Music of China

The **music of China** dates back to the dawn of Chinese civilization with documents and artifacts providing evidence of a well-developed musical culture as early as the Zhou Dynast

(1122 B.C.E. - 256 B.C.E.). One of the Five Classics, supposedly edited by Confucius, is the Shijing (Book of Songs), a collection of poems from folk songs or songs performed at banquets or at ritual sacrifices. In ancient China, music was regarded as central to the harmony and longevity of the state. Chinese traditional music is played on solo instruments or in small ensembles of plucked and bowed stringed instruments, flutes, and various cymbals, gongs, and drums. The scale has five notes. Bamboo pipes and qin are among the oldest known musical instruments from China; instruments are traditionally divided into categories based on their material of composition: skin, gourd, bamboo, wood, silk, earth/clay, metal and stone. Chinese orchestras traditionally consist of bowed strings, woodwinds, plucked strings and percussion. Chinese vocal music has traditionally been sung in a thin, non-resonant voice or in falsetto and is usually solo rather than choral. All traditional Chinese music is melodic rather than harmonic. Chinese vocal music probably developed from sung poems and verses accompanied by music.



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With the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911, there was an increasing interest in Western music, and attempts to adapt both Western classical music and popular music.

Chinese popular music originated with the *shidaiqu* genre founded by Li Jinhui



Music of China

Timeline

Genre

Modern C-pop:(Cantopop/Mandopop)

Rock

Opera

Traditional Yayue

Instrumental (musicology)

Historical Anthems

Patriotic / Revolutionary

National PRC: "March of the Volunteers"

ROC: "Three Principles of the

People"

Media Mainland radio stations

Charts

Festivals Midi Modern Music Festival

Regional traditions

Anhui - Fujian - Gansu - Guangdong - Guangxi Guizhou - Hainan - Hebei - Heilongjiang - Henan Hong Kong - Hunan - Hubei - Inner Mongolia Jiangsu - Jiangxi - Jilin - Liaoning - Macau Manchuria - Qinghai - Shandong - Shaanxi - Shanxi
- Sichuan - Tibet - Xinjiang - Yunnan - Zhejiang

(1891 – 1967) in mainland China, with Western jazz influences from Western musicians such as Buck Clayton. In 1949 the Kuomintang relocated to Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China was established. The Communist party denounced Chinese popular music as yellow music ^[1], and promoted Guoyue (revolutionary songs) instead. The Cultural Revolution and other Maoist initiatives, and the continuing censorship of the Chinese government, delayed the introduction of rock music until the 1990s.

- 4.1 Pop music
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History

The legendary founder of music in Chinese mythology was Ling Lun, who made bamboo pipes tuned to the sounds of birds. A carillon of nine bronze bells, the Carillon of the Marquis of Cai, dates from the Western Zhou period. Bells formed an important part of Zhou ritual music, as did musical stones which made a sound when struck. [2] During the early Zhou dynasty (1100 - 256 B.C.E.), elegant ritual movements, sounds and music, called *yue* or *yueh*, were performed. Confucius (551 – 479 B.C.E.) called these compositions "Proper Music," and maintained that music was the highest form because it expresses human feelings and virtues. One of the *Five Classics*, supposedly edited by Confucius, is the *Shijing*

(Book of Songs), a collection of poems from folk songs or

songs performed at banquets or at ritual sacrifices.^[3]



Chinese music in the dynasty era

The philosopher Xunzi (Hsun Tzu, c. 298 – 238

B.C.E.) developed a theory that a ruler could cultivate his subjects by having them listen to proper music. He believed that the tones that make up music are based on the responses of the human heart to the external things that it encounters. A well-governed kingdom would create peaceful music filled with joy.

