



中国乐器

— 古筝

Zither player Zhou Wang
from the Central
Conservatory of Music
中央音乐学院的古筝演
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Chinese Musical Instruments

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Photos Supplied by KAI WEI

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— The Ancient Zither

古筝是中国重要的民族器乐之一，已有 2000 多年历史，早在唐朝就传播到了日本和朝鲜。古筝的传统代表曲目有《渔舟唱晚》、《高山流水》、《寒鸦戏水》，还有大量的新筝曲。

Music has always held an important place in Chinese culture. For thousands of years, different Chinese nationalities have not only created a variety of their own musical instruments but have also altered and developed instruments from out of China. In recent years, Chinese national musical instruments have begun to arouse the attention of more and more people internationally. Chinese national music was featured in the Vienna Golden Hall three times and also in the performance hall of the United Nations in New York.

The ancient zither is an important national musical instrument. The zither, with a history of more than 2,000 years, was introduced to Japan and Korea during Tang Dynasty (618—907). During Qing Dynasty (1644—1911) most zithers were 14-stringed with two groups of octaves and the accordatura at subtonic.

Over the years, the number of strings

on the zither gradually changed—ranging from 5 to 49 strings. Currently, the 21-stringed zither is most common. The frame of the zither is made from wood of ebony, padauk, annatto and *hualimu*, while the surface and the baseplate are made of the tung tree. The head of the zither is called *yueshan* and the nut is made of small pieces of bone. The strings are held up by a spine of supports. The spine can be made of wood, bamboo, camel bone or ivory and comes in different shapes, sometimes pyramids, swords or coins. There is a slanting cross beam in the voice box, which regulates the tone. One string has one tone, so when tuning the zither the lowest string is usually set at Sol or Do. The traditional zither has a scale of five notes and the diapason can achieve three octaves. Zithers from different areas have a variety of tuning methods.

The player has to sit on a chair when playing the zither, leaving a good space between his/her body and the zither. The player's upper body, particularly the shoulders and head, usually keep time with the beat of the melody. Finger picks are taped to the fingers to enhance the sound of the strings as they are plucked.

A skilled player can use the zither to depict different images; particularly water, trees and sky.

Due to historical, dialect and cultural changes, different schools of the zither have appeared. The Zhejiang school is more complicated, the Shandong school is sonorous and forceful but simple and plain. The Chaozhou school is mild while the Henan school is lively, bold and unrestrained.

The music of the zither mainly developed from folk art and literature. Newer developments have included zither solos and scores for the zither as part of a traditional orchestra. Classic tunes for the zither include Fishing Boat at Dusk (when fishermen and their boats return with their loads of fish); High Mountain and Running Water (a long lingering tune, evoking clear spring water flowing into a deep valley river); Jackdaws Playing With Water and many others. (Translated by YU HU 翻译：玉琥)

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