that are popular in folk music, other graphics used in score for recording the pitch, this section will introduce those graphic notations.

i. Yin Tu Notation *(音图谱)*

"Yin Tu Notation" was invented by Yu Zai (A.D.1328-1330) in Yuan dynasty and it is collected in "*The Si Ku Quan Shu · Shao Wu Jiu Cheng Yue (四库全书·韶舞九成乐)*". In "Yin Tu Notation", Each straight line is divided into twelve frames, 12 lülü (*律吕*) was labeled on the frame from top to down to indicate the pitch of each frame and then the lyrics were added in each line from right to left (Wang, 2006).

ii. Jie Dai Notation *(结带谱)*

"Jie Dai Notation" is a kind of music score which is popular among Miao ethnic group. It used a lace as the main band, and then attached six different colors of fabric strips to the lace band to represent different pitches. Color and pitch have an amorphous relationship; it varies considerably between individuals. "Jie Dai Notation" was also adopted by other ethnic groups; for example, the Qiang ethnic group in Sichuan used it as a musical notation (Liu, 1982).

iii. The Graphic Notation in Tibetan Buddhist *(藏传佛教图形记谱法)*

The history of notating Tibetan Buddhist music is almost 2000 years. Curve notation is their basic notation system, but there are some different graphics in Tibetan Buddhist music scores. The graphics represent pitch, rhythm, etc. (Liu, 1982).

iv. Wen Notation *(纹谱)*

"Wen Notation", which is popular in Hunan province, China, is a kind of music score for guqin or zheng with the famous guqin performer's palm lines. Therefore, it should be a kind of curve notation. Supposedly, the score is made up with different patterns of the guqin performer's palm lines when playing guqin. Liu (1982) had collected some incomplete scores about "Wen Notation", the score recorded music with different curve lines, which is a seminar with palm lines.

4.1.4. The Combination of Graphic Notation and Other Notation Systems

i. Dunhuang Pipa Scores (*敦煌琵琶谱*)

The first few years of the last century, some pipa notations, which were recorded on the opposite side of the scriptures, were discovered in Mogao Grottoes. Three notation systems are used in those notations: the numbers 1 to 10 in cursive script and 10 to 20 in changed script to indicate the "San Yin" and phase of the four strings pipa; the Chinese characters to indicate repeat and speed; and the remaining ten symbols to indicate the instrument's performance techniques (Chen, 1985). Recent studies on how to read those symbols remain inconclusive. However, the pipa's notation is a hybrid of graphic and character notation.

ii. The Notation of Jiang Bai Shi's Songs *(姜白石歌谱)*

There are six volumes in "*Bai Shi Dao Ren's songs(白石道人歌)*", the score of those songs is notated by GongChe, JianZi, LüLü, Suzi notations. There are sixteen notation characters in the first volume of "ancient and modern music notation" of Jiang Kui. Besides, there are some other symbols in the score, such as  ,  ,  ,  ,  , and so forth (Zhang & Yu, 2021). The current research on the meaning of those symbols is quite controversial. Chen (1982) considered the symbol  means lower semitone. Meanwhile, Liang (1985) maintained that the symbol is merely a decorative element used to enhance and beautify melodies. Yang and Yin (1957) considered the symbol  as an extension sign for shorter time value notes in their book "The researches on Jiang Bai Shi's created songs in Song dynasty".

4.1.5. The Classification of Ancient Chinese Graphic Notations

The evolution and diversity of graphic notation in ancient Chinese history reflects not only the creative methods of music preservation, but also the cultural and stylistic dimensions of different eras. The earliest graphic notation in ancient China is the drum notation of the Zhou dynasty, which reveals the notation use of circles and squares to represent rhythm, a practice that persisted and evolved in later dynasties in works such as the '*Shilin Guangji (事林广记)*' and the '*Yuelü Quanshu (乐律全书)*'. These notations prioritized the functional aspects of rhythm and performance, laying the groundwork for the graphic representation of percussion in the works of contemporary figures such as Guo Wenjing.

Curve notation also played an important role, with systems such as the Han dynasty's 'Sheng Qu Zhe' providing a schematic representation of pitch flow and musical contours.