Dynastic China (1122 B.C.E. - 1911)

According to *Mencius* (*fourth century B.C.E.*), a ruler asked him whether it was moral if he preferred popular music to the classics. Mencius answered that the only thing that mattered was whether or not he loved his subjects. According to Chinese mythology, the cabinet in the administration of the legendary Emperor Shun included a Minister of Music (*Kui*) who was responsible for teaching music to the eldest sons of the aristocracy. The Imperial Music Bureau (*Yuefu*), first established in the Qin Dynasty (221-207 B.C.E.), was greatly expanded under the Emperor Han Wu Di (140-87 B.C.E.), and charged with supervising court music and military music and determining what folk music would be officially recognized. After Wu Di's death, court ceremonies declined, and the Bureau of

Music was dissolved in 7 B.C.E..^[4] In subsequent dynasties, the development of Chinese music was strongly influenced by foreign music, especially that of Central Asia.

The oldest written Chinese music is *Youlan* or the *Solitary Orchid*, attributed to Confucius (551 –479 B.C.E.) (see guqin article for a sample of tablature). The first major well-documented flowering of Chinese music was music for the *qin* during the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907 C.E.), though the *qin* is known to have been played since before the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E. – 222 C.E.).

In ancient China, the position of musicians was much lower than that of painters, though music was seen as central to the harmony and longevity of the state. Almost every emperor took folk songs seriously, sending officers to collect songs in order to understand the sentiments of the people. The Confucian Classic *Shi Jing (Poets)*, contained many folk songs dating from 800 B.C.E. to about 300 B.C.E..

Under the influence of Confucianism, and later Zen Buddhism, music was considered a scholarly art and an important form of self-expression for the educated elite. The qin became a popular instrument with scholars, and figures in many works of art and literature as a symbol of educated refinement.

The first European to reach China with a musical instrument was the Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci, who presented a harpsichord to the Ming imperial court and trained four eunuchs how to use it in 1601^[5].

Republic of China Era (1912 - 1949)

The New Culture Movement of the 1910s and 1920s evoked a lasting interest in Western music. A number of Chinese musicians returned from studying abroad to perform Western classical music, composing work based on Western musical notation system. **Shidaiqu** (Chinese: 時代曲, *Si Doi Kuk*), a type of Chinese folk/ European jazz fusion music, originated in Shanghai, China, in the 1920s^[6].

The Kuomintang tried to sponsor modern music adaptations via the Shanghai Conservatory of Music despite the ongoing political crisis. Twentieth-century cultural philosophers like Xiao Youmei, Cai Yuanpei, Feng Zikai and Wang Guangqi wanted to see Chinese music adapted to the best standard possible, though there was no consensus as to what that standard might be. ^[5].

Symphony orchestras were formed in most major cities and performed to a wide audience in the concert halls and on radio. Many of the performers added jazz influences to traditional music, adding xylophones, saxophones and violins, among other instruments. Lu Wencheng, Li Jinhui, Zhou Xuan, Qui Hechou, Yin Zizhong and He Dasha were among the most popular performers and composers during this period.



The earliest form of the 1935
Volunteers Marching On
anthem still in the preCommunist traditional
Chinese character in the
Denton Gazette newspaper

After the 1942 Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art, a large-scale campaign was launched in the Communist controlled areas to adapt folk music to create revolutionary songs to educate the largely illiterate rural population on party goals. Musical forms considered superstitious or anti-revolutionary were repressed, and harmonies and bass lines were added to traditional songs. One example is *The East Is Red*, a folksong from northern Shaanxi which was adapted into a nationalist hymn. Of particular note is the composer, Xian Xinghai, who was active during this period, and composed the *Yellow River Cantata* which is the most well-known of all of his works.

People's Republic of China (1949 - 1990s)

In 1949 the Kuomintang relocated to Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China was established. The golden age of *shidaiqu* and the Seven Great Singing Stars (七大歌星; qī dà gēxīng), the seven most renowned singers of China in the early twentieth century, came to an end when the Communist party denounced

Chinese popular music as yellow music (pornography)^[1]. Maoists regarded pop music as a decline of the art form in the mainland. Revolutionary songs would become heavily promoted by the state. The Cultural Revolution and other Maoist initiatives made revolutionary songs the only acceptable genre of music, to the point that it overshadowed other genres and almost defined what mainland Chinese music was.

