

# Classification of Chinese Musical Instruments

## 1. Traditionally classification

Traditionally, Chinese musical instruments were classified by the material of which they were made. The system of classifying musical instruments was known as "Ba-yin" or "eight tones", which are metal, stone, silk, bamboo, gourd, clay, skin and wood.

**Metal** - A good example is the Zhong, and also the Luo (gongs) and Bo (cymbals).

**Stone** - A good example is the Qing. Usually, it is a set of L-shaped stones with different quantities and sizes, hanging on a stand and struck with a special hammer.

**Silk** - Refers to the string instruments, which include the Erhu, Zheng, Zhu, Se, Qin, Pipa, etc.

**Bamboo** - The major instruments are made of bamboo. Examples include the Chi, Dizi (flute), Xiao, Guan and Bili.

**Gourd** - A type of plant. A good example is the Sheng (mouth organ).

**Clay** - A good example is the Xun (ocarina), a small egg-shaped wind instrument made of clay.

**Skin** – The Gu (drum) is often covered with different types of animal skins.

**Wood** - This section includes a large variety of percussion instruments including the Muyu (wooden blocks), the Zhu, etc.

## 2. Modern classification

Nowadays, Chinese musical instruments can be divided into four basic categories based on the method by which they are played. They are Bowed strings, Plucked strings, Winds and Percussion instruments.

**Bowed strings** – Huqin, Erhu, Gaohu, Jinghu, Gehu and Zhonghu

**Plucked strings** – Se, Qin, Ruan, Zheng, Pipa, Konghou, Sanxian

**Winds** – Dizi, Xiao, Xun, Sheng, Guan, Bili, Suona, Bawu

**Percussions** - Zhong, Qing, Gu, Bo, Bangzi, Muyu, Luo