



## CHINESE INSTRUMENTAL ENSEMBLE *JIANGNAN SIZHU* IN THE COLLECTIONS OF THE NAPRSTEK MUSEUM OF ASIAN, AFRICAN AND AMERICAN CULTURES<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

During the last three years in the Naprstek Museum (henceforth NpM) a synthesis, organization and refining of the documentation of the musical instruments in the Department of Asian Cultures collection has been worked on intensively<sup>2</sup>. One of the results of these activities is the following text created originally as a basis for the exhibition of non-European instruments called MUZIKA ETNIKA – Music as a Mirror of Culture. This exhibition is planned for the Czech Museum of Music in the spring of 2008 with borrowed exhibits mostly from NpM<sup>3</sup>. The Asian continent is going to be represented by musical instruments from North India, Java, the Arabic-Islamic music area and also by a musical genre and an instrumental ensemble of middle-eastern China called *Jiangnan sizhu* – the main theme of this text<sup>4</sup>.

The following text is composed of two parts. The first generally informs the reader about the relations between culture and music in China and gradually concentrates on the

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<sup>2</sup> For more information see my thesis *Sbírka hudebních nástrojů asijského oddělení Náprstkova muzea v Praze z hlediska etnoorganologie* / The Asian Department's musical instrument collection of the Náprstek Museum of Prague from an ethnoorganological point of view (FF UK, Prague 2007; only Czech version).

<sup>3</sup> Here I would like to thank all the staff of the Department of Asian Cultures. Without their help and support it would not have been possible to make the survey, analysis and new virtual organization of the collection (either for the purposes of my thesis or for the needs of planned exhibition). I own them my sincere appreciation.

<sup>4</sup> The short version of this text is being planned for publication in the catalogue of the above-mentioned exhibition. My appreciation and word of thanks for significant help with this text and the preparation of the Chinese part of the exposition belong to the sinologist and ethnomusicologist Mgr. Jan Chmelarčík (at present a Ph.D. student at the Department of Musicology, Faculty of Philosophy and Arts, Charles University, Prague).

example of *Jiangnan sizhu*. The second part then features basic information about several instruments of the genre and mentions specific examples from the NpM's collections, including photo documentation.

## Part I

### Traditional folk and classical music in China

The simplest way to differentiate the traditional music of China is to look at the context in which the music was used before the fall of the Chinese Empire in 1911. There used to be music worlds that had a lot in common and influenced each other but still remained apart: court music, music of the temples, music of the literati and folk music (Provine 2002:91). The first three are sometimes collectively referred to as classical music, but the use of this term in China is much more complicated than in Euro-American cultures.

Most traditional Chinese music (whether it concerns the music of the erstwhile elite class or of the common village people) shares, more or less, identical characteristics typical in the western sense mainly for classical music. These are age, prestige, documentation (i.e. recordings of and about music), transmitting by specialists, music theories, wide dissemination and musical complexity (Jones 1995:75). Naturally, not all of them are always represented by all types of music and a particular characteristic can also differ in different types of music. However, from a certain point of view almost every form of traditional Chinese music could be seen as classical music in the western sense. This is most likely caused by the mission music in China has had since the Confucius age (VI century BC). In Confucius's teaching, practicing of rituals has a direct influence on the harmonic organization of society. Mutually influential dance and music are part and parcel of these rituals. If the music has the right aesthetic characteristics (*shi yin* – the right sound), it is able to lead a human being to virtues and appropriate attitudes (Nettl 2001:99). The dance is then a model of ideal social interactions directly influenced by music. In such a society a man strives for excellence, desires education and self-improvement and thus he contributes to the homogeneity and hierarchical organization of society and heads toward a coalescence with the cosmic order. In addition to that, such a man can also, through his rational endeavour, gain a higher position in the social hierarchy and thus new personal possibilities as well.

Stressing the significance of education for the well-being of society, Confucius came up with the fundamentals for another educational system development, which was of great importance and notably influenced Chinese society for many centuries to come. The Confucian ethics became, along with Daoism and Buddhism, a significant basis of value orientations for each individual, and music, with its direct influence on the course of the society, gained an exceptional position in China.

*Before the discovery of rituals and music there used to live people-barbarians in the world. Only with the discovery of rituals and music the ennobling of the man was commenced. Thus: If you start to belittle the rituals and music you'll be as these barbarians.*  
Confucius (Čarnogurská 1990:52)

In the traditional Chinese conception music should serve to please the ancestors, spirits and Gods and/or to produce a pleasant environment. Many of the genres and repertoires differ considerably and many of their sounds wouldn't match the Confucius's ideals at



all. But the basic idea of the homogeneity, refusing virtuosity and emphasis on precise transmitting of music and conformity generally prevails (Jones 1995:83–84).

Besides the strictly fixed music features, requiring a certain level of a musician's education, a musician is also expected to have his own individual approach. This individual approach should then lead to the creation of a personal style which should nevertheless never endanger the homogeneity of played music. And thus the personal effort in self-improvement of an individual has the ability to produce musical as well as social harmony. And because the "right music" alone is able to contribute to harmony, from the traditional Chinese point of view it is not necessary to listen to the played music but much more important is the fact itself that the music is being played (Nettl 2001:98–99).

The close relation between classical and folk music is, apart from the shared ideas, also evident in a mutual sharing of repertoire, characteristic instrumental combinations and other musical features. Thanks to it, in today's folk music there are still to be found some of the elements of the mostly lost music of the ruling class: The former ceremonial and military music of the courts is today, for example, most strongly reflected by shawm bands' genres and former temple music by genres of *sheng-guan* bands. The class of literati then preferred ensembles composed of flutes and string instruments and their cultivated gentle music (perfectly reflecting Confucius's ideas on harmony and self-improvement) has its parallel still in folk "silk and bamboo" (*sizhu*) ensembles.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century brought lots of changes into China. Among others it has also brought the western concept of concert music intended for listening, which stresses virtuosity and fixated performing based on detailed notation. A number of specialists from town and village folk-music backgrounds were invited to teach at the conservatories; secular or secularized traditional music started to be standardized and took part in building a new Chinese identity. It caused much of the traditional music to become classical in the western sense and so nowadays there are in China two parallel worlds of traditional music living alongside each other: The world of paid music professionals, whose production is primarily intended for stage performances, and traditional amateurs, whose music is usually intended for festivities and ceremonies or self-cultivation. Although both groups can play the same genre, their completely different values lead to playing different music with the same basis.