After the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, a new fast tempo Northwest Wind (xibeifeng, 西北風) style was launched by the people to counter the government. The music progressed into Chinese rock, which remained popular in the 1990s. However, music in China is dominated by the state, as the television broadcasting, media, and major concert halls are all controlled by the Communist party. The government chose not to support Chinese rock, by limiting its exposure and airtime. As a result, the genre never fully reached the mainstream.

Contemporary

China has a high rate of piracy and difficulty enforcing intellectual property rights. ^[7]. As a result, record companies often make the decision to release new Chinese music albums in Taiwan or Hong Kong first; normally there is a delay before the products are released on the mainland, with occasional exceptions, such as the work of Cui Jian, which was released in Taiwan, Hong Kong and the mainland simultaneously^[8]. The delay in the release of new music is also a major factor in driving piracy, since individuals would rather pirate music from outside mainland China. The modern market for music in China is hindered, not only by issues of property rights, but by other factors such as profit margin, individual income and other economic constraints.

Annual events such as the Midi Modern Music Festival in Beijing keep music culture alive. In 2002, the "Snow Mountain Music Festival" was held in Yunnan province. Both events draw sizable outdoor crowds.

Today, Chinese rock music is centered almost exclusively in Beijing and Shanghai, and has very limited influence over Chinese society. Wuhan and Sichuan are sometimes considered pockets of rock music culture as well. The situation of Chinese rock highlights the significant cultural, political and social differences between China and the West, and even between different regions within China. While rock has existed in China for decades, if first received international attention when Cui Jian played with The Rolling Stones in 2003, at the age of 42.

Traditional Music

Chinese traditional music refers to the genres that developed prior to 1911 C.E..

Instrumental and Vocal

Traditional music in China is played on solo instruments or in small ensembles of plucked and bowed stringed instruments, flutes, and various cymbals, gongs, and drums. The scale has five notes. Bamboo pipes and qin are among the oldest known musical instruments from China; instruments are traditionally divided into categories based on their material of composition: skin, gourd, bamboo, wood, silk, earth/clay, metal and stone. Chinese orchestras traditionally consist of bowed strings, woodwinds, plucked strings and percussion.

Instruments

Woodwind and percussion

- dizi, sheng, paigu, gong, paixiao, guan, bells, cymbals
- Bowed strings erhu, zhonghu, dahu, banhu, jinghu, gaohu, gehu, yehu, cizhonghu, diyingehu, leigin
- Plucked and struck strings guqin, sanxian, yangqin, guzheng, ruan, konghou, liuqin, pipa, zhu



Re-enactment of a traditional music performance



Chinese musicians at a restaurant in Shanghai

Chinese vocal music has traditionally been sung in a thin, non-resonant voice or in falsetto and is usually solo rather than choral. All traditional Chinese music is melodic rather than harmonic. Chinese vocal music probably developed from sung poems and verses accompanied by music. Instrumental pieces played on an erhu or dizi are popular, and are often available outside of China, but the pipa and zheng music, which are more traditional, are more popular in China itself. The gin is perhaps the most revered instrument in China, even though very few people know what it is, or have seen and heard one being played. The zheng, a form of zither, is most popular in Henan, Chaozhou, Hakka and Shandong. The pipa, a kind of lute, believed to have been introduced from the Arabian Peninsula area during the sixth century and improved, is most popular in Shanghai and surrounding areas.

Ethnic Han music

Han Chinese make up some 92 percent of the population of China. Ethnic Han music consists of heterophonic music, in which the musicians play versions of a single melodic line. Percussion accompanies most music, dance, and opera.

Chinese Opera

Chinese opera has been popular for centuries. Originally performed only at court and for the entertainment of the aristocracy, the art form was gradually modified for public entertainment, and Beijing opera became widely popular. The music is often guttural with high-pitched vocals, usually accompanied by suona, jinghu, other kinds of string instruments, and percussion. Other types of opera include clapper opera, Pingju, Cantonese opera, puppet opera, Kunqu, Sichuan opera, Qinqiang, ritual masked opera and Huangmei xi.

