

9-2006

Whistling and its magico-religious tradition : a comparative perspective

Juilung SU

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.ln.edu.hk/ljcs_1999



Part of the [Chinese Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Su, J. (2006). Whistling and its Magico-religious tradition: A comparative perspective. Lingnan Journal of Chinese studies, 3, 14-44. Retrieved from http://commons.ln.edu.hk/ljcs_1999/vol3/iss1/3

This 專論 is brought to you for free and open access by the Centre for Humanities Research 人文學科研究中心 at Digital Commons @ Lingnan University. It has been accepted for inclusion in 嶺南學報 Lingnan Journal of Chinese Studies (1999-2006) by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Lingnan University.

Whistling and Its Magico-Religious Tradition: A Comparative Perspective

Jui-lung Su 蘇瑞隆

National University of Singapore

Intent of the Study

To whistle is not a natural act, but it is a universal phenomenon in human societies. In ancient China, whistling was especially significant because of its magical and religious functions. Aoki Masaru 青木正兒 (1887-1964) and Funazu Tomihiko 船津富彦 (1915-) were among the earliest scholars to pay attention to *xiao* 嘯 (whistling).^[1] In the West, E. D. Edwards (1888-) was the first person to translate the *Xiaozhi* 嘯旨 (principles of whistling), a Tang dynasty (n.d.) technical treatise on whistling, into English.^[2] Donald Holzman (1926-) also commented on *xiao* in his study of Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210-263).^[3] In the 1970s and 1980s Sawada Mizuho 澤田瑞穂 (1912-) and Li Fengmao 李豐楙 (1947-) also completed substantial studies on this subject.^[4] Both Sawada and Li have traced the origin of *xiao* back to its ritualistic tradition in summoning souls. However,

[1] Aoki Masaru, "Shō no rekishi to jigi no hensen" 嘯の歴史と字義の變遷, *Ritsumeikan bungaku* 立命館文學, 150-151 (October 1957), pp.179-187; and Funazu Tomihiko, "Gi Shin bungaku ni okeru shōgo ni tsuite" 魏晉文學における嘯傲について, *Tōyō bungaku kenkyō* 東洋文學研究, 13 (1963), pp.34-50.

[2] E. D. Edwards, "'Principles of Whistling' — Hsiao Chih — Anonymous," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 20 (1957), pp.217-229.

[3] Donald Holzman, *Poetry and Politics: The Life and Works of Juan Chi, A.D. 210-263* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp.149-153.

[4] Sawada Mizuho, "Shō no genryū" 嘯の源流, *Tōhō shūkyō* 東方宗教 44 (October 1974), pp.1-13; Li Fengmao, "Daojiao xiao de chuanshuo ji qi dui wenxue de yingxiang" 道教嘯的傳說及其對文學的影響, in his *Liuchao Sui Tang xiandao lei xiaoshuo yanjiu* 六朝隋唐仙道類小說研究 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju 學生書局, 1986), pp.225-275.

some problems remain unsolved and some of their conclusions are problematic. Is *xiao* truly a distinctive, orthodox Daoist technique related to the *jinqi* 禁氣 (tentatively translated as “breath magic”) and other Daoist practices? Did it later develop into the oral imitation of human voices as some scholars have claimed? This essay will investigate the development of *xiao* in the realm of literature and religion from a comparative perspective and attempt to account for aspects of *xiao* earlier scholars have failed to explain.

The Magical Tradition of Xiao

The word *xiao* 嘯 is tentatively translated as “whistling,” but in the Chinese tradition it covers a spectrum of nuance and significance.^[5] The earliest examples of *xiao* are found in a *Shijing* 詩經 poem in which the protagonist, identified as a woman, whistles while singing:

The Yangzi River has the (tributary) Tuo;
This young lady went to her new home,
But she would not pass us on;
She would not pass us on,
But now she whistles and sings. (Poem #22)^[6]
江有沱，之子歸，不我過，不我過，其嘯也歌。

In another poem, an abandoned woman whistles to express her sorrow:

There is a girl who has been rejected,
Long-drawn-out is her wailing.

^[5] This is Pulleyblank’s reconstruction of *xiao* in the early Middle Chinese. See Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation in Early Middle Chinese, Late Middle Chinese, and Early Mandarin* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991), pp.341.

^[6] Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1974), pp.13; and Poem #229, “Baihua” 白華: “Wailingly I sing with pained bosom, I am thinking of that tall man” 嘯歌傷懷，念彼碩人; see Karlgren, *The Book of Odes*, pp.182.

Long-drawn-out is her wailing,
 She has met with wickedness from a man. (Poem #69)^[7]
 有女怵離，條其歎矣。條其歎矣，遇人不淑矣。

In his commentary to Poem #22, Bernhard Karlgren (1889-1978) cites Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) who explains *xiao* as: “to compress the mouth and emit sound.”^[8] Xu Shen 許慎 (ca. 58-147) in his *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 gives a similar definition: “To *xiao* is to make sound by blowing. This word contains the mouth radical and takes *su* as its phonetic element” 吹聲也，從口肅聲。^[9] Xu Shen’s definition identifies *xiao* as “to whistle,” that is, to make a sound by the forcible expulsion of the breath through the mouth. Wang Li (1900-1986) points out that *xiao* 嘯 and *xiao* 簫 (panpipe) are cognates.^[10] Both of the characters contain the same phonetic element which indicates that the panpipe and whistling share the same sound-making principle. However, in his *Book of Odes* Karlgren follows the definition given in the *Yiqie jing yinyi* 一切經音義 and renders *xiao* into “to croon” and “wail” instead of “to whistle.”^[11] He probably thinks that “wailing” better fits the context here because it is difficult to associate whistling with a sorrowful mood from our modern perspective. Another possibility is that by the time of the *Shijing*, the meaning of *xiao* had already been extended to mean “wailing” or other similar shrill sounds. Though we cannot pin down the exact meaning of *xiao* in the above *Shijing* passages, those passages do indicate that *xiao* means “to whistle” and is often related to singing and chanting in general.

[7] Karlgren, *The Book of Odes*, pp.46-47. Wang Li 王力 glosses 歎 as 嘯. Wang Li, *Tongyuan zidian* 同源字典 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe 文史哲出版社, 1991), pp.222-223.

[8] *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義, in *Shi san jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1987), pp.292b.

[9] Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1981), 2a.58. The modern Japanese expression “kuchibue o fuku” 口笛を吹く (literally, “to play a mouth flute”), meaning “to whistle,” faithfully reflects the same concept.

[10] Wang, *Tongyuan zidian*, pp.222.

[11] Bernhard Karlgren, *Glosses on the Book of Odes* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1964), pp.104-105; also see his *Analytic Dictionary of Chinese and Sino-Japanese* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1923), pp.245.

In most cases, we can be sure that the word *xiao* does not go beyond this linguistic boundary.

The protagonists in those *Shijing* poems are not necessarily women, but they are identified as such by most of the commentators. The reason why whistling is especially associated with women in early Chinese literature remains obscure and requires further investigation. I shall present a tentative explanation. In Han and Six Dynasties texts, we find women whistling to express their joy or sorrow. The *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 tells of a woman of Qishi 漆室 (modern Zouxian 鄒縣, Shandong) leaning against a door-post whistling with anxiety. Her neighbor asks her if she is longing for a mate.^[12] It turns out that this wise woman was whistling to show her deep concern about the political conditions of her home state Lu 魯. The ruler of Lu was old and the heir designate was still young. Like the *Shijing* passages cited above, this incident also suggests that whistling was a common way for a woman to express sorrow, especially longing for or worry over a man. Besides expressing one's sorrow, there are also occasions on which a woman whistles to accompany certain graceful movements. For example, in Cao Zhi's 曹植 (192-232) "Mei'nu pian" 美女篇, a beauty whistles on her way to pluck mulberry leaves :

How her gauze clothing flutters,
The light skirt turns with the wind.
Looking back, her eyes give out a brilliant shine;
Giving a long whistle, her breath is like thoroughwort.^[13]
羅衣何飄飄，輕裾隨風還。顧盼遺光采，長嘯氣如蘭。

In Han and Six Dynasties literature, there are numerous examples in which whistling is used to express sorrow and pent-up feelings, though it does not necessarily apply to women only. In the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, it is the spirit of the

^[12] *Lienü zhuan* (*Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 [hereafter *Sbby*] ed.) 3.8b. c.f. Albert Richard O'Hara, *The Position of Woman in Early China* (Taipei: Mei Ya Publications, 1971), pp.96.

