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Introduction to the Guqin, China's classical zither

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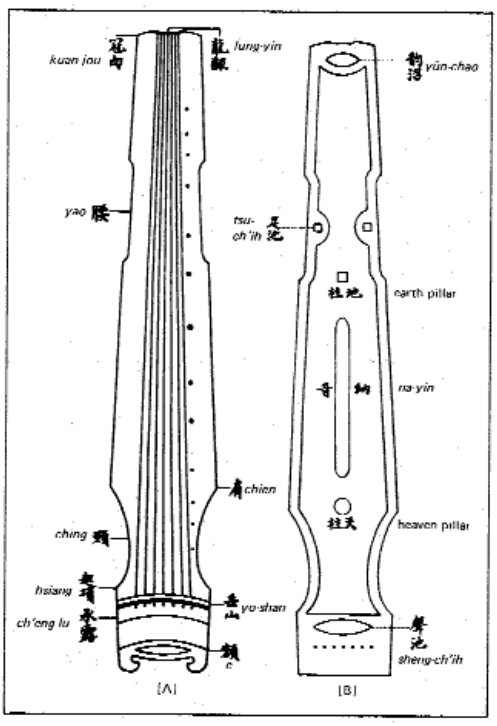
About Guqin

The guqin, a seven-stringed zither, is China's oldest stringed instrument, with a history of some 3000 years. Chinese music has a long history, and its essence is best expressed on the guqin. In Imperial China, a well educated scholar was expected to be skilled in four arts: Qin (the guqin), Qi (the game of Go), Shu (calligraphy) and Hua (painting).

Historically, the guqin has been viewed as a symbol of Chinese high culture and the instrument most expressive of the essence of Chinese music. There are over 150 guqin handbooks extant, which contain more than 3,000 pieces of music as well as essays on the theoretical aspects of the guqin and its music.

When the U.S. spaceship "Voyager" was launched in 1977, a gold CD was placed on board to introduce the music of our planet to the rest of the universe. The guqin piece "Flowing Water" was included as one representative of the world's music. Undoubtedly, the guqin is a part of our world's heritage, but today very few people can play it, and it is rarely seen in China. Music written over a period of many centuries is unknown to most people.

In Chinese, "gu" means old and "qin" means "musical instrument". Historically, guqin was rendered as "qin" in most ancient texts. Because its long history, it has during the last 100 years been widely called guqin.



Guqin tabulature

The guqin has its own notation, which itself has a history of at least 1500 years.

Program Notes

Guan Shan Yue
(*Moonlight on the Frontier)*
This piece depicts the ancient frontier guards' mixed feeling of homesickness and their determination to serve their country. More than 200 years old.

Yangguan San Die
(hree Variations on the Yang Pass Theme)
This piece is more than 300 years old. Based on the well-known poem "Sending Yuan'er to An Shi" by the famous Tang dynasty poet Wang Wei. It depicts the scene before his friend's departure to beyond the Great Wall

Liu Shui
(Flowing Water)
This piece is more than 700 years old, and is perhaps the most famous Chinese classical composition.

The story behind it concerns the Guqin player Bo Ya and his friend the woodcutter Zhong Ziqi. The Guqin music played by Bo Ya was as grand as the high mountains and as lively as flowing water, but only Zhong Ziqi could perceive this in his music. Whatever Bo Ya played, Zhong Ziqi never failed to understand. As a result of this mutual appreciation they became very close friends. When Zhong Ziqi died, Bo Ya destroyed his qin and vowed never to play again, because he thought nobody else could understand his music . This is the origin of the Chinese expression zhi yin - "knowing the sound". It means a very close friendship.

For more Guqin info and music samples, please check http://www.guqin.org
For more about Wang Fei, please visit http://www.feiwang.com