Folk music

Han folk music thrives at weddings and funerals and usually includes a form of oboe called a suona and percussive ensembles called chuigushou. The music is diverse, sometimes jolly, sometimes sad, and often based on Western pop music and TV theme songs. Ensembles consisting of mouth organs (sheng), shawms (suona), flutes (dizi) and percussion instruments (especially yunluo gongs) are popular in northern villages; their music is descended from the imperial temple music of Beijing, Xi'an, Wutai shan and Tianjin. Xi'an drum music, performed with wind and percussive instruments, is popular around Xi'an, and has received some popularity outside China in a highly-commercialized form. Another important instrument is the sheng, pipes, an ancient instrument that is an ancestor of all Western free reed instruments,



1800s Chinese Opera scene

such as the accordion. Parades led by Western-type brass bands are common, often competing in volume with a shawm/chuigushou band.

In southern Fujian and Taiwan, Nanyin or Nanguan is a genre of traditional ballads. They are sung by a woman accompanied by a xiao and a pipa and other traditional instruments. The music is generally sorrowful and mourning and typically deals with love-stricken women. Further south, in Shantou, Hakka and Chaozhou, erxian and zheng ensembles are popular.

Sizhu ensembles use flutes and bowed or plucked string instruments to make harmonious and melodious music that has become popular in the West among some listeners. These are popular in Nanjing and Hangzhou, as well as elsewhere along the southern Yangtze area. Sizhu has been secularized in cities but remains spiritual in rural areas.

Jiangnan Sizhu (silk and bamboo music from Jiangnan) is a style of instrumental music, often played by amateur musicians in teahouses in Shanghai, that has become widely known outside of its place of origin.

Guangdong Music or Cantonese Music is instrumental music from Guangzhou and surrounding areas. It is based on Yueju (Cantonese Opera) music, together with new compositions from the 1920s onwards. Many pieces have influences from jazz and Western music, using syncopation and triple time.

Modern Music

In China, "modern music" refers to genres that developed after 1912 to coincide with the New China.

Pop music

"C-pop" (Chinese popular music) originated with the shidaiqu genre founded by Li Jinhui (1891 – 1967) in mainland China, with Western jazz influences from musicians such as Buck Clayton, with whom he collaborated for two years. The Baak Doi record company ended up leaving Shanghai in 1952, after the establishment of the Peoples' Republic

of China. [6]. The 1970s saw the rise of cantopop in Hong Kong, and later mandopop in Taiwan. The mainland remained on the sideline for decades with a minimal degree of participation, and the youth of mainland China became consumers of Taiwan mandopop only recently. China is not yet considered a major music production hub for Chinese music, despite having the largest population^[9].

Censorship of popular music remains strict in the Peoples' Republic of China. When the Hong Kong icon Anita Mui performed the song "Bad Girl" during a concert in the 1990s in China, she was banned from returning to the concert for showing a rebellious attitude^[10]. By Western standards, the performance was no more rebellious than a performance by, for example, Madonna, on whose style Mui based her dance moves. Many Mainland Chinese artists try to start their commercial careers in Hong Kong or Taiwan first, and then re-import to the mainland as part of the *gangtai* (C-pop) culture.

Rock and heavy metal

The widely-acknowledged forefather of Chinese rock is Cui Jian^[8]. In the late 1980s he played the first Chinese rock song, called "I Have Nothing" ("Yi wu suo you"). It was the first time an electric guitar was used in China. He became the most famous performer of the time, and in 1988 he performed at a concert broadcast worldwide in conjunction with the Seoul Summer Olympic Games^[8]. His socially critical lyrics provoked the anger of the government and many of his concerts were banned or canceled.

During the late 1980s and 1990s, two rock bands became famous in China, Hei Bao (Black Panther) and Tang Dynasty. Hei Bao is an old-school rock band whose first CD, *Hei Bao* used the popular English song ("Don't Break My Heart"). Tang Dynasty was the first Chinese heavy metal band. Its first CD "A Dream Return to Tang Dynasty" combines elements of traditional Chinese opera and old school heavy metal.

Around 1994-1996, the first thrash metal band, Chao Zai (Overload), was formed. They released three CDs, the last one in cooperation with pop singer Gao Chi of the split-up band The Breathing.