^[13] Zhao Youwen 趙幼文, *Cao Zhi ji jiaoshu* 曹植集校注 (Taipei: Mingwen shuju, 1985), pp.385. The English translation is from Robert Joe Cutter, "Cao Zhi and His Poetry." (Diss. University of Washington, 1983), pp.401.

Yellow Emperor 黃帝 who whistles out his lamentation:

The Western Matriarch broke her *sheng* headdress, and the Yellow Spirit whistled and sighed.^[14]

西老折勝，黃神嘯吟。

The Eastern Han commentator, Gao You 高誘 (ca. 168-212), explains that chaos and disorder suddenly occurred when the Queen Mother of the West 西王母 (*Xiwangmu*, a legendary figure) broke her hairpin. The spirit of the Yellow Emperor laments the degeneration of the Way and thus heaved a sigh while whistling (or wailing?). Here again whistling is used to show deep sorrow and exasperation. In the *Wenxuan* 文選 anthology, the word *xiao* is also constantly employed to describe the mournful screeching and shrieking of birds and animals, though no reference to the magical function of *xiao* is found in any of these passages. From the above data, scanty as it is, my speculation is that women that appear in pre-Qin poems are often depicted as having strong emotions or are situated in an emotional state and whistling is used to express their sorrows. Otherwise, it will be difficult to explain why women alone, as far as known evidence goes, are associated with whistling. Down to the Han, the function of whistling in literature was expanded to include other types of emotional expression.

However, whistling as a means of expression was not limited to sorrow and grieving in pre-Qin periods. The most remarkable female whistler is the Queen Mother of the West in the *Shanhaijing* 山海經 (Classic on Mountains and Seas) whose whistling seems to display her ferocity and power:^[15]

The appearance of the Queen Mother of the West resembles a human. She has a leopard tail and tiger teeth and excels at whistling. In her disheveled hair she wears a *sheng* headdress. She presides over the

[14] See Huainanzi (*Sbby* ed.), 6.8b.

[15] Homer H. Dubs translated it as the Mother Queen of the West. Édouard Chavannes held the same view. See Dubs, "An Ancient Chinese Mystery Cult," *Harvard Theological Review*, 35:4 (1942), pp.222.

disastrous plagues of heaven and the five punishments.^[16]

西王母其狀如人，豹尾虎齒而善嘯，蓬頭戴勝，是司天之厲及五殘。

Whistling in the *Shanhaijing* is used to describe the ferocious disposition of the Queen Mother whose duty is to mete out punishments. Since *xiao* is closely related with strong emotions, therefore it is appropriate for her punitive function. It is interesting to note that *xiao* is also used to describe the howling and roaring of a tiger. In the above passage, the Queen Mother of the West appears as a semi-human with animal characteristics rather than as a civilized noble woman, which is a later development appearing in Six Dynasties texts such as the *Han Wudi neizhuan* 漢武帝內傳.

The Queen Mother is related to a tiger, which in turn is connected with *xiao*. The *Huainanzi* records that the power of a tiger's *xiao* can raise a wind:

When a tiger howls (*xiao*), a valley wind arises; when a dragon flies up, auspicious clouds follow.^[17]

虎嘯而谷風至，龍舉而景雲屬。

Gao You explains the passage by resorting to the theory of the five phases:

The tiger is a creature of earth while wind is created by wood. Because wood comes from earth, when a tiger howls, the valley wind arrives.

The dragon is a creature of water and clouds produce water. Thus, when

^[16] See Yuan Ke 袁珂, comm., *Shanhaijing jiaozhu* 山海經校注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), pp.50; and Rémi Mathieu, trans. and ed., *Étude sur la mythologie et l'Ethnologie de la Chine Ancienne: Traduction annotée du Shanhaijing* (Paris: Collège de France, 1983), pp.101-102. I follow Guo Pu 郭璞 (276-324)'s commentary instead of Hao Yixing 郝懿行 (1755-1825) who believes that the *sitian zhi li* 司天之厲 and *wucan* 五殘 are constellations. However, Suzanne E. Cahill endorses Hao's interpretation; see her *Transcendence and Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp.15-16.

^[17] See *Huainanzi*, 3.2a. The apocrypha *Chunqiu yuanming bao* 春秋元命苞 contains the same passage; see Li Shan 李善 (ca. 630-690), comm., *Wenxuan* 文選 (Taipei: Huazheng shuju, 1986), pp.18.28.

a dragon rises, auspicious clouds converge.^[18]

虎，土物也，風，木風也。木生於土，故虎嘯而谷風至。龍，水物也，雲生水，故龍舉而景雲屬。

Here *xiao* must refer to the roar of a tiger, which apparently cannot whistle, although most felines do make sounds similar to whistling when they breathe in and out.

The first hexagram of the *Yijing* 易經 already manifests the idea that clouds follow a dragon and wind accompanies a tiger. The Tang commentator Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648) explains that “the tiger is a ferocious animal and the wind is the breath caused by vibration, thus they are of the same category and respond to one another.”^[19] The theory of correspondence between objects of the same category reflects a common folk belief of the Han dynasty. Except for the *Huainanzi* passage, which is probably the earliest Han document describing this specific magic aspect of *xiao*, I find no other documents that offer a different explanation why a tiger’s roar can attract wind. However, in later periods some magicians are described as capable of summoning wind by their whistling. This ability seems to be a formal extension of its primitive magic power. In the folk beliefs of Fujian 福建 province, a young boy’s whistling indicates that windy weather is due in the near future. It reflects an ancient conviction preserved in the Chinese folk tradition which original significance remains mysterious. At most, we can only say that this behavior follows the magic “law of similarity”: like produces like.^[20] Similarly, the Japanese believe whistling will attract snakes which produce hissing sounds.^[21] By whistling, we force air through our teeth to produce wind, thereby causing nature to correspond. Accordingly, ancient Chinese people believed that whistling could cause wind.

[18] See note [17].

[19] Kong Yingda, *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義 (*Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 ed.), 1, 16.b.

[20] See James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (London: MacMillan and Co. 1963), pp.11-12.

[21] Cora L. Daniels and C. M. Stevans, eds., *Encyclopedia of Superstitions, Folklore and the Occult Sciences of the World* (Chicago and Milwaukee: J. H. Yewdale and Sons, 1903), Vol. 1, pp.344. Certainly, it also indicates that whistling can cause disasters.

The most fascinating aspect of whistling also reflects a particular Chinese folk belief. The “*Zhaohun*” 招魂 (Summoning the Soul) of the *Chuci* 楚辭 offers the *locus classicus* for the religious and magical function of *xiao* in calling back human souls:

Qin basket-work, silk cords of Qi, and silken banners of Zheng:

All things are there proper; with long-drawn whistles and cries

[they summon the wondering soul.]

O soul, come back! Return to your old abode.^[22]

秦箏齊縷，鄭棉絡些，招具該備，永嘯呼些，魂兮歸來，反故居些。

In discussing the magic of the Western antiquity, the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* states, “Magic is essentially based on secret knowledge of sources of power.” There are three important techniques: (1) utterances, (2) material objects, and (3) performance.^[23] According to Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), among the Buryat of the Alarsk region, silk thread is also used by a shaman in summoning souls.^[24] Here the silk is used as a magical ingredient. Hissing and whistling belong to the first category. Han scholars also explain this summoning of souls from a magical perspective. Wang Yi’s 王逸 (Eastern Han) commentary on this passage is tainted with Han *yin-yang* philosophical views regarding human souls:

Whistling belongs to *yin*, while calling belongs to *yang*. *Yang* dominates the *hun* soul, while *yin* dominates the *po* soul. Thus, (to summon the soul back), one must whistle and call out in order to reach it.^[25]

夫嘯者，陰也。呼者，陽也。陽主魂，陰主魄。故必嘯呼以感之也。

^[22] Hong Xingzu 洪興祖, *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補注 (Sbby ed.), 9.5b; and David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985), pp.226. I have modified Hawkes’ translation of *xiao*. Hawkes translates *xiao* as “long-drawn, piercing cries.” To make a loud cry requires vocal cords, but to whistle does not.