## Melodic-percussive ensembles of Chinese instrumental music

Most traditional Chinese music was originally ensemble music; a great deal of today's solo repertoire dates back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Only a few instruments with an extended tradition of solo playing presents an exception to this rule: especially the *qin* zither and the *pipa* lute (Jones 1995:6).

Although it is possible in China to hear ensembles composed of just either rhythmic or melodic instruments, groups made up of both of these instrumental types are much more common (Jones 1995:95–108). Generally, the most usual formations are the following: The tradition of playing of shawm bands formed by shawms with a conical bore and drum, cymbals and gong is spread all over China. Noisy outdoor performances and their hiring for village ceremonies are typical for them. The tradition of these groups is most often handed down in families, its members have a low social status and they are usually uneducated.

A slightly more serious variant of ceremonial Chinese folk music with greater prestige is the playing of *sheng-guan* groups occurring nowadays particularly in the north and



northeast of China. Their melodic section is composed of the instruments of the following instrumental groups – mouth organs (*sheng*), shawms (*guan*) with a cylindrical bore and without a bell, flutes and frames of pitched gongs; the rhythmical section includes drums, cymbals, gongs and also, if needed, other percussive instruments (Jones 1995:181).

Another possible traditional formation called *chuida* or *shifan* combines in its instrumentation a dominant percussive section with flutes and bowed and plucked lutes. Thanks to its special timbre possibilities this type of ensemble, probably coming from Taoism rituals, has always worked well as an accompaniment of vocal – dramatic genres. However, playing music in this formation also became a favourite activity among literati as well as among common folk where it served as accompaniment of rural festivities.

The ensembles composed particularly of flutes and strings are usually called *sizhu* – *si* means silk and *zhu* bamboo. These are two of the eight materials traditionally used in China for classification of musical instruments. Instrumental ensembles with a prevailing *sizhu* section are most common in the area from middle eastern China to the South. It is a type of mostly urban folk music with several characteristics common to all of its traditional versions – the players are amateurs coming from various social levels; to play together they meet in their free time in music clubs; their gatherings are informal and do not have the form of a rehearsal or of a performance; even if they meet in public places (e.g., tea houses) they are never paid for their playing.

Particular variants of ensembles with a prevailing *sizhu* section represent a certain counterpart to the shawm bands. Nowadays they are played solely in urban settings; their sound is soft, intended strictly for indoor production; the context of their playing is usually secular and their musicians are educated amateurs (Thrasher 1995; Jones 1995:91–108).

## Jiangnan sizhu

One of the *sizhu* variants comes from the middle eastern part of China, the *Jiangnan* geographic area. It is situated in parts of Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Anhui provinces on the south bank of the lower Yangtze river and it includes such towns as Hangzhou, Suzhou, Nanjing, Wuxi, Ningbo and, most important for the *Jiangnan sizhu*, Shanghai (Witzleben 1995:1).

*Jiangnan sizhu* is a genre with its own history, repertoire and instrumentation. When a *Jiangnan sizhu* band is complete (and so in a certain sense in an “ideal” formation), it includes eleven instruments played by ten players. These instruments are winds: *dizi*, *xiao*, *sheng*; string instruments: *yangqin*, *pipa*, *sanxian*, *qinqin*, *erhu* (2 x) and percussions: *baiban* and *bangzi* or *biqi gu*.

In the context of Chinese music known by its hundreds-of-years-old musical traditions and written documents about them, it is a remarkable rarity that the first information concerning the *Jiangnan sizhu* genre as it is known today comes only from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Jones 1995:271). However, the combination of “silk and bamboo” instruments, some parts of the genre’s repertoire and also the aesthetics which refer to the musical traditions of the Chinese literati class, indicate their roots reaching the depths of two millennia (Witzleben 1995:5–9).

The core of the *Jiangnan sizhu* repertoire is made up of so-called “Eight Great Pieces” – *Ba daqu*, which should be known to every educated musician. All of these eight pieces are variants and expansions of four basic pieces called maternal (*muqu*). The bases of “maternal pieces” are then “standards” called *qupai* – originally folk or composed vocal



songs whose origin and texts were forgotten. *Qupai* have changed into structural models identified by name, number of beats and characteristic modal orientation and they became basic constructional units from which instrumental pieces were derived by variation of these models.

Variation (*bianzou*) is in traditional Chinese music the most important creative principle occurring in three basic types (Jones 1995:142):

- 1) melodic and metric structure do not change; ornamentation and individual intonation, changes of rhythms or melodic outlines are used
- 2) metric structure is modified by augmentation and diminution
- 3) scale, mode and key are changed

Mainly with the combination of the second and third of these types a quite new piece with a new name originates and its origin is then usually forgotten. This method of creation by using already existing models provides a required continuity of the past and also makes up a repertoire of high homogeneity (Thrasher 1985,1993).

The first type of the variations appears in *Jiangnan sizhu* in two forms: Each musician first knows his own basic variation of the melody or melodies of a piece – a so-called skeleton melody (*guganyin*) – and only this version then becomes the basis for immediate treatment during particular performances. This type of variational work is carried out in a framework of a particular instrument's idioms, of individual concepts and the ability of a player, of a piece's character and of mutual interaction between players during the playing. An important and required musician's ability to create immediate variations results in a characteristic heterophonic structure of this actually "semi-improvised" genre.

A typical musical form of *Jiangnan sizhu* is a "suite" (*taoqu*). It can be made up of several variations of one maternal piece (variational form *bianzou ti*) or of a few different maternal pieces (cyclic form *xunhuan ti*). However, one part of the suite is always continuously connected to another one without any interruption so the complex whole appears to be a steady flow of new musical material often of great length (e.g., one of the most played pieces *Zhonghua Liuban* has a length of sixty four-beat bars!).

During a music club meeting several pieces from the *Ba daqu* group and other favourite pieces of the genre are played. The choice of the pieces usually depends on the preferences of particular music clubs and immediate agreement by musicians. Nevertheless thanks to the common practice of repeating the same piece several times (up to five times), the total number of pieces played during one meeting is not large. But still no repetition is identical to the former performance of the same piece because firstly an improvised variational work is used in all the parts, and, secondly an exchange of instruments among the musicians before the same piece is played once more is very common.

Although nowadays it is possible to meet players playing transcribed versions of someone else's piece, this attitude is rejected among traditional musicians. Visual records are accepted as support of memory for beginners or when playing lesser known pieces. From the traditional point of view, the creation of immediate variations is considered to be the very essence of this genre.

