Prologue

The concept of harmony is central to music and musical endeavors. It also represents a foremost goal for political regimes all over the world, both ancient and contemporary. In coverage of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, for example, newscasters on NBC read from Chinese scripts that explained various musical performances in terms of the ancient value of harmony. Viewers were presented with a picture of China as a world leader that hopes to contribute to human flourishing in a peaceful, innovative, and, indeed, splendid way. A multiplicity of ethnic groups entered the stage to represent the diverse faces of the People's Republic. The message of "harmony amid diversity" resonated throughout the Olympic Stadium, and the world smiled at such a noble and magnificent goal.

The rhetoric of harmony in the People's Republic, however, is complicated, and some might claim that it does not always point to a satisfactory reality for all. Recently, dissident voices in the People's Republic have coined the term "*he xie* 和協," the contemporary word for "harmony," to point to the phenomenon of state censorship on the Internet.[1] The ironic use of this term attests to an intrinsic conflict between rhetorical uses of the notion of harmony by the state and the practices it supports. But it is important to be clear about the various definitions of "harmony" in Chinese culture. If "harmony" refers to the creation of a homogenous and unified sense of culture without serious dissent, then the state's use of "harmony" to justify censorship of "unsavory cultural content" on the web seems to be an appropriate use of the term. On the other hand, if harmony refers not merely to the conformity of similar items but to an appealing admixture of many diverse ones—as it is defined in the *Zuo zhuan*, the *locus classicus* for defining the term "harmony" in ancient China, then the state would be more hard-pressed to justify its actions—such as Internet censorship and the incarceration of dissident voices in the community—in terms of

an effort to promote harmony in society.[2] This is certainly suggested by the Internet critics of *he xie*.

The purpose of this book is not to pursue how the current Chinese state employs the notion of harmony in its presentation of itself and through its policies and actions. It is also not to criticize the current regime by means of the age-old Chinese scholar-official's technique of examining the past in order to highlight current problems. Rather, I raise the issue of current uses of "harmony" to set the stage for thinking about possible political uses and implications for theories on music and harmony in ancient times.

In this book, I show how discussions of music in early China—based primarily on conceptions of harmony and balance—served as an important political and cultural tool for the state and its elite corps of ministers and intellectuals. The fact that the notion of harmony is still utilized as a tool that aids in state and social control, I think, attests to its effectiveness as something that speaks to people and resonates powerfully with Chinese longstanding political goals for state, imperial, or national unity, providing people and rulers alike with a familiar touchstone for speaking about the goal of cultural and political coherence and order at all levels of society.

For many authors in early China, music came to occupy a position of extreme importance in relationship not just to individuals and society, but to the larger cosmos as well. Around the fourth to third centuries BCE, authors of many different intellectual proclivities began to invoke metaphors of harmonious music to describe the workings of the cosmic Dao. Some authors even went beyond figurative associations to assert a primary, functional connection between harmonious music and the inherently balanced patterns or operations of nature and the cosmos. At first glance, one might not think to place too much value on such claims, since during the late Warring States and early imperial periods, assertions that referenced or invoked human connections to the cosmos were a matter of course. But upon closer inspection, one sees that music held an especially privileged relationship to the cosmos, above and beyond other elevated human activities such as the five other arts of a gentlemanly education and sometimes even ritual (though music was often later considered to be a part of ritual).[3] Indeed, while mastery of such other pursuits was integral to social standing, personal cultivation, and even—if one were a ruler—state order, music came to include and surpass these as a vital path to the highest levels of spiritual elevation and cosmic order.

Insofar as the notion of harmonious music held a special, spiritual connection to the cosmos, it comes as no surprise that it would be utilized by emerging states to aid in centralization during the late Warring States and early imperial period. The newfound cosmic implications of harmonious music placed it within a larger ontological framework, so that many

aspects of music—such as instrumental pitch, its level of detail, its rhythmic movement and emphasis on timing, and the emotive quality of its sound—became highly regarded areas of expertise not merely for aesthetic purposes but for spiritual purposes that could also be utilized by the state. In such a vein, music served as a tool to maintain social order and religious authority over one's own population as well as alien others.

In addition to such lofty uses for music, the idea of musical harmony could serve as a tool for high ministers and other elites for criticizing rulers. Harmonious music often served to gauge of a ruler's level of virtue, as well as the health and well-being of his body and, by extension, the state. Such virtue was often indicated not merely through the types of music patronized by the ruler, but by his psychological, medical (or "psychophysiological"), and spiritual health as well—as influenced by the type of music he supported and performed at court. As a measure of health, virtue, and state order, music linked to the various parts, systems, and attributes of the human body, so that the ruler was viewed as the most important recipient of its benefits and harms.

In exploring how music and cosmos are linked through the politics of harmony, we focus on two main topics of discussion, which comprise the two parts of this book: 1) music as a patterned expression of and means to state order, which includes viewing music as a civilizing force in state and society; and 2) music as a means of cultivating the moral self and maintaining bodily health, balance, and equilibrium, which includes viewing music as a boost to one's spiritual status. Through an analysis of these two areas—music and the state, and music and the individual body—we gain a glimpse of the changing roles and status of music in early China. We also learn how the spiritual belief in a harmonious cosmos made it possible for all of these areas to be thought of in terms of resonating spheres of activity. In such a way, we shed light upon why the notion of "harmony" seems to have held special cultural significance in Chinese society, throughout the centuries and up to today.