^[23] Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.909.

^[24] Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), pp.217.

^[25] *Chuci buzhu*, 9.5b.

Though Wang Yi's interpretation may not be entirely correct, the concept that whistling is capable of summoning spirits seems deeply rooted in the Chinese folk religious system. One fragment of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 further attests to this belief: "When a child whistles at night, ghosts appear as numerous as teeth" 童子夜嘯, 鬼數若齒.^[26] Though J. J. M. de Groot (1854-1921), in his monumental work, *The Religious System of China*, devotes a whole chapter to "calling back the soul and the death howl," unfortunately he fails to quote the *Chuci* and does not mention any function of whistling in the death ritual of both ancient and modern China.^[27] I surmise that the religious function of *xiao* belongs to the shamanistic tradition and was rejected in the course of Chinese history because Confucian scholars must have considered it an improper and vulgar act. It is worth noting that *xiao* appears to have a negative connotation in Confucian ritual texts. According to the *Liji* 禮記, "a man should not whistle nor point his finger whenever he enters a room."^[28] In the *Yili* 儀禮, the Confucian ritual handbook, the section on the summoning of souls contains no reference to the magical whistling that previously appears in the *Chuci*:

A soul-summoner must take a suit of court robes formerly worn by the deceased, and having first pinned the coat and skirt together, he is to lay it over his left shoulder with the collar tucked into his belt, and in this manner, setting a ladder against the east end of the front eaves of the house, is to mount up on to the ridge of the roof, and there, facing northwards and stretching out the clothing, to call out three times in a loud voice, "Ho, Such a One! Come back!" Then he is to hand the clothing down from the front eaves to another below, who is to receive

^[26] The modern edition of the *Zhuangzi* does not contain this line. It is quoted in the Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢, et al., eds., *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), pp.19.353.

^[27] See J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1892), Vol. 1, pp. 243-262. de Groot provides a wealth of information regarding the death-howl and death rituals in ancient China.

^[28] See *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 (*Shisanjing zhushu* ed.), 27, 1462.c. The commentary equates *xiao* with *chi* 叱, "to give command in a loud voice."

it into a box and carry it therein into the house, entering by way of the eastern step. And this other one, going into the room where the deceased lies, is to lay the clothing down upon the corpse. The summoner, meanwhile, is to descend from the roof by the west end of the rear eaves.^[29]

復者一人。以爵弁服簪裳于衣左。何之。扱領于帶。升自前東榮中屋。北面招以衣。曰皋某復。三。降衣于前。受用篋。升自阼階以衣尸。復者降自後西榮。

The Confucian scholar may have purposefully omitted the *xiao* as part of the important ritual. Compared to the scene in the *Chuci*, the Confucian summoning appears much more formal and less dramatic. David Hawkes (1964 -) humorously points out that “the Confucian ritualist who compiled the *Yili* evidently did not expect this somewhat perfunctory soul summoning to be successful...”^[30] In fact, the Confucianist objects to any ritual that contains excessive emotional outbursts, though the *Liji* prescribes specific periods of time for death wailing for people of different ranks.^[31] Sharp, piercing whistling must be offensive to Confucian ritualists. It is recorded that Confucius himself did not object to death wailing, but he “detested those who wail for their dead in the open field.”^[32] Confucius was surprised and displeased when he was informed that his own son Boyu 伯魚 still wailed for his mother a year after her death.^[33] Another anecdote records that Confucius also opposed singing on occasions of death. One day while he was helping Yuanxian 原憲 prepare a coffin for his mother, the latter began to sing some sort of dirge. Confucius took his leave immediately.^[34] As a faithful disciple of Confucius, Zengzi 曾子 said, “when the grass on a late friend’s grave is over a year old, one should not wail any more.”^[35] Zengzi also reprimanded

^[29] David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South*, pp.219; *Yili zhushu* 儀禮注疏 (*Shisanjing zhushu*), 35.1128-1129.

^[30] David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South*, pp.220.

^[31] *Liji zhengyi*, 56.1655c.

^[32] *Liji zhengyi*, 7.1282b, and 8.1294b.

^[33] *Liji zhengyi*, 7.1281a.

^[34] *Liji zhengyi*, 10.1315c-16a.

^[35] *Liji zhengyi*, 6.1275b.

Zixia 子夏 for losing his eyesight over his own son's death. All of these anecdotes point out that the Confucian school advocated moderation and restraint in rituals related to death and burials. Here we witness how Confucianism encroached on the practices of popular religion and erased many characteristics of the latter.

Whistling and Women: The East and the West

Now having established the historical background for *xiao*, we will again return to the previous question: Why are the earliest mentions of *xiao* usually associated with women? In "Summoning the Soul," the gender of the whistler who summons the human soul cannot be known due to the ambiguity of personal pronouns in classical Chinese. Could it be a woman? From the vestige of ancient rituals, we find a clue to the solution of this puzzling issue. Henri Doré, who observed the soul-calling rituals in the late Qing dynasty, gives an example from Xuzhou 徐州 and Suqian 宿遷 (both in modern Jiangsu) in which a woman plays the major role in the ritual:

A woman takes a bowl of water and, covering it with a sheet of paper, sprinkles upon the latter a few drops of water. She then holds up the sheet to the light, and observes whether any drops fall into the bowl, or still adhere to the lower part of the sheet. If several drops are found adhering, a dog has scared the child out of its wits; if only a few, a man has caused the fright; if none at all are found, the illness is deemed to be natural. Part of the water is then administered to the sick child; the demon that caused the fright is thus conjured, and the soul returns. The names given to this ceremony vary with the localities; it is most generally called "vociferating or calling aloud to the soul, *Kiao-hwun* 叫魂."^[36]

^[36] Henri Doré, *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, translated from the French original by M. Kennelly (Shanghai: T'uswei Printing Press, 1917), Vol. 4, pp.473.

Doré further provides an illustration of a folk carving in which a woman performs the ritual of soul calling.^[37] Is this merely an accident? Or is it a clue to an ancient ritualistic tradition? I think it is evident that women played an important role in the rituals of death-howl and soul-recalling in ancient China. de Groot also points out that it is the mother who is responsible for calling back the soul of her baby who is seized with convulsions.^[38] In ancient China, women probably were hired as soul-callers or professional mourners. It should be recognized that the death-howl prescribed in the *Liji* is a Confucianized ritualistic continuation of soul-calling. A passage in Camden's *Britannia* that vividly describes the female mourners in Ireland is enlightening:

When a person is at the point of death, just before he expires, certain Women Mourners, standing in the Cross-ways, spread their hands, and call him with cries adapted to the purpose, and endeavor to stop the departing soul, reminding it of the advantages it enjoys in goods, wives, person, reputation, kindred, friends, and horses: asking it why it will go, and where, and lastly, complaining that the departing Spirit will be transformed into those forms which appear at night and in the dark; and, after it has quitted the Body, they bewail it with howlings and clapping of hands. They follow the funeral with such a noise, that one would think there was an end both of living and dead. The most violent in these lamentations are the Nurses, Daughters, and Mistress.^[39]

First of all, we notice the striking similarity between the method with which the Irish female mourners try to entice the wandering spirit to return to his body and that used in the "Summons of the Soul" and the "Great Summons" ("Dazhao" 大招). Moreover, these women were hired as soul-callers and mourners at the same time probably because of their ability in demonstrating strong emotions.^[40] Thus,

^[37] See the illustration from Henri Doré, *Chinese Superstitions*, Vol. 4, pp.473.

^[38] de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, Vol. 1, pp.243.

^[39] It is cited by de Groot in *The Religious System of China*, Vol. 1, pp.245.

