

**Listen, Measure, Calculate:  
In Search of the Urton of the "Yellow Bell" in Chinese Music Theory**

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**Abstract:** The “Yellow Bell” is one of the central concepts in traditional Chinese music theory. Its earliest traces are leading back to the rituals of the early Chinese Bronze Age. In the long history of music theory in China, the Yellow Bell became the main object of research for theorists, namely as the “tone of origin” (German: *Urton*) of the whole musical system. The mathematical determinations of this tone have varied greatly at different times. And because of the central importance of music theory in traditional Chinese society in general, the standard pitch pipes representing these mathematical measures of the Yellow Bell-tone were also used as the basic unit of length respectively. Furthermore, the imperial powers of different historical dynasties and often even during different phases one and the same dynasty have defined the basic units of weights and measures of volume by establishing and controlling the length of the Yellow Bell-pipe. The present lecture presents an analysis of the concept of the Yellow Bell from the perspectives of etymology, music theory, philosophy and history. Under that interdisciplinary background, some of the core topics of traditional Chinese music theory are introduced and discussed.

**Keywords:** Yellow Bell, Chinese music theory, metrology, ancient world view