

神奇秘譜
Shen Qi Mi Pu

Folio I
Celestial Airs of Antiquity
上卷
太古神品

Transcriptions
五線譜

by
作者

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Shen Qi Mi Pu
 五線譜目錄

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Shen Qi Mi Pu

An introduction to the tablature and transcriptions

Transcriptions

These transcriptions into staff notation of the original tablature in *Shen Qi Mi Pu* (1425 AD) use the staff notation to indicate relative, not absolute pitch. Thus the note C here does not indicate a certain number of vibrations per second, but "do" (called "1" in contemporary Chinese number notation). This is done in part because qin tunings can vary considerably, depending on the size of the instrument, the quality of the qin strings, weather conditions and the attitude of the player. In addition this should assist in understanding the modality of the pieces represented.

In addition, the measures have been grouped on the systems, and systems arranged on pages, in a way which is intended to emphasize the structure of the original music.

The time signatures may give the impression of more regular meter than is intended. Some directions are given to qualify the tempos, but one must listen to the recordings to get an accurate idea of the actual note values. It should be kept in mind that the player has in mind (intellectually) the rhythms indicated in the tablature, but that in performance the actual note values (and in some cases the notes themselves) depend on the mood of the occasion.

Van Gulik has stated the common belief that qin music "is not primarily melodic. Its beauty lies not so much in the succession of notes as in each separate note in itself". This is an attitude which developed largely as the qin repertoire shrank in the past few centuries, and it is a misunderstanding related to the tradition that a qin piece is commonly appreciated not directly for its melody, but for the way a particular player interprets the melody. The melody remains essential.

The structure is thus not as in Western classical music, in terms of sonatas, fugues and so forth, but more like with jazz, where the melody is known and the appreciation is in seeing what liberties the performer can take with the melody. And since the melody is essential, this ancient music presents the modern listener with a particular challenge: the melodies which are at the core of the music being played are not familiar.

In Folios II and III, all pieces, except modal introductions, are divided into sections. However, of the 15 pieces (there is one modal introduction) in Folio I, seven (#3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 16) were not divided into sections. These have all been sectioned here according to later versions of the pieces. And wherever possible, section titles have been added from later versions. The recording gives timings for the individual sections.

In sum, although the current transcriptions have been done in such a way as to help the both the researcher and the performer, they are published here primarily for the general listener: the best way to appreciate the music is to ignore the commentary and simply listen to the recording while following the transcription. Then look at the transcription and get your own sense of the rhythms.

The only better way to gain an appreciation of the melodies would be to play them.

Tablature

The qin tablature details stroke techniques, finger positions and ornamentation, but gives no direct indication of note values (rhythms). In theory the tablature of a melody was intended to describe the way a particular person played it. The style and this aim have changed little since the time of Zhu Quan.

Originally these fingering instructions were written in full Chinese characters ("with the right thumb at the 9th position hook inwards with the ring finger on the 4th string; do a slow vibrato"), but the only surviving example of this is the 6th century *You Lan* manuscript preserved in Japan. Some time during the Tang dynasty our simplified tablature emerged. Here the full characters are represented generally in shorthand, with shorthand figures for simultaneous left and right hand techniques being grouped into clusters, each cluster generally representing one note, or a fixed series of notes.

Claims for the antiquity of the *SQMP* first folio pieces are based partly on Zhu Quan's statement that he could find no players for these pieces so he simply copied out the tablature as is, fearing even to make corrections. Also some of these pieces seem rather distinctive modally. This needs further examination, but here it is possible only to include some discussion of a third aspect: the tablature style in the first folio has some characteristics which are different from those of the latter two folios.

The present transcription generally presents the tablature figures in the style Zhu Quan wrote them, rather than substituting present day versions. This was done in the original hand-copied transcriptions on which the present printed versions are based, and it is continued here for the same reasons:

1. the antique clusters are a constant reminder of the intention not to use the figures simply to present a new interpretation, but as much as possible to express the intention of the person who wrote the tablature, or of the players whose music was documented in the tablature.
2. tablature figures are explained in a number of ancient sources, but the meaning of some of the original figures and/or clusters is uncertain, either because of a lack of direct explanation, or because of differing explanations.
3. keeping the original clusters helps group the pieces in ways which will hopefully inspire or assist further research in their various origins.