^[40] de Groot also advocates that the "recalling of the dead and the methodic lamenting" were originally the same rite; see *The Religious System of China*, Vol. 1, pp.254-255.

the person who uses whistling to summon human souls in the *Chuci* could have been a shamanka whose position was reduced to the status of a mourner in later ages. In the process of time, the recalling of soul is no longer practiced while the death-howl becomes a pure formality. Finally, regarding the two most violently emotional acts during the funeral, that is, the stamping of the feet (*yong* 踊) and the beating of the breast (*bi* 辟), de Groot concludes in accordance with Chinese commentators that “this manner of displaying grief was a special act of women; it is well known that, among savages, the weaker sex are particularly vehement and frantic in their grief, losing all self-control in the expression hereof.”^[41]

Since antiquity, women, due to their special emotional quality, served as shamankas and played an important role in pre-death and death rituals.^[42] This probably explains why in early Chinese texts women were often associated with *xiao*, which contains a ritualistic significance and indicates a powerful expression of tragic feelings. As mentioned above, Wang Yi interprets whistling as a *yin* activity while the *po* souls represent the *yang* energy of the human body, thus what could be more natural than to employ a female shaman to perform the magic whistling? The shamanka, an embodiment of *yin*, is powerful enough to summon the *hun* souls to reunite with the *po* souls.^[43] It is only natural for a poet to employ specific words and expressions pertaining to female emotions and behavior to describe women in distress. Therefore, in the *Shijing*, a woman whistling while weeping over her own miserable situation should be interpreted as a convulsion of violent emotion equivalent to the death-howl in funerals. In this context, perhaps *xiao* does not directly mean “whistling,” but rather it connotes an emotional outburst. By using the word *xiao*, the poet tries to bring out the tragic and

^[41] de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, Vol. 1, pp. 260-261. In the *Liji*, these two acts are considered the utmost expression of grief; see *Liji zhengyi*, 9.1301c.

^[42] The *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 defines the character *wu* 巫 as “women who can serve the unseen and invite the gods to descend by means of their dance.” See Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注, 5a.201. This is also evident that since antiquity women already occupied a significant place in Chinese religion.

^[43] For the concept about *hun* and *po* souls, Yü Ying-shih 余英時, “O Soul, Come Back! A Study in the Changing Conceptions of the Soul and Afterlife in Pre-Buddhist China,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47.2 (December 1987), pp.363-395.

intolerable predicament of the deserted woman. By the same token, the whistling of the Queen Mother of the West could have been a sign of her identity as a shamanka and a deity in charge of punishments.

Since whistling is associated with death rituals in Chinese magico-religious tradition, it always has an ominous connotation. However, there is no extant Chinese document that states that whistling women are considered unlucky. It is interesting to see that contrary to the Chinese phenomenon, there is a firm, deep-rooted prejudice against a woman's whistling in the West. Whistling is often called "the devil's music."^[44] In Cornwall (England), people believe a whistling woman and a crowing hen are the most unlucky things one can ever come across. A common saying goes as follows:

A whistling wife, and a crowing hen,
Will call the "old one" out of his den.^[45]

The Germans believe that a woman's whistling will make the angels weep and the devils rejoice.^[46] Here it is implied that a woman's whistling will convoke the Devil. In the *Chuci*, whistling shares a similar function in recalling the human soul. In the Han and Six Dynasties periods, it is recorded that some *fangshi* 方士 magicians whistle to summon spirits and demons. According to a legend of obscure source, a woman stood by idly whistling while the nails that were destined for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ were being made.^[47] This is presumably the very source that explains why a whistling woman is the most unlucky thing under the sun who will make the heart of the Virgin Mary bleed.

In the Chinese tradition, however, there is no prejudice or taboo directed against a woman's whistling. Instead, whistling in general possesses some sort of magical power. Despite orthodox Confucianism's repression of shamanism and popular religion, folk beliefs continued to survive in the oral tradition and

^[44] Daniels and Stevans, *Encyclopedia of Superstitions*, Vol. 1, pp.345.

^[45] See note ^[44].

^[46] See note ^[44].

^[47] See note ^[44] and David Pickering, ed., *Cassell Dictionary of Superstitions* (London: Cassell Wellington House, 1995), pp.285.

the collective memory of the masses. Even in modern times the Han Chinese consider it taboo to whistle in the house at night for fear of provoking ghosts. Similarly, the Maonan 毛難 and Tong 侗 people, among the Chinese minorities, believe that whistling while working on the field will invoke demons to damage the harvest.^[48] I do not intend to prove Daoist beliefs are directly related to the Chinese minorities. But such universal beliefs must have been the origins and foundations of later Daoist concepts of magical whistling. In the West, Mithraism, a mystical religion active in the third century Asia Minor, had a similar belief. In describing one of the Mithraic liturgies, C. G. Jung (1875-1961) quotes a passage from the Mithras liturgy: ^[49]

But after you have said the second prayer, where silence is twice commanded, then whistle twice and click twice with the tongue, and immediately you will see stars coming down from the disc of the sun, five-pointed, in large numbers and filling the whole air. But say once again "Silence! Silence!"^[50]

Whistling and clicking the tongue are both archaic devices for attracting theriomorphic star deities. Roaring has a comparable function. In addition, according to American folk beliefs, disasters can occur if someone whistles in a theater. Whistling not only is taboo for actors and actresses, but also for miners, who fear it can cause an explosion, and for sailors who believe it can raise a storm.^[51] Accordingly, both East and West consider whistling a taboo in many situations because it may call in gods or ghosts or cause a disaster.

^[48] Zheng Chuanyin 鄭傳寅 and Zhang Jian 張建, eds., *Zhongguo minsu cidian* 中國民俗辭典 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館, 1987), pp.406-407; and Xue Li 雪梨, ed., *Zhongguo minsu yuanliu jicheng: Jinji, shengchan, shangmao juan* 中國民俗源流集成：禁忌·生產·商貿卷 (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe 甘肅人民出版社, 1994), pp.85.

^[49] For a concise introduction, see Gherardo Gnoli, "Mithraism," in Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), pp.580-582.

^[50] See C. G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), pp.94. Again this Western example is offered from a comparative perspective of scholarly interest. I do not intend to prove that ancient Chinese situation was exactly like this.

^[51] See David Pickering, ed., *Cassell Dictionary of Superstitions*, pp.285; Philippa Waring, *Dictionary of Omens and Superstitions* (London: Treasure Press, 1984), pp.256.

Six Dynasties: The Golden Age of Whistling

In pre-Qin literature, whistlers include women, children, shaman, and a theriomorphic goddess. However, by the Han, Wei and Jin Dynasties, the practitioners came to include persons from almost all walks of life: recluses, hermit-scholars, generals, Buddhist monks, non-Chinese foreigners, women, high society elite, some believers in the Sect of Celestial Masters 天師道, and Daoist priests.^[52] *Xiao* seems to have permeated all strata of Six Dynasties society, which was truly the golden age of *xiao*. Li Fengmao points out that from the Han onward to the Jin whistling became especially associated with Daoists.^[53] Two of the best-known whistlers in the Eastern Han are Zhao Bing 趙柄 and Liu Gen 劉根, who were *fangshi* magicians.^[54] The *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 contains an anecdote about Zhao and whistling:

On another occasion, he was seeking passage across a river, but the boat man would not take him. Bing spread out a cloth and sat in the middle of it. Then with a long whistle he stirred up winds and crossed the river.^[55]

又嘗臨水求度，船人不和之，炳乃張蓋坐其中，長嘯呼風，亂流而濟。

Zhao's whistling reminds us of the example in the *Huainanzi* which claims that a tiger's roaring attracts winds. It also recalls the Western sailors' belief that whistling could raise a storm at sea. Liu Gen's story is even more dramatic and closely connected to ancient shamanistic techniques.

Liu Gen was a native of Ying-chuan. He lived in reclusion on top of

^[52] Li Fengmao, "Daojiao *xiao* de chuanshuo," pp.244-245.

^[53] Li Fengmao, "Daojiao *xiao* de chuanshuo," pp.235-240.

^[54] For their biographies, respectively see Fan Ye 范曄 (398-455), *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965) 82.2742 and 82b.2746.