Punk Rock

Punk rock became famous in China around 1994 - 1996. The first Chinese artist of the genre was He Yong of numetal style, influenced by Limp Bizkit, Linkin Park and others.

Around 1995 the first wave of Chinese punk bands appeared in Beijing (/entry/Beijing), and the second generation followed in 1997, inspired by Western bands such as Korn, Limp Bizkit or Linkin Park. Some of these bands are Yaksa, Twisted Machine, AK-47, Overheal Tank.

National Music

Patriotic / Revolutionary

Guoyue (国; 乐; "national music") is a modernized form of Chinese traditional music, written or adapted for some form of grand presentation, usually with an orchestra. It was created during the mid-twentieth century and is frequently broadcast on radio and television in the People's Republic of China. Its main purpose is to encourage national pride. Since 1949, it has been the genre of music most promoted by the government. Compared to other forms of music, symphonic national music flourished throughout the country. In 1969, the Yellow River Piano Concerto was performed by the pianist Yin Chengzong, and is still performed today on global stages. During the height of the Cultural Revolution, musical compositions and performances were greatly restricted. A form of soft, harmonic, generic, pan-Chinese music called guoyue was artificially created to be performed at conservatories. After the Cultural Revolution, musical institutions were reinstated and musical composition and performance revived. At the height of the Mao Zedong era, the music accelerated at the political level into "Revolutionary Music" leaning toward cult status and becoming mainstream under pro-Communist ideology.

Guoyue patriotic song ensembles range from chamber groups to large orchestras led by a conductor. Orchestral *guoyue* compositions are often arranged in concerto-like form, for solo instrument and orchestra, and often incorporate some use of Western harmony. Usually traditional instruments like *erhu* and *sheng* are combined with Western instruments such as violins and trumpets.

Regional Music

China has many ethnic groups besides the Han, concentrated in the southeast and northwest. These include Tibetans, Russians, Uyghurs, Manchus, Zhuang, Dai, Naxi, Miao, Wa, Yi, Lisu and Mongolians.

Tibet

Music forms an integral part of Tibetan Buddhism. While chanting remains perhaps the best known form of Tibetan Buddhist music, complex and lively forms are also widespread. Monks use music to recite various sacred texts and to celebrate a variety of festivals during the year. The most specialized form of chanting is called yang, which is without metrical timing and is dominated by resonant drums and sustained, low syllables. Other forms of chanting are unique to Tantra as well as the four main monastic schools: Gelugpa, Kagyupa, Nyingmapa and Sakyapa. Of these schools, Gelugpa is considered a more a restrained, classical form, while Nyingmapa is widely described as romantic and dramatic. Gelugpa is perhaps the most popular.

Secular Tibetan music survived the Cultural Revolution more intact than spiritual music, especially due to the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts, which was founded by the Dalai Lama shortly after his self-imposed exile. TIPA originally specialized in the operatic Ihamo form, which has since been modernized with the addition of Western and other influences. Other secular genres include nangma and toshe, which are often linked and are accompanied by a variety of instruments designed for highly-rhythmic dance music. Nangma karaoke is popular in modern Lhasa. A classical form called gar is very popular, and is distinguished by ornate, elegant and ceremonial music honoring dignitaries or other respected persons.

Tibetan folk music includes a cappella lu songs, which are distinctively high in pitch with glottal vibrations, as well as now rare epic bards, who sing the tales of Gesar, Tibet's most popular hero.

Tibetan music has influenced the pioneering compositions of Philip Glass and, most influentially, Henry Eichheim, most influentially. Later artists made New Age fusions by pioneers Henry Wolff and Nancy Hennings. These two collaborated on *Tibetan Bells*, perhaps the first fusion of New Age and Tibetan influences, in 1971. Glass' *Kundun* soundtrack proved influential in the 1990s, while the popularity of Western-adapted Buddhism (exemplified by Richard Gere, Yungchen Lhamo, Steve Tibbetts, Choying Drolma, Lama Karta and Kitaro and Nawang Khechong) helped further popularize Tibetan music.

