

A Systematic Review on Erhu

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Abstract: The history of erhu can be traced all the way back to the year 754, from the Tang Dynasty's huqin and xiqin. This article is talk about erhu's basic introduction, history and also huqin family's evolution timeline. In the different places, huqin has their own character to suit for the local music. For example, in Inner Mongolia the local people use Matouqin to showing the boldness and cheerfulness of their character. Overtime we can see how the huqin has changed in different historical periods. There are also lots of other tradition Chinese instrument appeared at the same time during this period. In additionally, the emergence of new traditional folk music compositions and composers laid the foundation for the development of Chinese music.

Keywords: Huqin history, huqin evolution timeline, Glossary of musical Chinese words

1. Introduction

Erhu is a two-stringed Chinese fiddle. It is a classic symbol of traditional Chinese music. The erhu, unlike the violin, is played upright sitting on the left lap, with its bow hair placed in between the two strings that is commonly referred to as *neixian*: the inner string that is closer in position to the performer; and *waixian*: and the outer string that is farther away in position to the performer. The two strings are tuned a perfect fifth apart, with its standard tuning being D and A (just like the second and third strings of a violin).[1]

The name *erhu* is a fairly new term; it used to be referred to by the name *huqin*, which also translates directly to “the stringed instrument of Hu”, Hu being “barbarian of the North and West”. [2] The term Hu is used to categorise barbarians from Northern China. As we understand it today there were five main tribes, also known as Wu Hu (direct translates to five Hu's), they are: Xiongnu, Jie, Xianbei, Di, and Qiang. They were around at the time of the 4th to 5th Centuries. [3][4] However, I was unable to retrieve more information regarding to which tribe it is specifically referring to, as most of the tribes have their own respective huqin, with different variations and names.

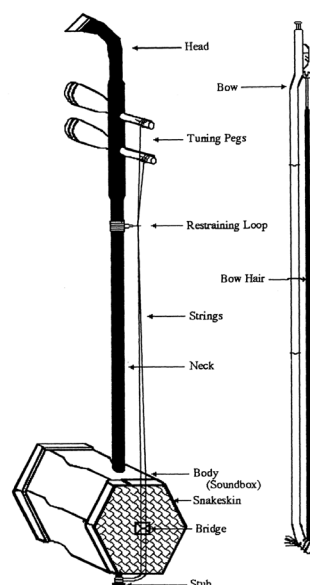


Figure 1: Diagram of Erhu, with bow detached(Stock)

In modern days when we mention the word huqin, it can be understood both as erhu, or as part of a

greater family of similarly related instruments, for example *Gaohu*, *Banhu*, and *Zhonghu*.

The history of erhu can be traced all the way back to the year 754, from the Tang Dynasty's *huqin* and *xiqin*. At around the Song Dynasty era it is also referred to as *jiqin*. During this era, the word *huqin* is in reference to *pipa*. This comes from the association of the word *hu* + *qin*, the *qin* (instrument) of hu people, with *pipa*, an instrument of the hu people. At around late 8th Century (Late Tang/ Western Xia), *Mawei Huqin* was introduced, named after 'instrument of Hu played by horse tail'. According to documents[2][5], in the Northern Song, there were already *huqin* played with horse tails, until the Yuan Dynasty the craftsmanship and appearance of *Huqin* is documented more clearly. During the Ming/Qin Dynasty the *huqin* became widespread in popularity, with its main usage being the accompaniment of folk music (community music, regional opera, etc...), as well as starting to star in some instrument ensembles (*Si zhu* music), and only recently changed its name to the now well-known *erhu*. During recent times, thanks to the contribution of modern composers like George Gao, we are able to experience a much more diverse *erhu* music in technical skills, musical styles and structure.

2. Timeline of the Huqin Family

During my research for this thesis, I have noticed the lack of clearly laid out information for the evolution and timeline of the huqin family. I decided to compose one of my own through the documentation found online, library, and the help of my tutors. Please note the graph is just a rough estimate, as many sources indicate to the loss of record for the instrument's origin, or some key information between the correlation of various versions of the instrument are lost.