^[55] *Hou Han shu* 82b.2742. The English translation is revised from Kenneth J. DeWoskin, trans., *Doctors, Diviners, and Magicians of Ancient China: Biographies of Fang-shih* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp.77.

Mount Song, and those who sought to study with him would travel from very distant places to learn the way. The local grand protector, Shi Qi, thought Ken was demonic, so he had him put under arrest and brought to the commandery office for interrogation. He repeatedly asked Gen, "What magical arts do you possess that you can so bewitch the people? If you really have spiritual powers, then demonstrate them for us by making something happen. If you cannot prove yourself, I will sentence you to die." Gen replied, "The ability I have developed most is to make people see ghosts. Otherwise, I can actually do nothing remarkable." Qi said, "Then quickly summon some here so that I may see them with my own eyes. That would be the clearest proof." Gen thereupon turned to the left and whistled. In an instant, Shi Qi's deceased father, grandfather, and several dozen close relatives appeared before them, with their hands bound behind their backs. They faced Gen, kowtowed, and said, "Our descendant has treated you in a disgraceful fashion. He should suffer ten thousand punishments!"^[56]

劉根者，潁川人也。隱居嵩山中。諸好事者自遠而至，就根學道，太守史祈以根為妖妄，乃收執詣郡，數之曰：「汝有何術，而誣惑百姓？若果有神，可顯一驗事，不爾，立死矣」。根曰：「實無它異，頗能令人見鬼耳」。祈曰：「促召之，爾乃為明」。根於是左顧而嘯，有頃，祈之亡父祖近親數十人，皆反縛在前，使太守目覩，向根叩頭曰：「小兒無狀，分當萬坐」。

It is noticeable that here whistling, rather than standing out as a brand-new technique, retains its primitive function of summoning spirits.

In addition to these magical aspects, the Chinese literati during this period employed the word *xiao* and its related phrases in their poetry. Whistling not only was closely connected to their writing, but it was an integral part of their lives as poets and hermits. One of the reasons why whistling is regarded as a taboo is that it produces a high-pitched and extremely loud sound that attracts attention. The Icelanders abhor whistling to the extent that they believe any

^[56] See note ^[55].

whistling sound made by, for example, a swinging stick, is inauspicious and would drive the Holy Ghost away from the person who makes the sound.^[57] However, the Chinese seem to be one of the few peoples, if not the only one, that romanticizes the technique of whistling. From the Han on, the Chinese began to absorb the word *xiao* into their refined literature. In phrases such as *xiaoju* 嘯聚 (whistle and gather) and *xiaochou* 嘯儔 (whistle to one's companions), the significance of the sharp sound is revealed.^[58] The phrase *xiaoju shanlin* 嘯聚山林 (to whistle and gather in the woods) is often used to describe how a band of outlaws stick together as brothers. One of the nuances of this phrase is it connotes a sense of individual freedom and pleasure in the act itself. When a reader familiar with the martial arts novels sees the phrase, a picture of a group of bold, free men gathering in the mountains will immediately appear in his imagination. It would be a perfect expression for the bandits in the *Legend of the Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳).

As mentioned above, it was due to its shrill, sometimes offensive, sound that Confucian scholars deemed whistling a behavior lacking decorum and propriety. Scholar-recluses in the Han and Six Dynasties often employed whistling to display their disdain and contempt towards worldly affairs or to show an attitude of absolute freedom and unrestraint.^[59] To give one example, in the Southern Qi 齊 when Zong Ce 宗測 decided to retire to Mount Lu 廬 (modern Jiujiang 九江, Jiangxi), he only took the *Laozi* 老子 and *Zhuangzi* 莊子 texts with him. While his sons and grandsons were crying and bidding him farewell, he let out a long whistle without looking back.^[60] There are some popular expressions related to whistling such as *xiao'ao* 嘯傲 (whistling while expressing one's haughtiness) and *changxiao* 長嘯 (long whistling), that are constantly found in the poetic diction

^[57] Daniels and Stevans, *Encyclopedia of Superstitions*, Vol. 1, pp.345.

^[58] See *Hou Han shu*, 87.2900. For other examples, see Academia Sinica's (Taipei) computerized index of *The Twenty-Five Dynastic Histories* <<http://www.sinica.edu.tw/ftms-bin/ftmsw3>>, which provides a convenient tool for this sort of search.

^[59] Since numerous examples can be found in Li Fengmao's "Daojiao xiao de chuanshuo," I will not repeat them here.

^[60] See Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯 (489-537), *Nan Qi shu* 南齊書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 54.941.

of Six Dynasties poetry. Funazu Tomihiko gives a comprehensive list of anecdotes to illustrate these expressions and their significance.^[61] For instance, Guo Pu whistles (*xiao'ao*) to forget worldly entanglements and Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365-427) whistles while roaming in his eastern verandah listening to the birds.^[62] Funazu points out that in the Six Dynasties whistling is intended to express one's indignation and contempt towards the world. The Chinese poets during this period feel that they are trapped and unable to achieve their ideals, and by means of whistling they try to rise above this vulgar world. It is a means to disperse and purge these feelings. Moreover, whistling is also constantly practiced by some hermit poets as a way to absorb themselves into nature. The most famous whistler of the Jin is Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210-263) whose encounter with a Daoist master, Sun Deng 孫登 (209-241), is recorded in the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語.^[63] Donald Holzman comments on their meeting:

It (*xiao*) was an unintellectual art, probably a fairly strange kind of sound that is divorced from speech and reason....When Ruan Ji whistles Sun Teng sees that he is not merely a pedant, but also an adept of an art that imitates nature, that he is able to control his breath so as to make it resemble that very breath of heaven.^[64]

In general, poets, hermits, and people of all types in the Six Dynasties utilized whistling to express a sense of untrammelled individual freedom, or an attitude of disobedience to authority or traditional ceremony, or to dispel suppressed feelings and indignation. Whistling was not limited to a certain class, but was practiced by men from all walks of life.

[61] Funazu Tomihiko, "Gi Shin bungaku ni okeru shō go ni tsuite."

[62] Guo Pu's "Youxian shi" 遊仙詩, no. 8, in Nie Enyan 聶恩彥, ed. and comm., *Guo Hongnong ji jiaozhu* 郭弘農集校注 (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe 山西人民出版社, 1991), pp.305; Tao Yuanming's "Yinjiu" 飲酒, no. 7, in Lu Qinli 盧欽立, ed. and comm., *Tao Yuanming ji* 陶淵明集 (Taipei: Liren shuju, 1985), pp.91.

[63] See Richard B. Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yu: A New Account of Tales of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), pp.331-332.

[64] Donald Holzman, *Poetry and Politics: The Life and Works of Juan Chi, A.D. 210-263*, pp. 152.

Is Whistling a Daoist Technique?

In order to trace the development of the meaning of *xiao*, I have investigated its occurrences in both the *Wenxuan*, representative of formal writings from the pre-Qin period down to the Six Dynasties, and the *Taiping guanji* 太平廣記, an extensive selection of fiction and short stories spanning from the Han to Early Song. In the Han and Six Dynasties works of the *Wenxuan*, *xiao* denotes either whistling and chanting or a shrill sound made by birds and animals such as monkeys, tigers, swans, and geese. In the *Taiping guanji*, I have found at least thirty-three occurrences of *xiao*. It generally means whistling or a penetrating sound made by human and animals. The significant difference lies in the fact that most whistlers in the *zhiguai* 志怪 stories are Daoist priests and magicians. However, the sense of “summoning” in the *Chuci* remains unchanged, though the function of *xiao* extends from summoning spirits to birds, rats or wind.

