

# Music of the World

## Chordophones: Fretted Chinese Lutes

*Note: A Dynasty is a succession of rulers or emperors from one family. In China, there were many dynasties over 4,000 years. The first Chinese dynasty was Yu the Great (who introduced flood control) in 2070 BC. The last dynasty ended in 1912. A dynasty had its own rules, government and art. The emperor might change the mode for music, dictating on which note a pentatonic scale would begin, erasing the previous dynasty's culture or ideas.*



The **Pipa** 琵琶 is sometimes referred to as the Chinese Lute. The Pipa is about 2000 years old being from Persia and introduced to China probably during the Qin and Tang Dynasties. It was played as the principal (most important) instrument for imperial courts during the Tang Dynasty. The body is pear-shaped with a long neck with between 12 to 26 frets and four strings. A fret is a raised line perpendicular the strings that sections off the strings

allowing them to vibrate at the desired pitches when fingered with left hand and strummed using plectrums (picks) with the right. The frets are positioned high so that the fingers never touch the body of the instrument.

Here is **Wu Man** playing the Pipa, first as a demonstration of technique and secondly, showing improvisation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mjg74dbjC5A>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiW7gLpDzdE>

Here is a Chinese orchestra featuring a Pipa:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHxQnnS7A3U>





Left, the **Luiqin** 柳琴 is a smaller Chinese mandolin having two to four strings with a pear-shaped body made of willow wood. The number of frets vary from 7-29 over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Here is a Mandolin orchestra which features a **luiqin concerto**:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0bmlUYM8Tg>



A **Qinqin** 秦琴 is a plucked Chinese fretted lute popular in the southern coast of China. It can have either a rounded or hexagonal (6 sided) body with a tall neck. Although it can have up to four strings, only two are generally played. It has a python skin on the body which serves as a resonator

(membranophone) as the strings vibrate. The modern version resembles a banjo, having three strings. *This may sound out of tune, but it is not.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUnzkArX41c>



A **Zhongruan** 中阮 is another Chinese plucked instrument that has 24 frets and 4 strings with a circular rosewood or red sandalwood sound box that has two sound holes. A modernized instrument, it is played much like the Pipa. There are generally three different

decorations of the lute head— good fortune, peony and dragon— which are made of plastic or ivory. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vl5vVS8oyEA>