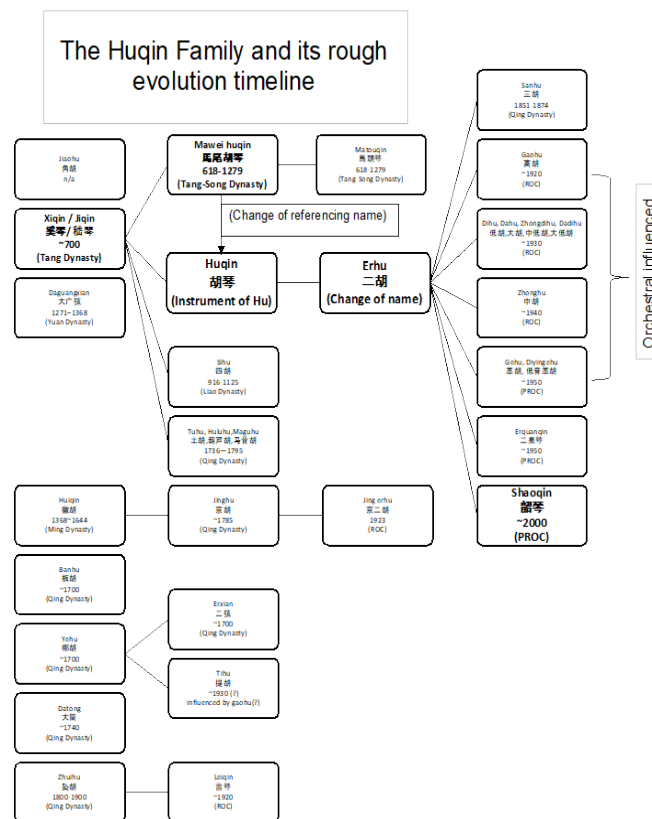


Figure 2: The Huqin Family and its rough evolution timeline

Rooted in the fertile soil of Chinese culture, the development and evolution of the erhu is both an artistic and a cultural phenomenon. The erhu as the main representative of the Chinese string instrument, has evolved in many regions, cultures, from style, technique and repertoire have evolved to reflect the power of the national psyche, social culture and the spirit of the time, which becoming an important representative of traditional Chinese music culture and an important embodiment of the national spirit.

Table 1: The Huqin Family and its rough description

Name	Year	Place	Derived from	notes
Xiqin / Jiqin	~700 (Tang Dynasty)	Xi Tribe		Currently believed to be the origin of the erhu, and many other stringed instrument of the huqin family. However, even though many instruments belong to the huqin family, it is argued that many of which are their own creation, without the influence of other similarly shaped huqin[6]
Huqin	~Tang Dynasty	n/a	n/a	The usage of the word huqin went through extensive semantic change in the history, during Tang Dynasty it meant the instrument of Hu people, and mostly used to be referred to pipa, later at around early Song Dynasty changed to referring mawei huqin, until now where it means the general huqin family, usually meaning erhu.[2]
Erhu	n/a	n/a	Xiqin / Mawei huqin	Most prominent instrument of the huqin family, widely seen across all stages and international scenes.[6]
Shaoqin	~2000	n/a	Erhu	An electric erhu developed by George Gao. This instrument expanded the playable range of the erhu, improved the weak tones of the higher positions, as well as added a built in quarter-inch auxiliary line for better mic reception.[7]

Table 2: The Huqin Family and its rough description - cont.

Name	Year	Place	Derived from	notes
Gaohu	~1920	n/a	Erhu	Also called yuehu, developed by the musician and composer Lu Wencheng (1898–1981) and used in Cantonese music and Cantonese opera[8]
Dahu	~1930	n/a	Erhu	Also known as xiaodihu or cizhonghu. Developed to expand the range of the huqin family, however it is not popular and only played by very few people nowadays and replaced by the more popular gehu[9]
Zhonghu	~1940	n/a	Erhu	It was developed as the alto member of the huqin family (similar in range to the European viola) to increase the pitch range of the instruments used in a Chinese orchestra[9]
Dihu	~1930	n/a	Erhu	Developed to expand the range of the huqin family, however it is not popular and only played by very few people nowadays and replaced by the more popular gehu (Music)[9]
Diyingehu	~1950	n/a	Erhu, Double bass	Developed in the 1950's by Yang Yusen, its original goal is to create an instrument with bass register similarly to the double bass of the Western orchestra.[9]
Erquanqin	~1950	n/a	Erhu	Slightly larger erhu used specifically to play the piece Erquan Yingyue

