

Jin Jie

CHINESE MUSIC

Echos in Ancient and Modern Times

Translated by Wang Li & Li Rong



CHINA
INTERCONTINENTAL
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Author: Jin Jie

Translator: Wang Li & Li Rong

Executive Editor: Qin Tiantian

Art Director: Tian Lin

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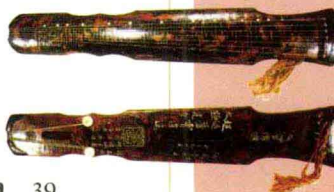
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Foreword

Music reflects thoughts of people, sense of beauty and arts of the human being. It, in a special way, shows different cultures of people and concepts in the world. That is why it is considered as a gem in the history of human civilization. The Chinese music is of a unique style, featuring various forms and graceful expressions. The Chinese musical instruments, of different varieties and colorful tones, constitute an important part of the Chinese folk music, which, together with the Chinese operas, plays an important role in the development of Chinese culture. It's believed that the comprehension and appreciation about the Chinese music culture will greatly influence the feeling about the charm of the Chinese folk music.

The Chinese music has a long history. Its record of origin has been continuously broken to an earlier date along with the discovery of historical relics. From the "12 Lüs" with a history of more than 4,000 years to the bone flute found in Henan that could be dated back to the Neolithic Age more than 8,000 years ago, a large varieties of music relics shock us time and time again and make us unable to help admiring the wisdom of the Chinese working people.

The music and dance in ancient times reflects the life and production of the tribes at that time. They are original expressions of simple emotions.

In the slave society, music and dance became a tool of the ruling class for strengthening their power and praising their achievements.

In the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods (770–



221 BC), when the slave society gradually evolved into the feudal society, music got a fast development with the advancement of thoughts and production skills. At that time, more types of music instruments were created and improved, and *Bayin* (eight tones) classification method was adopted.

In the Tang Dynasty (618–907), the state began to establish music management and education organizations.

By the Song Dynasty (960–1279), the Chinese opera had been mature, while in the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368), the styles of the south and north dramas were formed and many classical *Zaju* were created, including *The Injustice of Dou E* and *The Romance of the Western Chamber*. Since then, the Chinese music was increasingly used to express the human nature other than day-to-day emotions. It's used to reflect the inner world of the people.

In the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1911), music became easier to approach the ordinary people, and more types of operas were created.

After the Sino-British Opium War, democracy and science became the main themes of music. The traditional music and the Western music sourced from the Europe were integrated.

Since China's reform and opening-up in 1978, the Chinese music has found the right path for development. Not only music making, but also music performance, education, theories, and even related publication and marketing have got a fast development.

The exchanges and conflicts between the Chinese and Western culture can be extended to the music world. As recorded, the earliest music exchanges can be traced back to more than 4,000 years ago. After Zhang Qian's diplomatic mission to Xiyu (the Western Regions in China) in the Western Han Dynasty, the musical instruments, song and dance of the Central Asia and West Asia were introduced to the central plain through the "silk road," which made the central music more colorful. In the early



20th century, the Western music was formally introduced into China. More and more people accepted the Western musical instruments and used them to perform and make music. After the “May 4th” Movement, a real integration of the Chinese music with the Western music was realized. Later, the Chinese musical instruments got a new development after experiencing a period of isolation and a period of complete suspension. Entering the 21st century, the Chinese pop music has been added with more elements. Meanwhile, the Chinese “new music” also gets an internationalized and integrated development through the exchanges and conflicts between the Chinese music and the Western music.

Music is a symbol of the culture of a country and nation. Its contents, forms and styles are closely connected with the geographic, historical, linguistic, customs and cultural conditions of a country, a region and a nation. The Chinese music, after thousands of years of accumulation and development, has shown a pattern featuring plentiful contents, classes and styles as well as coexistence of classical and pop music and coexistence of traditional and modern music.

It's expected that readers can get more familiar with the Chinese music and its development, feel the artistic charm of the Chinese music and better understand and favor the Chinese culture by reading this book.