A typical session in a Shanghai music club starts around two p.m. and lasts for approximately three hours. The atmosphere there is informal; the musicians are in their casual clothes. The music starts as soon as at least the players of the instrumental core (*erhu*, *pipa*, *yangqin* and *dizi* or *xiao*) are present. Newcomers often join the band during the playing or in the breaks and likewise the players freely undock in accordance with their desires and needs.



Concerning the musician-listener relation, in a traditional session these two types of participants are not easily distinguishable. Some of the people in the room can intently listen to music while others perceive the music just as a background of their discussion; moreover members of both of these groups can be musicians (inactive at the moment) or non-musicians. No one in the room is required to sit silently and so loud noise is usually a characteristic part of the “performance”. Under such circumstances the music is audible solely if a listener sits right at the table with the musicians, which usually means that he also plays.

The musicians usually sit at a common, typically rectangular table. At one of its shorter sides sits the percussionist and at the opposite one the *yangqin* player ordinarily surrounded by the *erhu* and *pipa* players; the location of the other instruments is variable. Applause at the end of a piece is not expected. It occurs rather under exceptional circumstances – for example, after the playing of a musician who is not a member of the club, a musician from abroad or a new member of the club (Witzleben 1995:24–25).

The genre of amateur ensemble instrumental music *Jiangnan sizhu* represents a complex body of musical and non-musical concepts the knowledge of which requires some level of musical education. This knowledge then offers to the individuality of a musician a restricted space for its realization so that the main ideal of this music – i.e. harmony – will continue to be preserved. This ideal is manifested in an internally connected repertoire, smoothness of the non-opposed parts of compositions and finally in the collective interactive work of musicians who endeavor to create a balanced ensemble sound composed of instruments with diverse timbres. Confucius’s thoughts on social harmony achieved by self-improvement of individuals most likely finds its music formulation here.

## Part II

### Instruments of the *Jiangnan sizhu* genre

According to the NpM’s computer database most of the instruments used (in a certain sense) in an ideal form of *Jiangnan sizhu* (see Witzleben 1995) should be present in the museum’s collections. Usually a type of instrument occurs here in multiple numbers<sup>5</sup> also including different variants of the instruments according to the place and/or time of their origin. Unfortunately this very information – very important for the determination of a museum object – is mostly not available.

The following text brings a sum of general information on an individual type of instrument and, further, information on particular examples chosen from the NpM’s collections (structure of and terminology used for descriptions is based on Baines; Wachsmann 1962, Dournon 1981, 1992, Lysloff; Matson 1985, Montagu; Burton 1971, Olsen 2007; Sadie 1984). These were empirically evaluated, compared with descriptions in literature and an assumption about their relation to the *Jiangnan sizhu* was stated. In some cases other instruments are also introduced because of some of the interesting features they possess.

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<sup>5</sup> In the NpM’s computer database there are to be found: baiban 2x, yangqin 2x, pipa 8x, sanxian 10x, qinqin 1x, erhu 10x, sheng 10x, dizi 12x, xiao 7x. The real numbers can differ. Only in the past properly determined instruments currently feature in the computer database.



## 1. Struck idiophones – plaque clapper *baiban* and slit drum *bangzi*

In contrast to other folk genres of China, the percussion part of the *Jiangnan sizhu* is minimal. As a rule, they are a set of plaque clapper *baiban* and a wooden slit drum *bangzi*<sup>6</sup> (sometimes instead of it, a *biqu gu* drum) played by one man (the so-called *guban* – *drum-and-clapper*). Their names include a word *ban* meaning a flat plaque or a block, what is a general term referring to struck idiophones of this type. (Thrasher 1985:7; Witzleben 1995:55–56; Sadie 1984:119)

### Picture no. 2

This example is an object with inventory number A 7557 determined in 1970. It is a plaque clapper *baiban* consisting of three tied plaques in length 27 cm. Two of them are firmly tied together with a silken thread, all three are then flexibly tied with a silken yarn passing through the holes in plaques. This variant of clapper is commonly used in all China including the genre *Jiangnan sizhu*.

Although the term *bangzi* occurs in the NpM's computer database, the evidence card connected with the inventory number shows a trough clapper. We have not yet found out if some kind of a slit drum used in *Jiangnan sizhu* really exists in the NpM's collections.

## 2. Struck chordophones – dulcimer *yangqin*

The oldest depiction of this type of instrument comes from the XII century from the Byzantine territory, which apparently is its place of origin. From thence it most probably spread during the XV century in Europe and only in XVII century is it documented in Turkey, Iran and China and later also in Korea, Vietnam and Japan.

Its relatively late incorporation into the Chinese instrumentary is reflected by its Chinese name: the characters originally used for the word *yangqin* meant “foreign string instrument”. Nowadays, the syllable “yang” is written with a homophonic character to the original “ocean; overseas, foreign”, but meaning “to elevate” and also the area around the city of Yangzhou situated at the lower reaches of Yangtze river<sup>7</sup>.

The dulcimer arrived in China most probably from two directions: in the southeast of China from Europe and in the northwest from Central Asia. At the beginning it had fourteen tones, but with its gradual evolution in China the number of tones increased to the 26–36 tones of the XX century's biggest dulcimers.

The *yangqin* appears today in all China in many versions with many variations of the basic trapezoidal shape, with a variety of ornamentation, tonal range, number and location of bridges, and types of beaters. In the *Jiangnan sizhu*, beaters of flexible bamboo are preferred; their tips are covered with skin or felt, which gives the instrument more muted and quieter color appropriate for the general sound of ensemble. (Thrasher 1985:6–7; Witzleben 1995:50–51; Provine 2002:113; Sadie 1984:882, 620–632)

<sup>6</sup> This term is used by Witzleben (1995) for a slit drum played in the Jiangnan sizhu groups, by Jones (1995) generally for a “woodblock” and by Thrasher (in: Sadie 1984:119) for a type of clappers played in bangzi operas in north China.

<sup>7</sup> According to J. Chmelařčík and Š. Němec (sinologists).



### Picture no. 3

This example is a 1955 gift for the museum with inventory number A 1706ab. It is a type of zither board with a trapezoidal shape of the bowl resonator with rounded edges. The monoxylic body is covered by a wooden soundboard on top with two sound holes. The instrument has 2 rows of bridges (in each row there are 8 bridges; possibly made of ivory) and 45 strings in 16 courses.