Table 3: The Huqin Family and its rough description- cont

Name	Year	Place	Derived from	Notes
Mawei huqin	618-1279 (Tang-Song Dynasty)	Inner Mongolia	Xiqin	Believed to be the origin of matouqin, and later known as huqin through semantic change. derived from xiqin[10]
Matouqin	618-1279 (Tang-Song Dynasty)	Inner Mongolia	Mawei huqin	Currently the most popular bowed instrument of the Mongolian, its origin is no longer traceable but it is believed to have derived from xiqin from around the Tang, Song Dynasty. By the Genghis Khan period it is already in wide spread amongst the people.[11]
Sihu	916-1125 (Liao Dynasty)	Mongolia	Xiqin	Also called Khuurchir, it is played primarily by the Mongolians in the Inner Mongolia[11]
Sanhu	1851-1874 (Qing Dynasty)	Yi Tribe	Erhu	Developed from the erhu, it was further improved in the 1970's, and is commonly played among the Yi people.
Huluhu	1736—1795 (Qing Dynasty)	Guangxi	Xiqin	Played by the Zhuang people of the Guanxi province, originally used for instrumental ensemble Youyuan (游院) and regional opera Zhuang opera.

Table 4: The Huqin Family and its rough description- cont

Name	Year	Place	Derived from	Notes
Huihu	1368-1644 (Ming Dynasty)	Anhui		Developed with Hui opera, it is a form of regional opera from the southern Anhui, originated from around Ming Dynasty
Jinghu	~1785 (Qing Dynasty)	Beijing	Huihu	Used primarily in Beijing opera. It is the smallest and highest pitched instrument in the huqin family
Jing erhu	~1923	Beijing	Jinghu and Erhu	Created by Wang Shaoqing for the peaking opera troupe of Mei Lanfang.
Maguhu	1736—1795 (Qing Dynasty)	Guangxi	Xiqin	Played by the Zhuang people of the Guanxi province. There are legends surrounding the origin of this instrument, the result is the creation of this instrument using the horse bone (magu) and horse tail hair (mawei), hence the name.
Tuhu	1736—1795 (Qing Dynasty)	Guangxi	Xiqin	Played by the Zhuang people of the Guanxi province, originally used for instrumental ensemble Youyuan and regional opera Zhuang opera.
Tihu	~1930 (?)	Southern China	Influenced by GaoHu	Used alongside erxian, It is an adaptation of the gaohu used in Cantonese music.

Table 5: The Huqin Family and its rough description- cont

Name	Year	Place	Derived from	Notes
Yehu	~1700 (Qing Dynasty)	Southern China		Also called chaoti, often played in combination with erxian, it is a popular accompanying instrument among the southern regional operas like Cantonese Chao opera, Ming Opera, and others.
Erxian	~1700 (Qing Dynasty)	Southern China	A form of Yehu	Also called kezaixian, this is a type of yehu. Used to be the primary leading instrument in the regional operas Cantonese Chao opera, Ming Opera, and others. Nowadays it is replaced by gaohu, and only used in specific regional groups
Zhuihu	1800-1900 (Qing Dynasty)	Henan		Also called zuiqin, gets its name from its original use: as an accompanying instrument for the Henan Zhuizi.[12]
Leiqin	~1920	n/a	Zuihu	Developed by Wang Dianyu. It lengthened the fingerboard, enlarged the sound box, and replaced the front with snake skin. Used to be called daxuanzi or dalei

Table 6: The Huqin Family and its rough description- cont

Name	Year	Place	Derived from	Notes
Jiaohu	n/a	Guizhou		Also called the bonijiao, this is an ethnic instrument played among the Gelao people
Daguangxian	1271-1368 (Yuan Dynasty)	Chaozhou		Also referred to as datongxian, guangxian, and daganxian. Earliest record shows it was used for Regional opera Chao Opera, nowadays it is used primarily in Taiwan and Fujian, among the Hakka and Min Nan peoples.
Banhu	~1700 (Qing Dynasty)	Northern China		Sometimes referred as banghu most likely developed along with the regional opera Bangzi Qiang
Datong	~1740 (Qing Dynasty)	Hunan		Not to be confused with datongxian, it is also referred as huagu datong for its usage as the main accompanying instrument in the Huaguxi opera

As the times change we can see huiqin is one of the most representative and nationalistic string instruments in China, and has been developed from the music and culture of the frontier ethnic group. It is a major achievement of the traditional music culture of the Han people. From the perspective of ethnomusicology, what needs to be studied is not only the isolated music itself but also the social, historical and culture reason for the formation of this music.

