

According to the principles of Confucianism, music represented imperial power and influenced the fate of dynasties, so each subsequent dynasty introduced new musical pitches and instruments. The scholar officials of traditional China are interested in restoring traditional instruments and recreating the music of ancient Chinese saints. “Se” (瑟) is a traditional string instrument that has mostly been forgotten. There are many descriptions of “Se” in the scripture of Confucianism and this instrument was used in ancient rituals. Modern Chinese people cannot play this instrument and the Yuan (元) dynasty people had little knowledge of “Se”. Xiong Penglai (熊朋來), a scholar who lived between the end of the Song (宋) dynasty and the beginning of Yuan dynasty, tried to restore “Se.”

There is another way to recreate ancient music (古樂). We can never directly know how to recreate very old instruments, so we try to find remnants of ancient music in current music (今樂) and then recreate it. Mencius discussed the concept of ancient music with the king of Qi (齊), who preferred more modern music to ancient music. Mencius told the king, who was ashamed of his taste of music, “The ancient music is like the current music (今之樂, 猶古之樂也),” and encouraged

him to enjoy music with his people. Mencius was not trying to argue that current music was exactly the same as the ancient music, but this description was cited by many Confucians who wanted to use current music to recreate ancient music. Many scholars have agreed that understanding current music was very important for recreating ancient music.

So, is Xiong Penglai' s trial to restore traditional instruments merely reactionary? After I explain the history of thoughts about ancient music and the current music of Confucianism, I will analyze the philosophy of Xiong Penglai.