It is probably an older version of the little Chinese dulcimers which were earlier also used in *Jiangnan sizhu* (Witzleben 1995:50). Although it is not clear if this concrete variant belonged to or was preferred by the musicians in the Jiangnan area, it was recommended for exhibiting as a *Jiangnan sizhu* instrument.

### 3. Plucked chordophones – lutes *pipa*, *sanxian*, *qinqin*

#### a) *pipa*:

The name of this instrument is composed of the terms *pi* and *pa* originally referring to the right-hand playing technique<sup>8</sup>. During the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BC) this name was given to two types of lutes with a rounded resonator and a short neck. Only during the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–534 AD) did a type with a short neck, pear-shaped body and a bent-back head appear in the Chinese territory – it was called the *quxiang pipa*. The origin of this type of instrument is probably Persian and it is much more ancient than its Chinese cousin.

Early depictions of that lute show the instrument being held horizontally; it was played with four frets and four strings plucked with a plectrum. During the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD) and Song Dynasty (960–1279 AD) the popularity of the *pipa* increased and the *pipa* was more or less changed into the form used up to now. At that time it became a court instrument, the core of its solo repertoire originated, the horizontal holding of the instrument became a vertical one and the use of the plectrum was abandoned.

Today's *pipa* has generally kept the number of strings (although five- and six-stringed *pipa* do exist) plucked by the nails of the right hand and it can have as many as 36 frets (in the *Jiangnan sizhu* ensemble, there are usually 16). It is most frequently played in a (approximately) vertical position. Its body (the resonator and neck is monoxylic) is made of teak, the top soundboard of wutong, the neck-frets of ivory, the bull horns or wood and the sound-board-frets are made of bamboo. Traditionally the *pipa* used to have silken strings; nowadays nylon strings are more common. The tops of the *pipa*'s heads usually have a concrete or an abstract form of a symbolic object (e.g., a dragon's head or a bat). (Thrasher 1985:6; Hua Shu 1993:11–12, Provine 2002:112, Witzleben 1995:47; Sadie 1984:15; Moore-Kenneth 2003; <http://www.philmultic.com/pipa.html>)

### Picture no. 4

This example is an object with inventory number A 1709 donated to the museum in 1965. It is a plucked short-necked four-string lute with a pear-shaped body, wooden soundboard and wooden bent-back head. The neck and bowl resonator is monoxylic; the head is easily separable by removing a fixing peg. The end of the head is probably in the shape of an abstract form of an originally symbolic object; the top fret is a part of the head.

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<sup>8</sup> Only one of several possible etymological explanations.



The wooden soundboard has 13 thick bamboo frets; on the neck there are another 4 frets, but from wood and in a trihedral shape with a rounded top. A little flat wooden plaque is pasted between the last wooden fret and the first bamboo fret. The strings are stretched between a frontal string-holder glued onto the soundboard and four pegs in the pegbox on the head. The instrument has two silken strings (one snapped) and two strings made of gut.

The next picture (below) shows an object with inventory number A 7578 which is an older type of lute. This instrument is a bit smaller than the one described earlier; it has a different colour, its head is inseparable and the top of the head is in the concrete form of a bat. Its appearance is almost identical to other three empirically evaluated *pipa* lutes created around the turn of the century<sup>9</sup>. The last three details show the inscriptions noticeable on these three objects (31 025, 3332, 31 055). The only clear one is the one on instrument 31 055: *jinsheng*, “gold sound, tone”; the remaining two have not been deciphered yet<sup>10</sup>.

From all of the studied lutes described in this paragraph the newest one most probably could belong to the instrumentary of the *Jiangnan sizhu* (Witzleben 1995:47).

#### **b) *sanxian*:**

The name *sanxian* means “three strings”. The oldest depiction of the *sanxian* comes from southwest China from the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279 AD). From that time its popularity grew and spread throughout China.

It is a three-stringed lute with a quadrilateral resonator with rounded corners. Snakeskin is stretched over its top and bottom. It has a long wooden neck and is fretless. Its strings (originally silken, nowadays often nylon) are tuned in a fourth or fifth (order varies) and are plucked with the nails of the right hand. In the *Jiangnan sizhu* ensemble, the smaller of the two main variants of this instrument are used. The length of this variant varies between 80 and 100 cm. (it is sometimes called the *xiao sanxian*, i.e. *small sanxian*). (Provine 2002:80–81, 113; Witzleben 1995:49; Sadie 1984:293)

#### **Picture no. 5**

This is an example of an object with inventory number A 7589 bought by the museum in 1977. It is a plucked spike box long-necked lute with a round resonator with both soundboards of snakeskin and three strings. The strings are stretched between a string-holder fixed at the end of the spike and three pegs in the head (no peg-box). The half-rounded neck without fingerboard and the square (on the top) bent-back head are monoxylic. The instrument has three silken strings (out of tune), a removable bridge and a separable string-holder.

From a group of six evaluated Asian Department collection instruments, this one, with its length of 100 cm., is one of the shorter versions of this instrument type. Although in *Jiangnan sizhu* a shorter variant of this instrument is typically used (Witzleben 1995:49), it could also have a rather square resonator. However, this shape of resonator is to be found mainly by the longer variations of the evaluated instruments.

<sup>9</sup> According to J. Chmelařík these instruments still probably have pentatonically arranged frets; playing the pictured variant of *pipa* in contemporary China is very rare.

<sup>10</sup> Translation and transcription J. Chmelařík.



### c) *qinqin*:

A long-necked lute with a rounded resonator called the *qin hanzi* or the *qin pipa* is documented in China for the Qin and Han Dynasty (221 BD–220 AD). Later (256–316 AD) this type of instrument began to be named after a famous musician, the *ruanxian*, and the name *pipa* was used from then on for a pear-shaped lute.

From the lute *ruan*<sup>11</sup> (shortened form) originated two related instruments: the *qinqin* (i.e. string instrument from the Qin Dynasty) and the *yueqin* (i.e. moon string instrument). Both have high frets and wooden top and bottom soundboards of the resonator but in other perspectives they differ considerably. The *yueqin* is a four-stringed lute with a characteristic rounded resonator with a big diameter and very short neck. The *qinqin* is, in contrast, a type of two- or three-stringed lute with a long, fretted neck. Its resonator has a round, wavy perimeter of not such a big diameter and wooden top and bottom soundboards. Its sound is the softest of all the instruments of the *Jiangnan sizhu* group. (Witzleben 1995:49–50; Thrasher 1985:6; Sadie 1984:887; <http://www.philmultic.com/pipa.html>)

### Picture no. 6<sup>12</sup>

This example is an object with inventory number A 7590 donated to the museum in 1967. Is is a plucked spike box long-necked lute with a round resonator with both soundboards of wood. Its neck without a fingerboard and the head with a peg-box and ivory decoration on the top are monoxylic. In the peg-box there remains only one roughly worked peg of the original three; 12 frets originally glued onto the neck are missing as well. The instrument also has only two (of the original three) strings – one nylon and one gut. Its bottom soundboard is cracked; glued onto the top soundboard there are a string-holder and a Chinese label with the inscription<sup>13</sup>: “Excellent quality, exact tuning, musical instruments factory *Cai Fu ji*, *Shantou Tongping no. 92*”.