Based on the above analysis, in the following we will begin to examine the conclusions of Sawada Mizuho and Li Fengmao, who have both traced the origin of *xiao* back to its ritualistic tradition in summoning souls and maintained that *xiao* is closely associated with orthodox Daoism. In his “Origins of *Xiao*,” Sawada observes that *xiao* is connected to *taixi* 胎息 (embryonic breathing) and *kouji* 口技 (oral imitation of human and non-human voices). He assumes that since both embryonic breathing and whistling involve breathing exercises, they must be related. In fact, both the *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 and the *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 explain that embryonic breathing requires absolute quietness, while the purpose of whistling is to make a piercing sound. The *Yunji qiqian* contains some texts specifically dealing with the practice of *fuqi* 服氣 (swallowing the breath) and embryonic breathing, but none of them has related *xiao* with these breathing exercises.^[65] Usually, *fuqi* has to be practiced in a very quiet environment and the person should not make any noise. In describing the practice of embryonic

^[65] See HY 1026 (HY=Harvard Yenching; the HY numbers refer to that in the *Combined Indices to the Authors and Titles of Books in Two Collections of Taoist Literature*). See *Daozang* 道藏 (Taipei: Yinwen yinshuguan, 1962), v. 248, *juan* 57-60. All the *Daozang* texts are from this edition.

respiration, Ge Hong 葛洪 (284-364) points out that “during the exhalations and inhalations one should not hear the sound of one’s own breathing, and one should always exhale less than one inhales.”^[66] The main principle of embryonic breathing is “to inhale breath and hold out as long as possible, and then to utilize this breath held within the body by swallowing it, that is by making it pass from the respiratory apparatus into the alimentary canal so as to be nourished by it.”^[67] But whistling entails the outburst of breath so as to create a treble sound. In the *Baopuzi*, a practitioner of embryonic breathing even refuses to talk too much or loudly for fear of losing his breath.^[68] In addition, according to Ge Hong, to practice embryonic breathing one must not choose the period from noon to midnight when breath is dead.^[69] But whistling is very often practiced at night when it becomes truly quiet. Except for breathing, a superficial tie, there are no direct links between these two practices. As for Sawada’s assumption that *xiao* was later developed into oral imitation of human and non-human voices, it is total speculation based on Qing scholars’ notes. He quotes the Qing scholar Niu Yuqiao’s 鈕玉樵 (鈕琇, ?-1704) *Gusheng* 觚賸, which states that vocal imitation inherits the technique of ancient *xiao* and is its highest form of presentation.^[70] In the final note Sawada attaches to the end of the article, he points out that in modern Japanese the character *xiao* corresponds to *usobuku* 嘯く (meaning “roar, howl, feign indifference; recite emotionally”)^[71] which is the same as *kuchibue o fuku*, that is, to pucker up one’s mouth, send the air through the narrow opening, and whistle. Furthermore, a bird called *uso* 鶯 (bullfinch, pronounced as *xue* in

^[66] See Wang Ming 王明, comm., *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi* 抱朴子內篇校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 8.149 and James R. Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion in the China of A.D. 320* (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1966), pp.139.

^[67] Henri Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion*, trans. by Frank A. Kierman Jr. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), pp.343.

^[68] Wang Ming, *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi*, 16.268; and Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion*, pp. 248.

^[69] Wang Ming, *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi*, 8.149; and Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion*, pp. 139.

^[70] Sawada Mizuko, “Shō no genryū,” pp.11-12.

^[71] Andrew Nathaniel Nelson, *The Modern Reader’s Japanese-English Character Dictionary* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1988), pp.255, no. 999.

Chinese) gained its name because it makes a whistling sound. Sawada argues that artificial imitation of human voices and sounds is similar, in terms of meaning, to whistling which is to breathe air through an empty place, and is also similar to “uttering *empty* (false) words” (*uso-tsuki* 嘘つき, a liar) because they are all related to the idea of “emptiness.”^[72] In this way he tries to show the relation between whistling and vocal imitation. But, these suggestions are unfounded. First of all, the vocal mimicry mentioned in the Qing documents comprises all kinds of sounds such as the squeaking of a bed, baby’s crying, dog’s barking, and the noise of a market. The production of all these sounds requires vocal cords which a whistler does not need. *Xiao* as described in early documents such as Chenggong Sui’s 成公綏 (231-273) “Rhapsody on Whistling” (“*Xiaofu*” 嘯賦) and Sun Guang’s 孫廣 (Tang Dynasty) *Principles of Whistling*, is never connected to the imitation of human voices, while *kouji* involves mimicry of all kinds of sounds. Chenggong Sui only compares it to the cry of birds and neighing of a horse and does not describe it in terms of different human voices. In his *Principles of Whistling*, Sun Guang categorizes whistling into various types such as “Fleeting cloud,” “Tiger in a deep ravine,” “Cicada on a tall willow,” “Night demons in a lonely wood,” “The Gibbons of the Magic Cavern,” “Snow Geese and Swans Alighting,” “A Kite on a Dead Tree,” and “Earthquake.”^[73] Sun Guang’s classification is based on the auditory effects that whistling could create and the environment in which it is practiced. His descriptions must not be taken at face value; but they should be treated as metaphorical and literary because no whistling can really create the sounds he characterizes. There is no direct link between *xiao* and the imitation of human voices.

Li Fengmao in his comprehensive study of *xiao* also ignores the link between *kouji* and *xiao*, though he is fully aware of Sawada’s article. Li attempts to explain *xiao* as a shaman’s technique that was later assimilated into orthodox Daoism and developed into a sort of occult language or incantation. In order to establish the connection between whistling and *xiao*, he first points out that whistling as a

^[72] Sawada Mizuko, “Shō no genryū,” pp.13.

^[73] E. D. Edwards, “Principles of Whistling,” pp.222-225; and *Xiaozhi* (*Gushi wenfang xiaoshuo* 顧氏文房小說 ed.), 3b-6b.

Daoist non-verbal, spiritual language is connected to the practice of breath magic and the magic of visualizing the bright mirror (*cun minjing* 存明鏡) because both of these types of *fangshu* 方術 magic are mentioned together with whistling.^[74] According to Ge Hong, when a person masters breath magic he can exhale to extinguish fire, force water to flow backward, control snakes, tigers and wolves, and cure wounds.^[75] However, nowhere does Ge Hong mention whistling in his description. At the same time, the magical aspect of whistling in extant texts never includes the above functions of breath magic. Again breathing serves as an insubstantial connection. As for the “visualizing the bright mirror,” it is an even more far-fetched speculation than the previous one. In describing the technique of foretelling the good and bad fortunes of the future, Ge Hong remarks:

At other times, a bright mirror nine inches or more in diameter is used for looking at oneself with something on the mind. After seven days and nights a god or genie will appear, either male, female, old, or young, and a single declaration on its part discloses automatically what is occurring at that moment a thousand miles away.^[76]

或用明鏡九寸以上自照，有所思存，七日七夕則見神仙，或男或女，或老或少，一示之後，心中自知千里之外，方來之事也。

The practice is a means of fortune-telling through meditation and visualization as prescribed in detail in the *Yunji qiqian* and is by no means related to whistling.^[77]

Furthermore, Li Fengmao interprets Chenggong Sui’s “Rhapsody on Whistling” as a Daoist text, thereby establishing whistling as a Daoist art. He points out that *xiao* is a means of exercising one’s breath and prolonging one’s life because in describing the recluse-whistler the rhapsody says: “He has mastered

^[74] Li Fengmao, “Daojiao *xiao* de chuanshuo,” pp.258 and 275.

^[75] Wang Ming, *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi*, 8.150; and Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion*, pp. 138-139.

^[76] Wang Ming, *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi*, 15.273; and Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion*, pp. 255.