This tradition influenced the subsequent notations, such as the 'Qi Notation' and the 'Fang Fu Notation', both of which are associated with religious and instrumental practices. For example, the 'Fang Fu Notation' records the techniques of the *guqin*, combining artistry with instruction. Similarly, the 'Sheng Ming Notation' from the Indian tradition illustrates the cross-cultural exchanges that have shaped graphic notation systems, particularly in religious music, such as Buddhist and Taoist music.

Folk music contributes its own distinctive symbols, including the 'Jie Dai Notation', a notation of colour-coded laces popular among the Miao and Qiang ethnic groups, and the 'Wen Notation', which amusingly mirrors the palm lines of *guqin* performers. These systems highlight the integration of visual culture into grassroots music teaching, in contrast to the more structured graphic notation found in court and ceremonial music, such as the 'Yin Tu Notation'.

Hybrid systems that combine graphic notation with other forms, such as the 'Dunhuang Pipa Score' and the 'Bai Shi Dao Ren's Song', emphasise the adaptive nature of Chinese notation practices. These scores employ a mixture of figures, symbols, and words to represent performance techniques, pitches, and rhythms, illustrating a comprehensive approach to ancient Chinese music literature.

Analysing the relationships between different graphic symbols reveals that they were interconnected despite temporal and functional differences. For example, the evolution from the 'Sheng Qu Zhe' to the 'Sheng Ming Notation' suggests a continuum of ideas in the representation of musical flow. Similarly, the structural similarities between the 'Qi Notation' and the 'Sheng Qu Zhe' indicate a lineage in religious music. While court and religious music relied heavily on a mixture of figures and graphics, folk and ethnic traditions emphasised functional visual aids, reflecting different musical practices in different regions and classes.

Taken together, these findings position graphic notation as a dynamic and adaptive tool in ancient Chinese music, linking theoretical ideals to practical applications while capturing the aesthetic and cultural essence of the time.

4.2. The Functions of Chinese Notation in History

Graphic notations served various purposes in Chinese history, reflecting their importance as versatile tools in the development, preservation, and expression of Chinese music and culture.

4.2.1. Educational Tools for Facilitating the Transmission of Musical Knowledge

Graphic notations played a vital role in teaching and passing down musical knowledge, especially in oral traditions where written instructions complemented hands-on learning. For example, Jianzi notation of *guqin* served as an instructional guide for students, detailing not only the finger positions and string plucking techniques but also the nuances of expression and articulation required for proper performance (Wang, 2021); Moreover, in ancient China, music education often relied on visual aids, such as diagrams showing the placement of fingers on instruments or the sequence of notes in a melody (Zhao, 2018). These visualizations made it easier for learners to grasp complex musical concepts without requiring a deep understanding of abstract theory. Additionally, Graphic notation also serves the adaptability to oral traditions (Zhang & Yu, 2021). Graphic notations often

functioned as mnemonic devices, supporting the oral transmission of music by providing key visual cues that students could interpret in the context of live instruction.

4.2.2. Preservation for Recording Traditional Compositions and Performance Practices

Chinese ancient graphic notations were indispensable for preserving the rich heritage of Chinese music, particularly in an era when audio recording technology did not exist. They served as a bridge between past and present by capturing essential musical elements in a durable and interpretable format (Wang, 2021). First, the Chinese ancient graphic notations could be the detailed tablatures. Systems like guqin notation not only preserved melodies but also documented the specific performance techniques unique to each piece, ensuring that future generations could replicate the original intent and style. In addition, the Chinese ancient graphic notations could be the compilation of repertoires. Collections of graphic notations, such as those found in ancient music treatises like the '*Qinshu Daquan* (琴书大全)', acted as repositories of knowledge, safeguarding compositions that might otherwise have been lost to time. Furthermore, the Chinese ancient graphic notations could represent the regional and stylistic variations. By recording specific regional or stylistic differences in notation, these systems preserved the diversity of Chinese music, reflecting the unique characteristics of different cultural traditions.

