

Music and Mindfulness:  
An investigation on Confucian notion of music ideal

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Abstract

The East Asian classical treatises on music implied that listening to the ideal or great music, such as *yayue*, would make listeners to be clear and bright, and achieve the sense of peacefulness, a consciousness state similar to what mindfulness practices could induce. Yet such a view remains anecdotal. In this pioneer study, a piece of Korean traditional court music, *Sujecheon*, was examined as a representative of *yayue* to test the hypothesis that listening to *yayue* could induce a consciousness state resemble to mindfulness induction with respect to the reduction of mind-wandering. The results support such hypothesis. Two neuroimaging studies found that participants listening to *Sujecheon* showed increased functional connectivity among the default mode network (DMN), a brain circuit known to be related to mind wandering, and the dorsal anterior cingulate as well as the dorsolateral prefrontal cortices (regions involving top-down control over DMN). Such enhancement was found to be one of the critical differences between long-term meditators and novices, indicating a better control of mind wandering. The behavioral experiment further supports such finding. Participants performed better on a mind-wandering task (SART) after listening to *Sujecheon*, compared to the group listening to relaxation instructions. This is the first finding confirming the traditional East Asian thinking about the function of ideal music with objective evidence as well as music could enhance listeners' mindfulness tendency and thus decrease mind-wandering.