^[77] *Yunji qiqian*, *juan* 48, and Chen Yongzheng 陳永正, *Zhongguo fangshu da cidian* 中國方術大辭典 (Guangzhou: Zhongshan daxue chubanshe, 1991), pp.603-604.

the supreme subtleties of life and fate,/ Discerned the dark secrets of the Way and Virtue” 精性命之至機，研道德之玄奧。^[78] In fact, these are conventional phrases used to describe a self-cultivated recluse. It has nothing to do with the recluse's identity as a whistler and certainly does not mean that whistling is a way of achieving longevity. Descriptions of recluses can also be found in the “Sevens” (*Qi* 七) such as Cao Zhi's “Seven Arousals” (“Qi Qi” 七啟) and Zhang Xie's 張協 (?-307) “Seven Counsels” (“Qiming” 七命).^[79] Both *xingming* 性命 and *daode* 道德 appearing in many classical texts of pre-Qin periods which can hardly make the rhapsody a Daoist treatise.^[80] The reason why the recluse whistles is straightforwardly stated in the rhapsody:

Stinted by the narrowness of the mundane road,
 He gazes on the concourse of Heaven and treads on high.
 Removing himself from pomp and vulgarity, he becomes oblivious of self,
 And with strong feeling makes a long-drawn whistle.
 逸羣公子，體奇好異。傲世忘榮，絕棄人事。

He whistles to express his disdain toward the vulgar world. Whistling is the means to release his indignation and suffering. Although in the piece Chenggong Sui exaggerates the function of whistling by saying: “Its mysterious wonder is sufficient to commune with gods and awaken spirits; Its refined subtlety is sufficient to explore the hidden and fathom the deep” 玄妙足以通神悟靈，精微足以窮幽測深; still it does not make the *fu* exclusively Daoistic. As mentioned

^[78] For the Chinese text, see Li Shan 李善, comm., *Wenxuan* 文選 (Taipei: Huazheng shuju, 1986), 18.262. All the translations from this *fu* are from David R. Knechtges, *Wenxuan or Selections of Refined Literature, Volume III: Rhapsodies on Natural Phenomena, Birds and Animals, Aspirations and Feelings, Sorrowful Laments, Literature, Music and Passions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp.315-323. For another translation, see “Rhapsody on Whistling,” in Victor Mair, ed., *Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp.429-434.

^[79] For texts, see *Wenxuan*, 34.484-499.

^[80] Many examples can be found in the computerized index of *Shang'gu Hanyu yuliao ku* 上古漢語語料庫 at Academia Sinica <<http://www.sinica.edu.tw/ftms-bin/>>.

above, in the earliest stage of its magical tradition whistling already possessed the power of summoning spirits. Chenggong's statement does not go beyond the traditional parameters. Many types of musical performances, as well as whistling, allegedly are capable of causing changes in nature. The concept that a music corresponding to nature can influence heaven and earth existed since antiquity. For instance, Duke Ping 平 of the Jin 晉 insisted that Shi Kuang 師曠 play the "Qingjiao" 清角 (allegedly a zither tune by Yellow Emperor), and as soon as the latter played the tune, dark clouds rose, then a hurricane came, and finally a heavy downpour followed. As a result, the Jin state suffered drought for three years.^[81] Another example is Ma Rong's 馬融 (79-166) "Rhapsody on the Long Flute" ("Changdi fu" 長笛賦) which claims: "Thus, flute music can commune with the spirits, stir natural beings, / Express spirit, reveal thoughts" 是故可以通靈感物，寫神喻意。^[82] There is no doubt that the power of music was a common belief of the ancient Chinese, predating both Daoism and Buddhism.

Li Fengmao further observes that the way the whistler breathes resembles *qigong* 氣功。^[83] Here again breathing as a link appears inconsequential. Can we say that singing is also a form of *qigong* just because it involves a similar breathing process? Recently several dictionaries of *qigong* have been published, but none of them lists *xiao* as one of the techniques.^[84] The *Wenxuan* places the "Rhapsody on Whistling" under the "music" category. At the same time, in Chenggong Sui's *Jin shu* biography, he is introduced as an excellent whistler and musician. There is no direct proof that Chenggong was an orthodox Daoist and no extant document that indicates a connection between his Daoist practices, if there were any, and

[81] Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, comm., *Han Fei zi jishi* 韓非子集釋 (Taipei: Huacheng shuju, 1987), 3.172-173; and W. K. Liao, *The Complete Works of Han Fei Tzu* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1959), Vol. 1, 3.77.

[82] Knechtges, *Wenxuan*, Vol. 3, pp.275.

[83] Li Fengmao, "Daojiao xiao de chuanshuo," pp.253, 274-276.

[84] See Lu Jichuan 陸錦川, *Qigong chuantong jishu shuyi cidian* 氣功傳統技術術語辭典 (Changchun: Jilin Kexue jishu chubanshe, 1988); Lü Guangrong 呂光榮, *Zhongguo qigong cidian* 中國氣功辭典 (Beijing: Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 1988); Fang Chunyang 方春陽, ed., *Zhongguo qigong dacheng* 中國氣功大成 (Changchun: Jilin Kexue jishu chubanshe, 1989); Li Yuanguo 李遠國, ed. *Zhongguo Daojiao qigong yangsheng daquan* 中國道教氣功養生大全 (Chengdu: Sichuan cishu chubanshe, 1991).

his whistling.^[85] The Six Dynasties compilers must have viewed this poem as a special piece on music rather than as a Daoist work. In terms of content, this rhapsody emphasizes whistling as a special musical performance that does not require any instrument. As for the description of the auditory effect whistling is able to create, it is similar to that of other rhapsodies on music in the *Wenxuan*. For example, in depicting the effect of whistling, Chenggong says, “At that time it is played, Mian Ju becomes tongue-tied and bereft of vitality;/ Wang Bao closes his mouth and turns pale.” Ma Rong in his “Rhapsody on the Long Flute” observes, “At this time, Mian Ju would lose his voice,/ Bo Ya would break his zither strings.”^[86] They both use the same allusions and similar pattern to describe the musical effect. This is evident that Chenggong’s *fu* is on a special kind of musical performance instead of a Daoist piece.

Despite all the counter-evidence, there is actually a passage that is possibly related to Daoist thought and magic, but Li Fengmao fails to quote it:

It relieves a great flood with fiery drought,
Turns “overpowering yang” into “double yin.”

濟洪災於炎旱，反亢陽於重陰。

The commentator Li Shan cites a passage from an ancient Daoist *Lingbao Scripture* (*Lingbao jing* 靈寶經) to explain the allusion. In the Chanli 禪黎 world, the southern extreme, a daughter of one King Zhui was born mute and thus abandoned at the age of four. However, she nourished herself on vapors and the essence of moonlight, and she learned the technique for eradicating disasters from an immortal. Later, upon returning she found her home state was suffering from a severe drought. Raising up her head, she gave out a long whistle and the

^[85] Donald Holzman commented on my paper and pointed out it is possible that Chenggong Sui came from a Daoist family because the surname Chenggong is related to Daoism. For example, there is a Daoist goddess named Chenggong Zhiqiong 成公智瓊 in the *Soushen ji* 搜神記. See Donald Holzman, “From Skepticism to Belief in Third Century China,” in Zheng Hui-xin 鄭會欣, ed., *A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Jao Tsung-i on the Occasion of His Seventy-Fifth Anniversary* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1993), pp.311- 317.

^[86] Knechtges, *Wenxuan*, Vol. 3, pp.275.

sky sent down torrents of rain. This passage is located in the *Dongxuan benxingjing* 洞玄本行經 cited in the *Yunji qiqian*.^[87] This is a story of one of the former lives of A-Qiu Zeng 阿丘曾 whose story is found in the *Sutra of the Maiden Lung Shi* 龍施女經. Li Shan apparently found this story pertinent to these two lines. The question is whether or not Chenggong himself meant to convey the Daoist idea of *xiao* in his rhapsody. The idea that music can bring harmony existed before the Qin. For example, the *Llshi chungiu* 呂氏春秋 records that “music is the harmony of heaven and earth and the accord of *yin* and *yang*” 凡樂，天地之和，陰陽之調也。^[88] Another passage from the same source also attests to this concept:

When Zhuxiangshi governed the world, it was windy and full of *yang* energy. A Myriad of things were torn asunder and plants could not bear fruit. Shida created the five-string *se* zither in order to attract the *yin* breath and stabilize the masses.^[89]

昔古朱襄氏之治天下也，多風而陽氣畜積，萬物散解，果實不成，故士達作為五弦瑟，以來陰氣，以定羣生。

In the *Fangshi zhuan* 方士傳, a legend about the pre-Qin magician Zou Yan 鄒衍 further attests to this concept:

Zou Yan was in Yan where there was a valley. It was beautiful and yet too cold to yield any grain. Master Zou resided there and played the pitchpipe. It became warm and grains began to grow.^[90]

鄒衍在燕。燕有谷，地美而寒，不生五穀。鄒子居之，吹律而溫氣至，而穀生。

In the “Rhapsody on Whistling” as well as other rhapsodies on music in the *Wenxuan*, a similar idea is present:

[87] See HY 1026, 102.10a ff. I would like to thank Stephen Bokenkamp for locating the passage and providing scholarly information regarding the *Lingbao Scripture*.