4.2.3. Cultural Expression for Reflecting Philosophical and Aesthetic Principles Through Symbolic Representation

Graphic notations in Chinese ancient music often transcended their practical function to become a medium for expressing deeper philosophical and aesthetic ideals. They embodied the harmony between music, nature, and human emotion, integral to traditional Chinese thought (Chen, 1985). Firstly, the Chinese ancient graphic notations could be the symbolism in notation. Many graphic notations included symbolic elements that reflected the philosophical underpinnings of the music. For instance, guqin notation often incorporated poetic inscriptions and visual metaphors that resonated with Confucian, Daoist, or Buddhist ideals (Tian, 1992; Tashi, 1993). Secondly, they could integrate with visual arts. Some graphic notations were designed with artistic elements that aligned with traditional Chinese calligraphy or painting, reinforcing the connection between music and other forms of cultural expression (Wang, 2005). Thirdly, the Chinese ancient graphic notations are encouraging interpretation (Zhang & Yu, 2021). Rather than dictating every detail of a performance, many graphic notations left room for personal interpretation, encouraging performers to engage deeply with the music and imbue it with their own emotional and spiritual understanding.

The purposes served by graphic notations in Chinese history continue to resonate today. They inspire modern musicians and composers to explore new ways of representing music visually, bridging traditional practices with contemporary artistic innovation. The adaptability and richness of graphic notations reflect their enduring value as tools for education, preservation, and cultural expression.

4.3. The Relationship between The Graphic Notation and Chinese Ancient Music Style

Based on the review of a significant number of ancient Chinese graphic notations that was presented earlier. The relationship between graphic notation and ancient Chinese musical styles is rooted in their shared emphasis on flexibility, cultural expression, and nuanced

interpretation. Graphic notation provides a visual representation of music that is consistent with the unique characteristics of traditional Chinese music, including its reliance on modes and scales that differ from those of the West. It includes pitch and rhythm, as well as the expressive components of dynamics, articulation and timbre that underlie the emotional and spiritual nature of Chinese music (Yang, 2006; Sparks, 2023).

In classical traditions like the guqin, where improvisation and personal interpretation are significant, graphic notation provides a flexible framework that respects these qualities. In contrast to Western pentatonic notation, graphic notation adapts to the fluidity and interpretive nature of ancient Chinese music, preserving its distinct character. In addition, graphic symbols are an important tool for the preservation and dissemination of traditional Chinese music. A number of ancient Chinese musical compositions have been transmitted throughout history by oral or non-standardised means. Graphic notation visually represents these traditions and facilitates the recording and dissemination of music for future generations, thus supporting academic research and performance practice. In this way, graphic notation has provided ancient Chinese music with a medium that is reflective of its cultural depth and artistic complexity.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the study of ancient Chinese musical notation reveals its multiple meanings in the context of China's musical heritage. First of all, the classification of these notations highlights their diversity, ranging from the Jianzi notation to visual symbols and textual descriptions, each uniquely adapted to the requirements of the instruments, genres and styles they represent. These classifications illustrate how different systems can be developed to meet specific needs, such as guiding instrumental performances, preserving works and supporting improvisation. The findings suggest that graphic notation was a dynamic and adaptable instrument in ancient Chinese music, linking theoretical concepts to practical applications while encapsulating the aesthetic and cultural essence of the era. Second, the functions of ancient Chinese graphic symbols go beyond simply representing timbre. Embracing both the technical instruction and the expressive nature of music, they were tools for musical education, cultural preservation and expression. By enabling performers to capture nuances of ornamentation, dynamics and phrasing, these symbols bridge the gap between the written and aural traditions of ancient Chinese music. Thirdly, the relationship between ancient Chinese graphic symbols and ancient Chinese musical styles emphasizes their integral role in reflecting the core principles of ancient Chinese music. Consistent with the tonal system, pentatonic structure, and improvisational nature of traditional Chinese music, these symbols provide a flexible and culturally resonant medium that honors its interpretive and spiritual dimensions. In sum, the classification, function and stylistic alignment of ancient Chinese graphic symbols illustrate their enduring importance in preserving and understanding the rich heritage of Chinese musical traditions.

In ancient China, the notation systems employed across various regions and periods exhibited significant divergence. Moreover, studying ancient Chinese graphic notations is difficult due to the predominance of oral transmission in Chinese music, with only a limited number of compositions having been recorded. According to those sources, most graphic notations in ancient Chinese pertain to pitch modification, and these notations are predominantly challenging to comprehend and interpret. Conversely, the invention of visual notation represented an endeavor by ancient Chinese individuals to encapsulate the music integral to their existence. The visual notation in this paper does not encompass

the entirety of Chinese history due to insufficient scores for specific genres of folk music. Graphic notation is employed in the writing of certain contemporary music, a topic that requires more extensive exploration in the forthcoming studies.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Not applicable

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Conflict of Interest

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