The Evolution of Chinese Music



Music is a soul-touching art that has developed in the long process of human civilization. A wide variety of distinctive music cultures, such as Indian, Asian, Jewish, Gypsy and Latin American music, are like glittering and dazzling pearls that are scattered throughout the world. Chinese music is also among the shining stars and mainly includes folk songs, dance music, instrumental music, *quyi* and opera based on a wide array of folk music. Statistics indicate that the number of Chinese folk songs collected so far totals more than 300,000 pieces, musical instruments more than 200. Furthermore, combinations of various musical instruments, various songs and playing styles result in a great number of musical genres. Chinese *quyi* and opera are both forms of comprehensive art, with the former divided into more than 200 categories and the latter more than 360 categories. Chinese music, as an independently developed system, has grown as one of the Chinese people's early cultural heritages and an integral part of world music civilization by absorbing and incorporating music cultures of all the ethnic groups and regions in the past millenniums.

Historically, music, both at home and abroad, appeared earlier than Chinese characters. Ancient Chinese literature typically attributed the origin of Chinese music to Emperor Huangdi who lived more than 4,000 years ago. It is said that Emperor Huangdi once asked a necromancer surnamed "Lun" who was good at music to develop a regular sound system that was later called "*Li*" by identifying high and low-pitched sounds. Then, Lun found bamboo pipes in faraway places and carefully listened to the singing of male and female phoenixes, the divine birds in the eyes of ancient people. He made the bamboo pipes into 12 "*Lü*" pipes and called them "12 *Lüs*" ever since then. Current archeological discoveries show, however, a batch of bone flutes, unearthed from the site dating back to the Neolithic Age located in Jiahu Village, Wuyang County, Henan Province in 1986–1987, were the



world's earliest musical instrument known so far. With a history of more than 8,000 years, they were reputed as "China's earliest flutes" and were witness to the highly developed prehistoric Chinese music civilization; clay *xuns* (a type of ancient musical instrument) were discovered at the Hemudu Site in Zhejiang and Banpo Site in Xi'an also have a 6,000-year-plus history. All these marked a big step forward in Chinese music history.

Ancient Times



Bone flutes unearthed from the remains of the Neolithic Age at Jiahu Village, Henan Province between 1986 and 1987, are the most ancient musical instrument discovered by archeologists in China.

All early music in human history began with singing. Zhai Jian was cited as saying in the ancient literature *Huainanzi*: "Among the workers who carry lumber together, those walking in the front of the queue would shout '*yexu*,'

which was echoed by those following them. This was the song for encouragement in carrying loads." It described the scene that many workers carrying a piece of wood together shouted aloud in coordinate paces, and reflected how the primitive songs were naturally created in daily labor. Lu Xun, a man of letter in Chinese modern history, believed these labor chants pronounced as "*hangyu hangyu*" were the earliest poems.

In remote times (around 2600–2100 BC), the art of music and dancing with independent meanings didn't exist. The so-called music and dance were considered part of witchery ceremonies.



Legendary music in ancient times was shrouded in mystery, and collectively called “primitive music dance” by later generations, as it featured the integration of songs, dances and music. *Shi Xu* writes, “People used words to express their inner feelings, which were beyond words, however. They sighed for supplementation, which was still insufficient and added singing and even dances, using both arms and legs.” The description vividly shows the origin of dances as well as the relationships among poems, songs, dances and music.



A pottery basin painted with dancing figures unearthed in 1973 at Shangsunjia Village, Datong County, Qinghai Province, presents a cheerful singing and dancing scene 5,000 years ago.

Primitive music dances basically fell into two categories: One was the music reflecting the development and life of tribes, such as *The Music of Zhuxiang Clan* that tells a story of praying for rain in the time of drought, *The music of Yinkang Clan*, a musical dance for health benefits, *The Music of Yiqi Clan* that reflects the wishes of the primitive people who pray for harvest at the Laji Festival (a festival for offering sacrifices at the end of the year), and *The Music of Getian Clan* that describes the lives of primitive people who had entered the period of agricultural production.