This variant of the instrument is very close to the depicted instruments used in *Jiangnan sizhu* (Witzleben 1995:49). Unfortunately, the condition of this object is (if compared to the others described here) very bad<sup>14</sup>.

## 4. Bowed chordophones – spike fiddle *erhu*

The oldest bowed lute is documented to have been found in China during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD). It was called the *xiqin* and its two strings were played with bamboo sticks. Only later (probably during the Yuan Dynasty, 1279–1368 AD) did the stringed lute called the *huqin* (“barbarian instrument”) arrive; today this is the generic term for all variants of this type of instrument.

One of its most widespread variants is called the *erhu*. This is a stringed instrument with a hexagonal or octagonal resonator over one side of which is stretched snakeskin. A bamboo pole that serves as the neck without a fingerboard passes through the resonator. *Erhu* have two strings that are generally tuned in a fifth; the bow passes between them. The playing position is vertical: the player most often rests the bottom of his instrument on

<sup>11</sup> It is visible on the Picture no. 1.

<sup>12</sup> The following description had been created before the instrument was restored.

<sup>13</sup> Translated by Š. Němec.

<sup>14</sup> It is the only instrument not recommended for exhibiting. Eventually restored and exhibited.



his thigh. A complete *Jiangnan sizhu* ensemble (10 players and 11 instruments) includes two *erhu* tuned differently. (Witzleben 1995:43; Provine 2002:113; Buchner 1969:17, Sadie 1984:717)

#### Picture no. 7

This is an example of an object with inventory number A 1708 donated to the museum in 1955. It is a bowed long-necked spike fiddle with a bowl resonator, the top soundboard of snakeskin and the bottom one of carved ivory. Its rounded neck without a fingerboard and the square (on the top) bent-back head without a peg-box are monoxylic. The head and pegs are decorated with ivory. The instrument has two strings and a removable bridge; as a part of the instrument there is a bamboo bow with horsehair.

The first detail on the picture shows the fixing of the horsehair by on a bow of an instrument with inventory number A 1708; the second one then shows the passing neck through the resonator by an object A 7603.

This variant of the instrument is probably the same one used (among others) in *Jiangnan sizhu* (Witzleben 1995:43–45).

### 5. Free-reed aerophones – mouth organ *sheng*

Together with the flute (*di*) and the panpipes (*yue*) this free-reed instrument represented part of the most varied instrumental ensembles of the Shang Dynasty (XVII – XII century BC). Later documents from the Zhou Dynasty (1045–256 BC) mention two types differentiated by their names, size and number of tubes: the big one was called the *yu* and had 23–26 tubes; the smaller one was called the *he* and had 13 tubes. The only finds of both types come from the period 206 BC–220 AD and show a different number of tubes from those mentioned in older documents, their tubes are organized in two rows and are set into a rounded gourd or wooden wind chamber from which towers a long blowing pipe.

The instruments that are direct antecedents of the contemporary *shengs* appear not earlier than during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD). They have 17 tubes organized in an open ring, a dished wooden wind chamber, but still also a long removable blowing pipe like the older variants. In contrast, it seems probable that the type of big *sheng* has completely disappeared in China.

Today's *sheng* usually appears in three basic traditional forms. Northeast and central China *shengs* all have 17 bamboo tubes organized in an open ring. The first one mentioned has a larger metal wind chamber and three dumb tubes (i.e. without any sound-producing device). The second one (used also in *Jiangnan sizhu* ensembles) possesses a wooden wind chamber and 4 dumb tubes. In contrast to these two, the wooden wind chamber of Henan Province's *sheng* is rectangular and this instrument has 14 tubes arranged in three rows. There is a fingerhole used for playing right over the wind chamber on each tube. These tubes contain metal reeds that vibrate when the player, through a mouthpiece, blows into or inhales out of the wind chamber and closes the holes. The arrangement of the instrument allows the playing of several tones simultaneously and so a characteristic feature of the *sheng* is harmonic playing. (Witzleben 1995:42; Buchner 1969:18; Provine 2002:109; Sadie 1984:371–372)



## Picture no. 8

This example is an object with inventory number A 7507 determined in 1970. It is a mouth organ with multiple free reeds in multiple tubes with fingerholes. The tubes of different lengths are arranged in the shape of an open ring and are fixed into a wooden wind chamber. Thirteen of them possess a free reed and have a finger hole; two of these have the finger holes orientated inward of the ring (and are then played with the forefinger of the right hand).

The first detail shows the outcuts in the tubes and so the real length of each tube, which is different for each reed. The length of the tube does not influence the fundamental frequency of a tone (it is determined by the characteristics of the concrete reed) but still it has a direct influence on the vibration of a reed after closing the finger hole.

The second detail shows a Chinese inscription visible on the wind chamber<sup>15</sup>; the horizontal characters *Gusu* mean an alternate name for the Suzhou city near the Shanghai; the vertical characters *Yan Hai ji zao* mean “made by Yan Hai manufactory”.

In the last detail there is shown some of the sound-producing devices of object A 7621 – i.e. metal reeds (tuned with wax) fixed to their supports and to the tubes. Not all of the sound-producing devices of object A 7507 really work but because of its general poor condition (if compared to A 7621) they have not been precisely surveyed or photographed.

Object A 7507 is probably a variant used in *Jiangnan sizhu* – it has a wooden wind chamber and four dumb tubes (Witzleben 1995:43–45; Sadie 1984:372).

## 6. Edge aerophones – flutes *dizi* and *xiao*

### a) *dizi*:

The term *di* used for a vertical notched ductless flute with four finger holes is documented as early as the Zhou Dynasty (XI–III century BC). However, a variant of the transverse flute appears together with the term *hengchui* (i.e. side-blown) not earlier than early in the Han Dynasty (202 BC–20 AD) – it had a blowing hole and six finger holes. Later during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD) this flute type was called the *hengdi* and it had seven finger holes (an antecedent of the Japanese flute *ryuteki*). Yet a bit later finally appeared a transverse flute type with a mouth hole, six finger holes and a resonance hole which became the basis for the origin of many *dizi* flute’s variants.