Transcription details

Standard tablature has major (right hand) strokes indicated in large print, then slides and other ornamentation usually is written smaller, in columns half the size of the main ones. One major characteristic of the first folio tablature is that the small columns have more material; no attempt has been made in the present transcription to differentiate between small and large column information.

Introduction to the transcriptions

Tables of finger positions

A comparison of *Shen Qi Mi Pu* finger position indicators with those of other early and late *qin* handbooks

Table I: Notes generated at the various harmonic positions (徽) on a string tuned to C:

Position	0	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Harmonic note	C	c''	g'	e'	c'	g	e'	c	e'	g	c'	e'	g'	c''

Table II: Positions for stopped notes on a string tuned to C:

	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	c	c#	d	d#	e	f
New	0(13.9*)	(13.5*)	wai*	12.3	10.8	10	9.4	9	8.5	7.9	7.6	7.3	7	6.7	6.4	6.2	5.9	5.6
Old	0(wai*)	wai*	wai*	12	11	10	9-10	9	8-9	8	7-8	7-	7	7+	6-7	6-	6	5-6
Alt. (Zhe yin)			13*				9-* 9½		8- 8½ 9+*		7- 7½ 8+	7-8		6-7	6- 6½ 7+	6	6+	5- 5½ 6+

f#	g	g#	a	a#	b	c'	c#	d'	d#	e'	f'	f#	g'	g#	a'	a#	b'	c''
5.3	5	4.8	4.6	4.4	4.2	4*	3.7	3.4	3.2	2.9	2.6	2.3	2	1.8	1.6	1.4	1.2	1
5-	5	5+	4-5	4½	4-	4*	4+	3-4	3-	3	2-3	2-	2	2+	1-2	1-2	1-	1
5-6-			4- 4½ 5+	4- 4½ 5+		*												

* wai is normally located at 13.1; for 13, 13.5 and 13.9 see #5 below;

"9-" = "below 9" (*jiu xia*); downwards on a string means going to a lower note but a higher position;

"9+" = "above 9" (*jiu shang*);

positions higher than 4.0 are extremely rare, except when playing harmonics.

- Table II shows the current (since the 17th century) system for indicating finger positions (New); the one generally used in *Shen Qi Mi Pu* (Old); then several possible alternatives (Alt.). (If no alternative is given in Alt., the position was always indicated as in Old).
- The decimal system (New) in use since the end of the Ming dynasty can indicate finger positions with mathematical precision: 7.6 and 7.9 mean respectively 7.6 and 7.9: 6/10 and 9/10 of the distance between the 7th and 8th positions. In theory this system could be used to indicate very precise tonal differences, e.g., 10.9 for a slightly flattened E.
- Since this was never done, the system used in *Shen Qi Mi Pu* (Old) was in theory just as precise as the contemporary one. Thus the decimal position 7.6 was in *Shen Qi Mi Pu* almost always written 7.8, meaning "the correct place between the 7th and 8th positions"; 7.9 was rounded off to 8; and 7.3 was written 7-. When *Shen Qi Mi Pu* deviated from this system, using values found in row Alt., it was usually on slides.
- Although the above means that with the old system one has more flexibility in selecting finger positions than one does in *Shen Qi Mi Pu*, there is no evidence that this was the intention of the person writing the tablature. And one might surmise that one reason the new system succeeded was the inexact way the old one was sometimes used.
- Today's standard repertoire does not use position 13.5, wai (outside) always being 13.1. However, on occasion some early qin tablature uses wai for 13.5, or even for a slide down to 13.9. In several pieces wai is indicated by 13, and sometimes in passages at 13.1 over several strings, notes played by the 3rd finger use 13 and those by the 4th finger use wai. Could this be an example of a transcriber, who may not have known about temperament or "correct" positions, describing where a player seemed to put his fingers?

For clarity or quick reference, in these transcriptions the finger position is often written below the tablature using Arabic numerals in decimal form, in accordance with the row New in Table II above. Since positions in the tablature line have not always been standardized in accordance with the row Old, precedence should go to the figures in Arabic numerals. The Arabic numerals are particularly important in passages where the same written finger position seems to refer immediately to different actual positions. Note also that wai always means 13.1 unless 13.5 or 13.9 has been written below it.