The other was closely related to legendary ancient emperors, and the music dances extolling the feats of Emperor Huangdi, Zhuan Xu, Emperor Ku, Emperor Yao, and Emperor Shun or clan totems were cases in point. It is said that the tribe of Emperor Huangdi regarded clouds as totems and thus the



music dance “Yunmen Dajuan” was created; *Shao* was the dance music intended to praise Emperor Shun. According to records, it involved musical instruments playing like “Nine-chapter Xiaoshao” and “Striking Stones,” and performances in which people acted like birds and beasts like “Running Birds and Beasts” and “Dancing animals,” displaying the wild and grand scenes in sacrificial primitive music dances.

“Cutting bamboo, making bamboo into bows, throwing clay and hitting beasts,” wrote *The Tan Song*, that was said it was written in the period of Emperor Huangdi, was recorded in *The States of Wu and Yue in the Spring and Autumn Period*. It is considered the earliest Chinese poem known so far and is a song describing how people made tools to go hunting in the age of fishing and hunting. The poem, with simple, standard and rhythmic language, records the process from making bows to hunting animals.

As *Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals* · chapter on ancient musical instrument says, “People in the Getian Clan usually dance and sing for recreation. Three people would hold the cattle’s tails, dancing and singing merrily, and the song they sang was in eight parts.” The eight parts mentioned were: *Zaimin*, a song praising the earth that carried both the sky and people; *Xuanniao* (the auspicious black bird, a totem that the clan worshipped); *Sui Caomu* (exuberant trees and grass); *Fen Wugu*, used to pray for grain harvests; *Jing Tianchang*, to extol the gifts from the gods; *Da Digong*, to extend thanks to the kindness of the gods; *Yi Dide*, to show thanks to the mother earth, and the *Zongqinshou Zhiji*, to pray to the gods for offering more animals and a stable and happy life. The music dance content in this period mainly reflects the ways of human existence and human’s wishes of asking more from nature.

A lot of literature describing activities in the primitive period not only record the rough forms of music at that time, but also



involves some musical instruments as well. For instance, as *Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals* · chapter on ancient musical instruments says, in the remote period of Zhuxiang Clan, there was not only strong winds and heavy sands, but also extremely dry climates, which resulted in little vegetation and fruitless plants. Later, a wise man called Shida invented a *se* (a type of musical instrument) with five chords to pray for rain, thus helping the people lead stable and affluent lives. The “five-chord *se*” may be concluded as the most representative musical instrument in the primitive period.

The Xia, Shang and Western Zhou Dynasties

The Xia Dynasty (2070–1600 BC) saw the beginning of the transition of Chinese society from a primitive one to one of slavery. The music dances, previously for totem sacrifices, were used to extol monarchies with slavery or the achievements of kings. For instance, the music *Daxia* sang high praises for the exploits of Dayu who successfully regulated the water system in the Xia Dynasty: “He worked hard day and night, digging mountain earth to block up dike breaches” and “all for the interests of people.” The music dance Dawei in the Shang Dynasty (1600–1046 BC) was created to offer sacrifices to the ancestors and show off the success of Chengtang who defeated Jie as well.

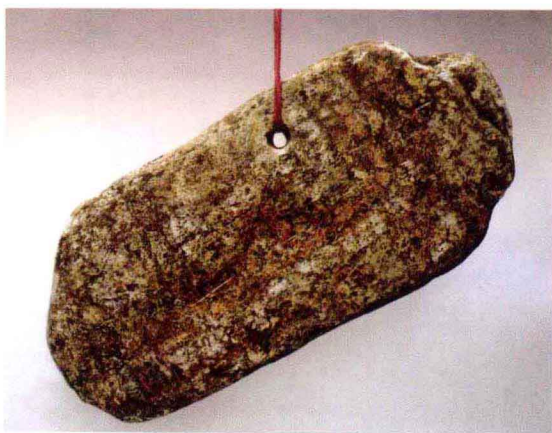
The Shang Dynasty entered the Bronze Age. As the craft and bronze-smelting sectors developed, over 10 percussion instruments and blowpipes like chime bells and chime *nao* were invented. They included a single *qing* or a set of *qings* (consisting of three *qings* and producing low or high-pitched sounds), as well as bell-like percussion instruments such as *nao* that were



placed on shelves, *duo* and *ling* that were held and struck by hand, and hanging bells and *yong* that produced sounds when struck. Among them, bells and *qings* have the most far-reaching influences on later generations.