Today’s *dizi* flute has a total of ten openings: six are fingerholes, one is the mouth hole, one is for resonance and two or more serve to shorten the column. The *dizi*’s head is closed directly behind the mouth hole placed approximately in the third quarter of the tube. The rest of the tube behind the plug does not influence the acoustic characteristics of the tube. The flute is often decorated with cotton or silken ligatures arranged in regular intervals.

The particularity of the *dizi* transverse flute is mainly the resonance hole covered by a membrane which produces its characteristic penetrating sound with nasal coloration reminiscent of a Chinese string instrument.

(Provine 2002:109; Witzleben 1995:38; Sadie 1984:563)

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<sup>15</sup> Transcription and translation J. Chmelařík.



### Picture no. 9

This example is an object with inventory number A 7514 determined in 1970. It is a common side-blown top-stopped bamboo ductless flute with 1 blowing hole, 1 resonance hole, 6 fingerholes and 4 blind holes<sup>15</sup>. The 64.7 cm. long flute is decorated with black ligatures of thread; both ends of the tube are strengthened with ivory rings. The blowing hole is situated 24.7 cm. from the upper end of the tube, directly behind a natural node of the bamboo (i.e. the beginning of the real acoustic length of the tube). 9 cm. from the blowing hole there is a resonance hole without a membrane (which is missing here). 6 cm. farther along there lies the first of the 6 finger holes which are then placed at 3.5 cm. intervals. 4 blind holes (i.e. the end of the real acoustic length of the tube) are situated on the bottom of the tube; a decorative tassel passes through two of them.

This common variant is probably also used in *Jiangnan sizhu* (Witzleben 1995:38–40).

### b) *xiao*:

The oldest Chinese finds of a vertical osseous flute come from eight to nine thousand years ago. However, one of the first depictions of the *xiao* flute is probably a vertical flute with five finger holes (one of them a thumbhole) from the Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD).

The term *xiao* is nevertheless an even later one. Only in the XI–XII centuries did the new term *dongxiao* gradually replace the former name *chiba* commonly used for a vertical ductless flute type with six openings from the Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD). The term *chiba* was derived from the length of the instrument (*yi chi ba cun*: 1 Chinese foot and 8 Chinese inches) and remained in Japanese pronunciation *shakuhachi* as a name for a related variant of this flute type. The name *dongxiao* is still used on the southeast coast of China and in Taiwan and refers to a flute variant similar in some characteristics to the Japanese *shakuhachi* (e.g., compared to other *xiao* variants it is shorter and its head is not closed).

The *xiao* flute common in the Shanghai territory has five fingerholes in the upper side of the pipe, a thumbhole underneath, and two or more holes for the shortening of the air column at the end of the tube. It is made of bamboo and its head is closed by a natural bamboo node. Sound is produced by blowing into the sharp edge in the U-shaped notch carved in the head. Its sound is far softer than that of the *dizi* flute. (Provine 2002:111; Sadie 1984:867–868)

### Picture no. 10

This is an example of an object with inventory number A 7510 donated to the museum in 1967. It is a notched end-blown ductless bamboo top-stopped flute with 6 fingerholes (1 thumbhole) and 2 blind holes. Its length is 65 cm., diameter cca. 3 cm. (bore cca. 2 cm.) and the tube, cracked in several spots, includes four bamboo nodes. The detail shows a notch in the head.

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<sup>15</sup> This term generally refers to the holes whose purpose is to shorten the acoustic length of a tube (the acoustic and real lengths of a tube can differ).



An interesting notice is written in the evidence card of this object: "On the flute, there is a Chinese inscription 'tung-siao'". Nowadays this inscription is not visible.

In spite of the notice in the evidence card, it still seems to be a variant also used in *Jiangnan sizhu* (Witzleben 1995:41–42).

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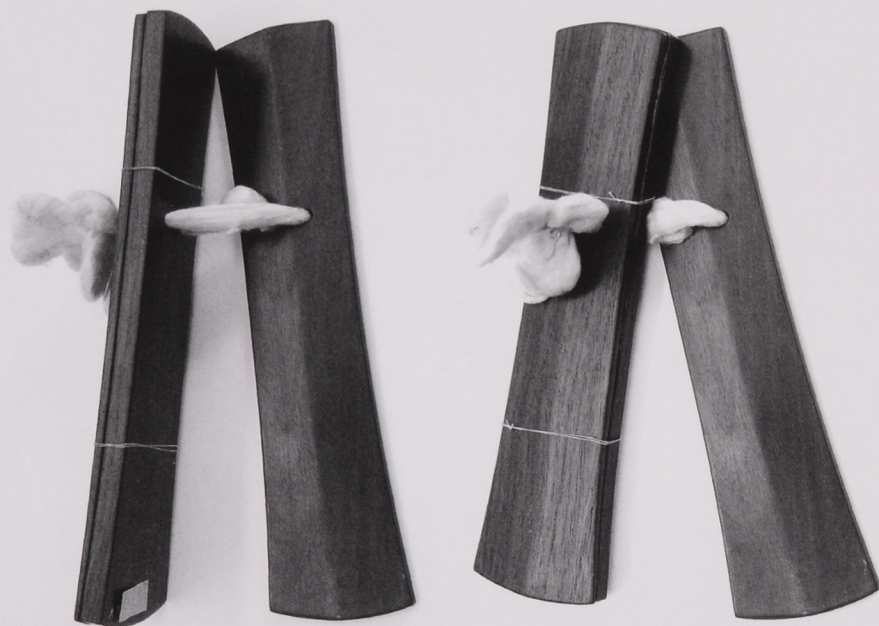


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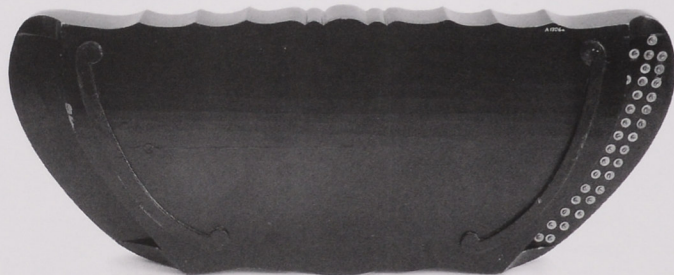
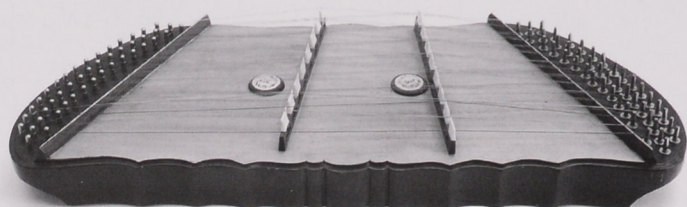


