

Music of the World

Chordophones - 胡琴 **Huqin**: Chinese Bowed Instruments



The **Erhu** is a two stringed bowed Chinese instrument known as a spike fiddle from the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD). The name Erhu means two—two strings. This was mostly found in Southern China and primarily used in folk music. The Chinese often link it with beggars. The long neck has two tuning pegs at the top and a python snake skin covered resonator on the bottom covering a box. The strings, which are looped from the pegs, holds a small bridge in place. The horsehair bow is placed inside and between the two strings, not separated. The unique sound is due to the python skin which vibrates.

The **Erhu** does not have a fingerboard, rather, the player touches only the two strings, which are tuned in fifths: D4 and A4, together as one. It is considered to be in the middle range of **Huqin** which is about two and a half octaves. The **Huqin** family has a traditional vibrato.



However, quite often performers use a combination of vibratos borrowed from western string playing. Demonstration: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GqVXBiqeT4>

Here is the famous pianist, Lang Lang, with his father on Erhu at Carnegie Hall

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyJemf8hwkU>





The two stringed **Gaohu** 高胡, which is considered to be the higher range of the *Huqin*, was developed in 1920's to be used in Cantonese music. It is made like the Erhu. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKqbdFqI9RY>



Zhonghu or Alto Erhu was developed as a lower pitched version of the *Erhu* in the 1940's. It is slightly larger, hence the lower pitch. The two strings are tuned in fifths: A to E or G to D which is the same range as the violin's lower strings.

This spectacular listening example contains an entire orchestra of authentic Chinese instruments accompanying the Zhonghu: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bELJPricLTo>

The **Mongolian Sihu** (*si* (四 means 4) spiked fiddle has four strings. It is bowed in the same manner and is used to accompany singing, talking and drama including shadow theatre. This example is in an ensemble.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvwR5hJAMxI>