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, Erhu had a long history in traditional Chinese music. Erhu music can be used in a variety of ethnic groups, places and different historical periods. With the development of Chinese society and background, the huqin is also evolving to suit the current situation. As we see, a large number of outstanding erhu performers and classical works have emerged during that time, they have played an important role in the development and evolution of erhu music. Because of limitations when looking

for the relative sources this article can use at a approximate information reference not a detailed systematic data anakysis.

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Appendix

Glossary of Chinese Words

Table 1 : Chinese words glossary - Musical instruments

• Musical instruments	
Qianjin	Erhu's bridge-like string above the neck
Guomen	instrumental passages in traditional music styles
neixian	Inner string, commonly D
waixian	Outer string, commonly A
Shuangquan	A double-pipe read wind instrument
shengguan	1. A category of shen instruments 2. A mouse-organ predating the current sheng 3. sheng
sheng	Chinese mouse-organ
suona	Chinese double-reed horn
xindi	New Chinese flute
dizi	Chinese flute
xun	Chinese ocarina
pipa	Chinese lute

Table 2 : Chinese words glossary - Musical works

• Musical works	
Erquan Yingyue	
Sai Ma	Racing Horse
Bing Zhong Yin	
<i>Shimian Maifu</i>	
Ballad of Yubei	
The Great Wall Capriccio	
Wailing Waters	
Sanmen Gorge Capriccio	

Yangguan Sandie	
Wohu Canglong	
Daxia	
Yangguan Sandie	
Shimian Maifu	
Farewell My Concubine	
<i>Guangming Xing</i>	
Listening to Qin	

Table 3 : Chinese words glossary - Terminology

• Terminology	
<i>fangman jiahua</i>	Slowing down, adding ornaments
sanban	ad libitum
yinzi	An introduction section that is usually in the form of sanban
qi cheng zhuan he	Intro-Development-Transition-Conclusion
gong	First mode of Chinese pentatonic 1,2,3,5,6
shang	Second mode of Chinese pentatonic 2,3,5,6,1
jue	Third mode of Chinese pentatonic 3,5,6,1,2
zhi	Fourth mode of Chinese pentatonic 5,6,1,2,3
yu	Fifth mode of Chinese pentatonic 6,1,2,3,5
Gongchepu	Gongche notation, a form of notation using Chinese characters, used prior to the jianpu.
jianpu	A cipher notation used for Chinese music
guankou jiaozhengshu	A form of note locating system
sanfen sunyifa	A form of note locating system
Huangzhong	Rudimentary note / tonic
<i>yarou</i>	An erhu vibrato technique
ge	song
wu	dance
yue	music
Yuefu	Imperial music bureau
liyue zhidu	Manners-music system
yuewu	Music-dance
yanyue	used in court house
guiziyue	Music imported from the guizi area
qupai	Named-music
Liaoning guyue	A form of regional ensemble
Hebei chuige	A form of regional ensemble
beiqu	Music of the Northern region
nanqu	Music of the southern region
Jiangnan sizhu	A form of regional ensemble
nanxi	Southern opera
Kunju	Kun opera
Jingju	Peaking Opera
yuanzaju	Yuanza opera
yayue	A music form from confucianism
folk music	Folk music
national music	National music

Table 4 : Chinese words glossary - Names

• Names	
Wu Hu	five Hu Barbarians tribes
Xiongnu	the tribe of Xiongnu
Jie	the tribe of Jie
Xianbei	the tribe of Xianbei
Di	the tribe of Di
Qiang	the tribe of Qiang

Hua Yanjun	
Liu Tianhua	
Jiang Fengzhi	
Huan Haihui	
Liu Wenjin	
Min Huifen	
Tan Dun	
Zhu Zhaiyu	
Lady Meng Jiang	Mystical character in the story of crying for her husband