Picture no. 1: Illustrative photo – one of the Shanghai's Jiangnan sizhu clubs (photo: J. Chmelařík, Shanghai 2006)

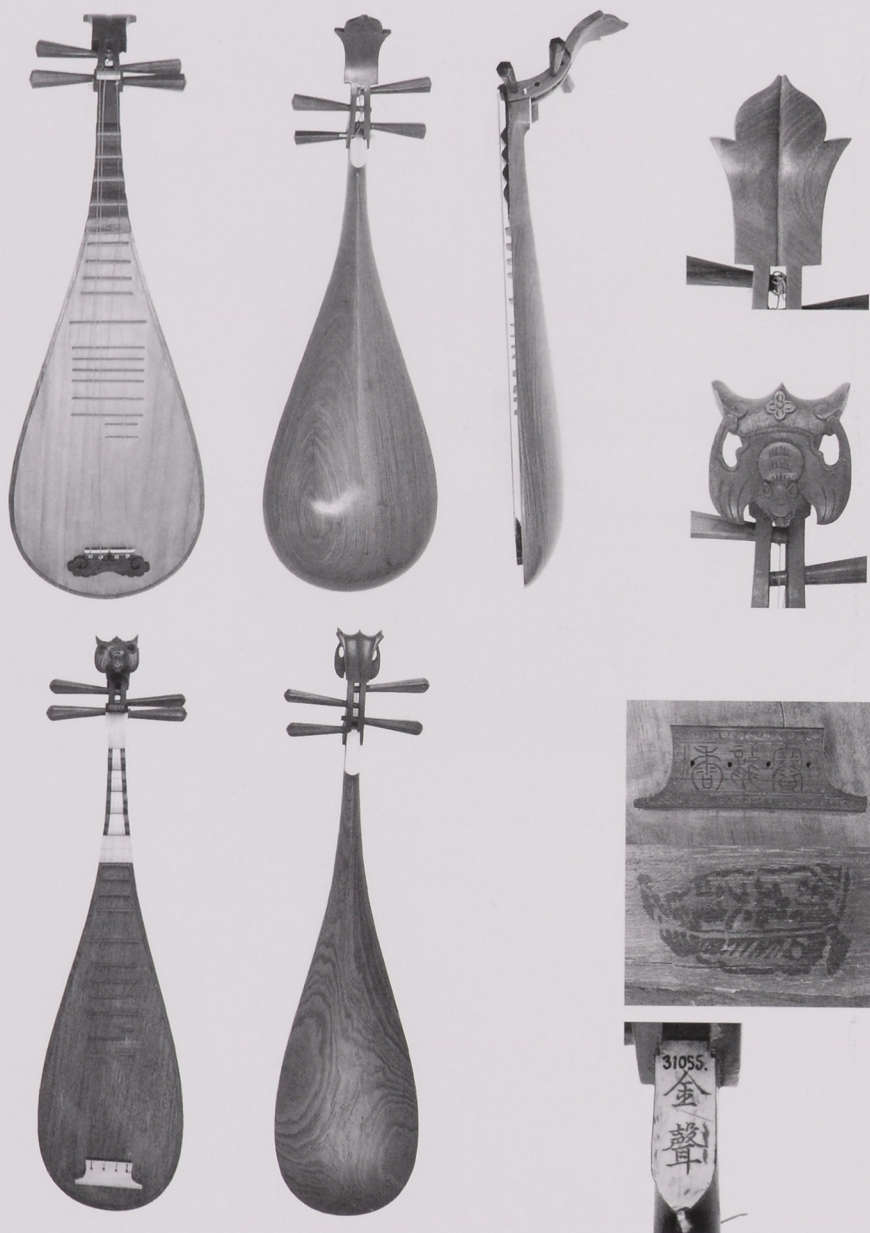


Picture no. 2: An NpM's collections example – clapper *baiban* (photos: J. Vaněk)



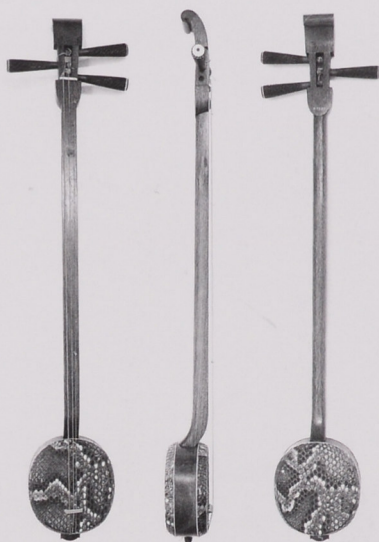


Picture no. 3: An NpM's collections example – dulcimer *yangqin* (photos: J. Vaněk)

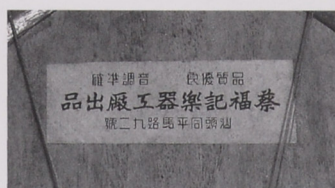


Picture no. 4: An NpM's collections example – lute *pipa* (photos: J. Vaněk)

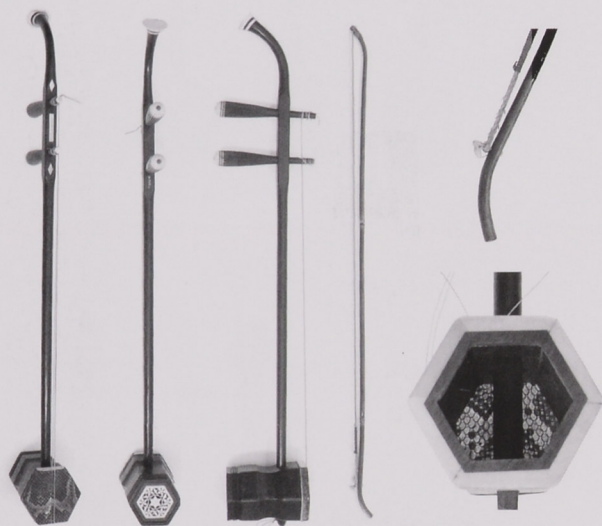




Picture no. 5: An NpM's collections example – lute *sanxian* (photos: J. Vaněk)