[88] Chen Qiyu 陳奇猷, comm. and ed., *Llshi chungiu jiaoshi* 呂氏春秋校釋 (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1984), 5.256.

[89] *Llshi chungiu jiaoshi*, 5.284.

[90] It is quoted in *Yiwen leiju*, 69.175.

It dispels stagnant air, scattering and carrying it away;
Purges the murky turbidity of dusty haze.

It effects the perfect harmony of *yin* and *yang*,
And transforms the vile vulgarity of wanton customs.^[91]

散滯積而播揚，蕩埃藹之溷濁。變陰陽之至和，移淫風之穢俗。

Although Li Shan sees a Daoist connection here is significant, that music can harmonize *yin* and *yang* is not a unique Daoist idea. Thus, rather than an exclusively Daoist treatise that advocates whistling as a way to prolong one's life, Chenggong Sui's poem is mainly a poetic summary of ancient concepts of music and a refined portrayal of the art of whistling.^[92]

In Six Dynasties documents the magical functions of whistling never go beyond summoning animals and spirits. The first noticeable effort in assimilating whistling into a Daoist system is the *Principles of Whistling*. Its preface goes as follows:

Old Master transmitted it to the Queen Mother of the West, she to the Realized Man of the South Polar Star; he to the Master of Broad Accomplishment, he to Feng Hou, and he to the Father of Whistling. Father of Whistling taught it to Wu Guang, he to Yao, and Yao to Shun. Shun developed it into the zither.^[93] This passed to Yu, after whom the art declined. It revived with the immortal of the Jin Dynasty, Sun Deng of Mt. Taihang who obtained the technique, achieved the Way and disappeared.

^[91] Knechtges, *Wenxuan*, Vol. 3, pp.321.

^[92] There is another "Rhapsody on Whistling" by the famed Japanese poet Sugawara no Kiyokimi 菅原清公 (770-842) preserved in the *Keikokushū* 經國集 (Collection of National Polity, compiled in 827). Basically, this *fu* follows the conventions of the Chinese counterpart and presents whistling as a musical technique. For the original text, see *Kō chū Nihon Bungaku Taikei* 校注日本文學大系 (Tokyo: Kokumin tosho, 1925-1928), Vol. 24, pp.247-248. For an elegant and carefully annotated translation, see Robert Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane and the Early Heian Court* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), pp.44-45. I would like to thank Borgen for bringing this piece to my attention.

^[93] Whistling and zither are often practiced together. See Wang Wei's poem in the *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 4.128, pp.1301.

He did not teach it to anyone. Ruan Ji had a smattering knowledge of the art but after him it was lost and never heard of again.^[94]

[老]君授王母，母授南極真人，真人授廣成子，廣成子授風后，風后授嘯父，嘯父授務光，務光授堯，堯授舜，舜演之為琴，與禹，自後迺廢。續有晉太行山僊君孫公獲之，迺得道而去，無所授焉。阮嗣宗得少分，其後湮滅，不復聞矣。

The author Sun Guang invents a whole system of mysterious transmission in order to absorb whistling into the Daoist world. Laozi is accorded the honor of the originator since he was the most respected Daoist god during the Tang. The Queen Mother of the West who appears in the *Shanhaijing* is a famous whistler whose antiquity and reputation as a Daoist goddess naturally occupies a position in the system. The reason why the Realized Man of the South Polar Star (Nanji zhenren 南極真人) is listed is perhaps because he is in charge of human life and Sun Guang wishes to link whistling with longevity.^[95] None of the other immortals is associated with whistling. The Father of Whistling (*Xiaofu* 嘯父) is listed in the *Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳, but there is no link between him and whistling except his name.^[96] Sun Guang was the first one who connected whistling with immortality. From the “Rhapsody on Whistling,” we see that whistling is practiced by hermits, but it does not necessarily mean that it is a way to increase one’s life span. Except longevity and summoning spirits, Sun Guang does not mention any other magical functions linked to whistling.

The current Daoist canon (*Daozang* 道藏) does not contain the *Principles of Whistling* and nowhere describes whistling as a formal Daoist technique. Even though the word *xiao* constantly appears in Daoist scriptures, its semantic scope

[94] See *Xiaozhi, Gushi wenfang ben* 顧氏文房本, 1. The translation is revised from E. D. Edwards, “Principles of Whistling,” pp.219-220.

[95] For information on Nanji zhenren, see *Shiji*, 27.1306-1308. Lü Zongli 呂宗力 and Luan Baoqun 樂保群, eds., *Zhongguo minjian zhushen* 中國民間諸神 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1991), Vol. 1, pp.144-147; Gustave Schlegel, *Uranographie Chinoise* (Taipei: Ch’engwen Publishing Co., 1967), pp.426, 520.

[96] See Max Kaltenmark, trans., *Le Lie-ien tchouan: Biographies légendaires des Immortels Taoïstes de l’Antiquité* (Paris: Collège de France, Institute des Haute Études Chinoises, 1987), pp.74-76.

is limited within the definitions given above, that is, whistling and chanting. One of the most common phrases is *xiaoming* 嘯命 (to whistle to give an order) which appears in many Daoist texts.^[97] Li Fengmao interprets whistling as a non-verbal expression that possesses the power of a talisman or an incantation.^[98] He agrees with Tang Yin's 唐寅 (1470-1523) "Postface to the Principles of Whistling" ("*Xiaozhi houxu*" 嘯旨後序) which remarks that whistling as a non-verbal art is similar to a Daoist's (*huangguan shi* 黃冠師, literally, yellow cap master) secret incantation and a Buddhist monk's magical formula in Sanskrit.^[99] Is it possible that whistling was developed into a sort of "secret language," such as that used in Tibetan tantrism and shamans? Eliade observes that "the shamanic 'spirit language' not only attempts to imitate animal cries but contains a certain proportion of spontaneous creations presumably explained by pre-ecstatic euphoria and ecstasy itself."^[100] It is very tantalizing to think of *xiao* in such a mysterious way; unfortunately we have no concrete evidence to support this theory. None of the Daoist texts dealing with rituals mentions *xiao* as a specific, formal technique. Although the "Principles of Whistling" gives a catalogue of *xiao* imitating different kinds of animals, whistling cannot be equated with the "spirit language" because even Sun Guang never mentions such a religious function. Besides, Sun's descriptions are merely rhetorical and figurative. Unlike the shaman's spirit language, whistling by no means requires vocal cords.

Observing Remarks

Both Sawada Mizuho and Li Fengmao have contributed a great deal to our understanding of whistling and its magical tradition in ancient China, but unless we find more evidence, we must be content with explanations based on the extant documents. I cannot agree with Sawada in equating *xiao* with oral

^[97] For example, it appears in the *Han Wudi neizhuan* 漢武帝內傳, see Kristopfer Marinus Schipper, *Han Wou-ti nei-tchouan, L'Empereur Wou des Han dans la Légende Taoïste* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1965), original text, pp.6.

^[98] Li Fengmao, "Daojiao xiao de chuanshuo," pp.243.

^[99] *Tang Bohu quanji* 唐伯虎全集 (Taipei: Shuiniu chubanshe, 1966), pp.171.

^[100] Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, pp.440.

imitation of human and non-human voices. Until we have further evidence that *xiao* in the Qing dynasty referred to a special kind of *kouji*. I fully agree with Li Fengmao's opinion that *xiao* is closely related to Daoist life-nurturing and self-cultivation techniques. Indeed, it is undeniable that *xiao* was used by people of Daoist tendencies as a means to be in tune with the cosmos as the *Xiaozhi* states, but we do not have enough textual evidence and religious features to confirm that whistling was incorporated into Daoism as a ritualistic technique or as a sort of magic language. We can only say that the religious function of whistling in summoning spirits and wind is deeply rooted in Chinese folk belief. Daoist magicians utilized whistling in the same capacity to invoke spirits and summon animals and birds, but it did not develop it into an independent and unique ritualistic technique in the Daoist tradition.