The bells, made of bronze and give a loud and solemn sound, were called “gold” among the eight sounds in ancient Chinese music. *Qing*, made of *qing* stones that produce a clear and piercing sound, were called “stones.” The combination of bells and *qings* in music playing is said to produce “the sound of gold and stones,” which was described in many ancient books and poems frequently, such as “the sound of bells and *qings* would shock the mountains and rivers” and “striking bells and drums while raising flags.” Bells and *qings* were regarded as ritual instruments and would be played in such important occasions as setting off for battle, going to the imperial court, offering sacrifices or grand feasts.

Chinese “ritual music” originated from primitive worship in ancient times. “Playing music by beating earthen drums” recorded in *The Book of Rites* reflects the earliest form of ritual music that, despite its presence and dramatic development in the Xia

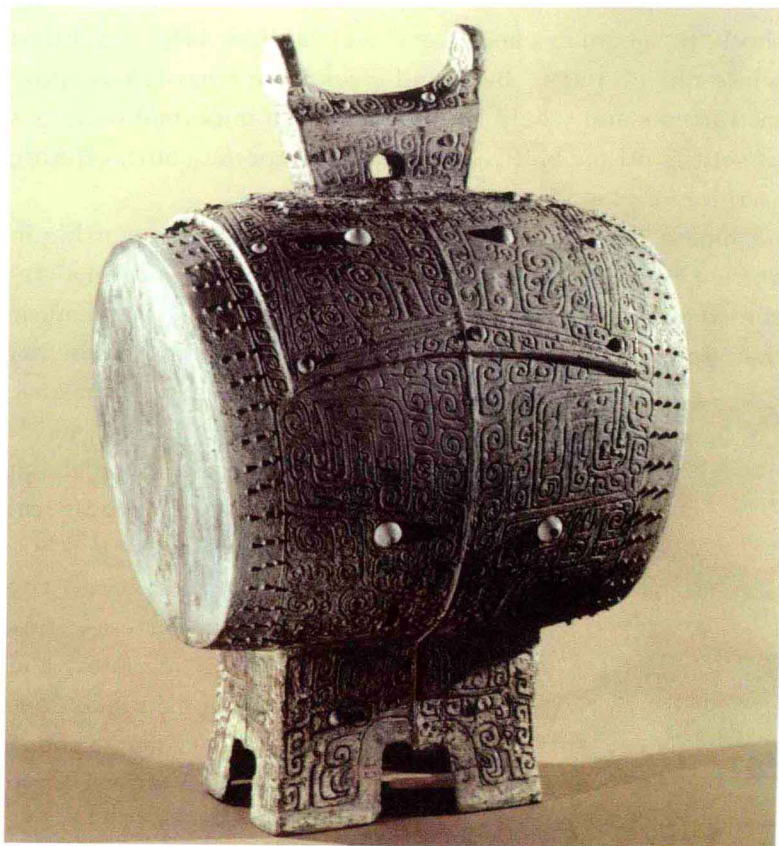


A special stone *qing* excavated from the Yin Ruins in Anyang, Henan Province.

and Shang dynasties, was mainly considered as a supplement to religious political activities. Some scholars considered the Xia culture as “one of obeying fates” and Shang culture as “one of honoring the gods.” In the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046–771 BC), however, the po-



litical implications of “obeying the gods’ will” were weakened greatly. The Duke of Zhou significantly restructured and organized the ritual music created from ancient times to the Shang Dynasty, and developed it into a set of systematic social rules and codes of conduct. Also, special organizations were established to standardize and manage music dances. “Dasiyue” was one of the organizations and responsible for teaching royal families, nobles and some talented people music, including “music morals,” “music languages” and “music dances” (see *The Rites of the Zhou · Chunguan*). The music dances, previously used to extol



A bronze drum from the Shang Dynasty unearthed in Chongyang, Hubei Province.