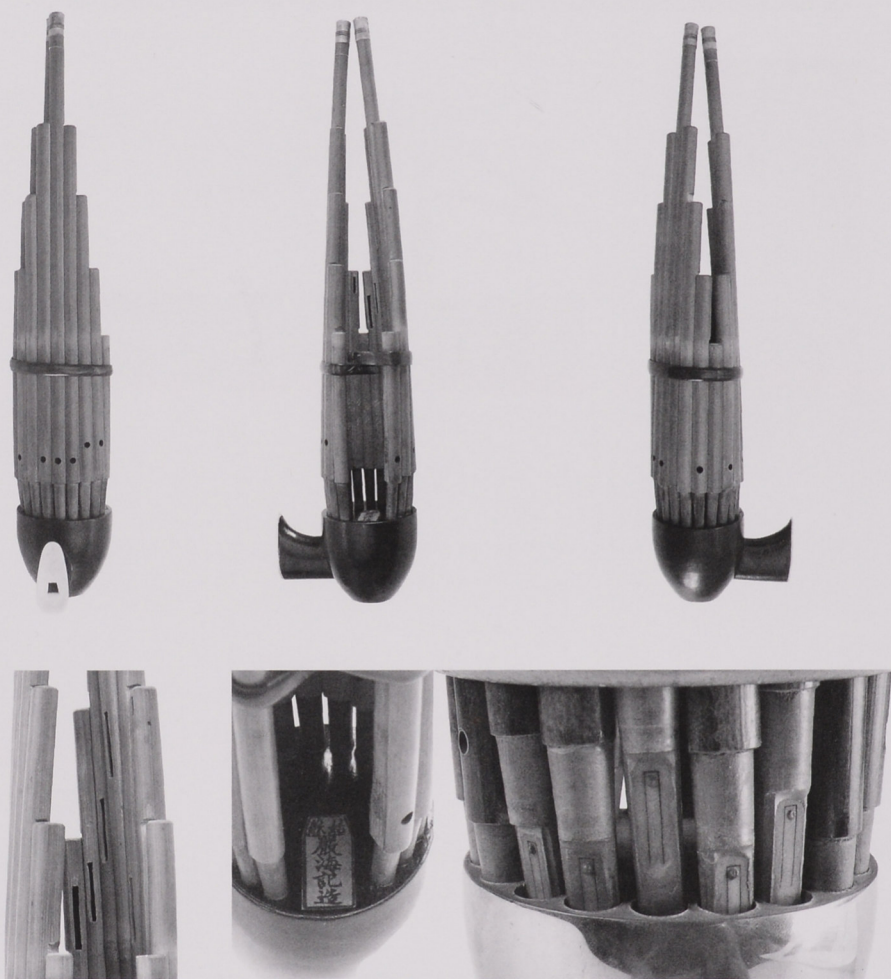


Picture no. 6: An NpM's collections example – lute *qinqin* after restoring (photos: J. Vaněk)

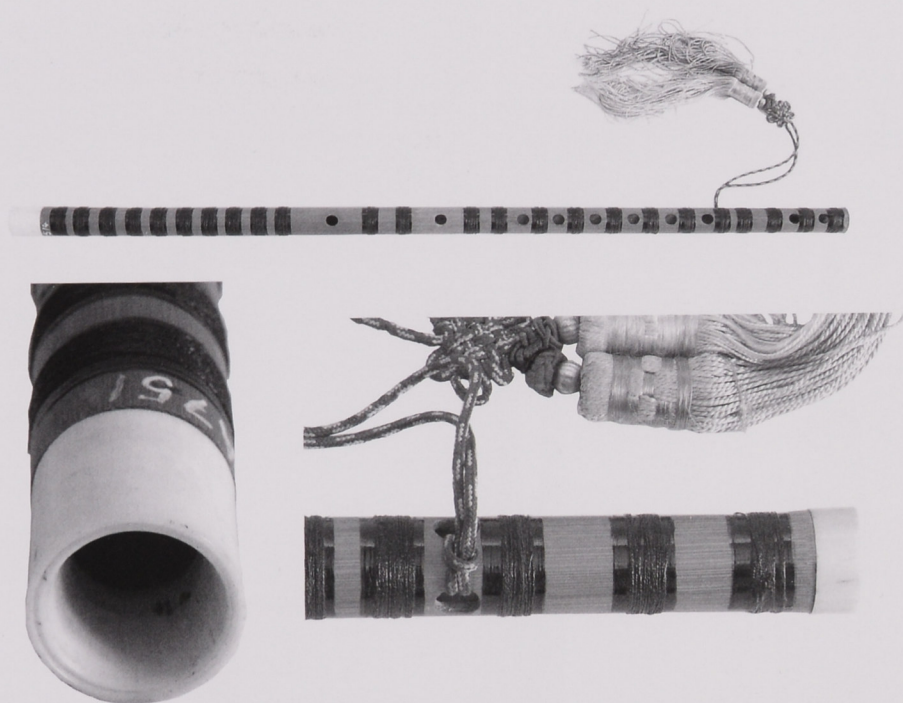


Picture no. 7: An NpM's collection example – spike fiddle *erhu* (photos: J. Vaněk)

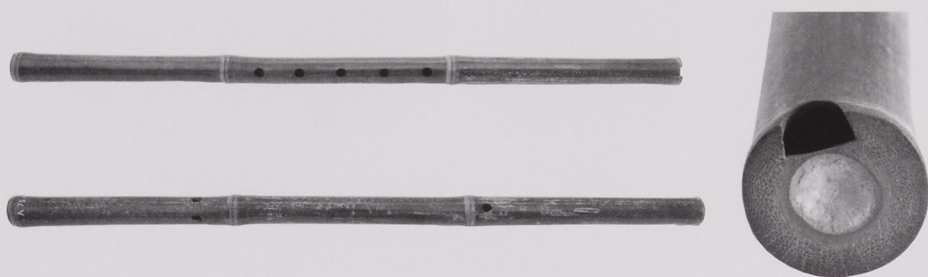




Picture no. 8: An NpM's collections example – mouth organ *sheng* (photos: J. Vaněk)



Picture no. 9: An NpM's collections example – flute *dizi* (photos: J. Vaněk)



Picture no. 10: An NpM's collections example – flute *xiao* (photos: J. Vaněk)