With the arrival of Tibetan refugees in the Himalayas, Western music, often in unique Tibetan forms, started to become popular among Tibetans everywhere. Rangzen Shonu quickly became the most popular ethnically Tibetan performers of Western rock and pop. Other forms of imported pop music include Indian ghazal and filmi, popular across the Himalayas and in Tibetan communities worldwide. Tibetan-Western fusions have been long suppressed in China itself, but have been widespread and innovative outside of the country. In the mid- to late 1980s, a relaxation of governmental rules allowed a form of Tibetan pop music to emerge in Tibet proper. Direct references to native religion is still forbidden, but commonly-understood metaphors are widespread. Pure Tibetan

pop is heavily influenced by light Chinese rock, and includes best-sellers like Jampa Tsering and Yatong. Politically and socially aware songs are rare in this form of pop, but commonplace in a second type of Tibetan pop. Nangma karaoke bars appeared in 1998 and are common in Lhasa, in spite of threats from the Chinese government.

Guangxi

Guangxi is a region of China, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Its most famous modern musician is Sister Liu, who was the subject of a 1960s film that introduced Guangxi's cultures to the rest of the world.

The Gin people are known for their instrument called *duxianqin* (独弦琴, pinyin: dúxiánqín; lit. "single string zither"), a string instrument with only one string, said to date back to the eighth century.

Yunnan

Yunnan is an ethnically diverse area in southeast China. Perhaps best-known from the province is the lusheng, a type of mouth organ, used by the Miao people of Guizhou for pentatonic antiphonal courting songs.

The Hani of Honghe Prefecture are known for a unique kind of choral, microtonal rice-transplanting songs.

The Nakhi of Lijiang play a type of song and dance suite called baisha xiyue, which was supposedly brought by Kublai Khan in 1253. Nakhi *Dongjing* is a type of music related to southern Chinese forms, and is popular today.



Sichuan

Sichuan is a province in southwest China. Its capital city, Chengdu, is home to the only musical higher education institution in the region, the Sichuan Conservatory of Music. The province has a long history of Sichuan opera.

Manchuria

Manchuria is a region in northeast China, inhabited by ethnic groups like the Manchu. The most prominent folk instrument is the octagonal drum, while the youyouzha lullaby is also well-known.

Xinjiang

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is dominated by Uyghurs, a Turkic people related to others from Central Asia. The Uyghurs' best-known musical form is the On Ikki Muqam, a complex suite of twelve sections related to Uzbe and Tajik forms. These complex symphonies vary wildly between suites in the same muqam, and are built on a seven-note scale. Instruments typically include dap (a drum), dulcimers, fiddles and lutes; performers have some space for personal embellishments, especially in the percussion. The most important performer is Turdi Akhun, who recorded most of the muqams in the 1950s.

Hua'er

Hua'er is a type of song prevalent throughout northwest China. The informal music is often competitive in nature, with singers interacting and improvising topical and love lyrics, usually unaccompanied.

Kuaiban

Kuaiban is a type of rhythmic talking and singing which is often performed with percussive instruments such as hand clackers. The center of kuaiban tradition is Shandong province. Kuaiban bears some resemblance to rap and other forms of rhythmic music found in other cultures.

Notes

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- Listen to traditional Chinese music (http://www.sinohits.net/music/index.htm).
- The Internet Chinese Music Archive (http://www.ibiblio.org/chinese-music/).
- Chinese Popular Songs (http://www.chinese-tools.com/songs).
- Donohoe's Shi Jing Ancient Book of Songs takes ancient Mandarin songs and puts them into a new light (http://www.donohoemusic.com).
- Chinesemusictv.com (http://www.chinesemusictv.com) Chinese Music TV has free music videos found on the web.
- (Japanese)中国古典テキストデータベース(中国思想史研究室) (http://hyena.human.niigata-u.ac.jp/files/textdb/cndbhome.html) Archive of some Classical Chinese texts about Music theories.
- Melody of Dragon- a Modern-Day Chinese Traditional Music Ensemble (http://www.melodyofdragon.org/).

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