



JIGU! Thunder Drums of China ~ Suggested Study Guide*

BEFORE SEEING THE PERFORMANCE:

1. Ask the class to brainstorm all that they know about China and the Chinese culture.
2. Review the attached vocabulary list. Or, assign a portion of the list to different groups of students and have them provide definitions. Have the Groups then share their definitions with the class.
3. Discuss capitalism and communism. Have students discuss how their life would be different if they lived in a communist country.
4. Have students read and discuss the attached information about Shanxi Province, China, Chinese daily life, politics, theatre, and background on Chinese Musicians.
5. Have the class compare what they know about daily life in China from ten years ago and as it is today. How has the life of the average Chinese person changed over the last ten years? How has it improved? How has it not improved? Have the class discuss the possible reasons for these changes in China?
6. Based on the attached information, have the students compare their daily lives to the daily life of a Chinese Drummer. How might their routine differ? How is it the same?
7. Based on the attached information, have the students discuss the significance of costumes during musical performances.
8. For Music Classes: Review the attached list of Chinese musical and percussion instruments, some of which the students will see the musicians play at the performance. Have the classes discuss how they differ from, or how they are similar to Western Musical Instruments?

AFTER SEEING THE PERFORMANCE:

1. If Chinese theatre is an illusion of life, which part of the performance illustrated struggle? Which part illustrated joy? How did the performers show joy and struggle in the performance?
2. If you were to create an artistic percussion routine to depict one of your struggles, what would that struggle be and how would you show that? Follow the same creative process to depict one of your joys.
3. What have you learned about China or the Chinese people through the musician's performance that you found most interesting?
4. Using the attached information, and what you saw in the performance, consider all the training that goes into to being a Chinese drummer or percussionist. What does their performance show you about the human race and our capabilities? Compare training to be a musician to striving for your own individual goals in life.
5. Consider Chinese percussion and music as an art form. What Western (European, American, Latin, etc.) art forms are similar to Chinese percussion or music, and why are they similar? What about Chinese percussion or music is different from Western percussion or music, and why are they different?
6. After watching the performance, discuss what effect the costumes had on the mood of the musical selections. Can you see influences of the traditional Chinese theater costumes in current fashion trends? Explain and discuss these influences in specific detail.
7. If someone asked you about the performance you saw, what would you tell them about, and why would you pick that particular part?

**Please note that this is only a suggested guide. As each group of students differs, instructors may wish to focus on only a few of the proposed topics of discussion or, create their own study guide more suited to their particular student group. An original study guide may be derived from the attached background on China, the bibliography provided, or by using other sources of choice. The Management hopes that the students enjoy this cultural experience and that it will deepen their understanding of this unique culture and art form!*



CHINA AND HER PEOPLE

Hailing from the Shanxi Province in China, the Shanxi Jiangzhou Drum Arts Ensemble, as they are known in China, comes to America as “JIGU! Thunder Drums of China.” In English, Shanxi means “Western Mountains” which refers to the province’s location west of the Taihang Mountains in China. Shanxi Province is located in the very heart of China, boasting a population of more than 36 million in an area of over 77,000 square miles. Shanxi is abundant in natural beauty, beyond its rich historical legacy. As one of the five best-known mountains in China, Mount Huashan, is famous for its breathtaking cliffs and awe-inspiring landscapes. In terms of agriculture, important crops in Shanxi include wheat, maize, millet, legumes, and potatoes. Shanxi has about one third of China’s coal deposits, making Shanxi a leading producer of coal within China. Shanxi also has about one third of China’s bauxite deposits. Bauxite is an ore from the earth and is the main source for aluminum. Industry in Shanxi is mostly centered around coal, power generation, chemical industries, metal refining, and other heavy industries.

The earliest and longest enduring system of government in China began around 1111 B.C. and was dynastic in nature, meaning a governing system where an emperor rules until he dies and then passes the throne on to his first-born son, nephew or grandson. As a result of the Cultural Revolution in 1911, most of the Chinese dynastic governments were ended and a communist state was installed, except in the Province of Shanxi which was held by warlord Yen His-shan until his failed defense against the communist People’s Liberation Army in early 1949. A communist form of government is a form of government where all businesses, property, foods, goods, and services are controlled by the government. Today, although private enterprise does exist and is flourishing in China in many areas of endeavor and industry, most Chinese citizens are still employed, either directly or indirectly, by the Chinese government. They receive wages, housing, health care and an education as compensation for their work.

The citizens of modern China are diverse and multi-faceted, as the old embraces the new with great fervor. Today, there is great change in China. With more relaxed government controls and capitalism becoming more wide spread, the Chinese are now able to enjoy many of the modern conveniences that we in the West have come to take for granted. While many still commute to work or school by bus or bicycle, increasingly the influences of the West can be seen in fancy cars on the streets, shopping malls, cell phones, computers, and the growing presence of fast food restaurants.



During leisure time, young people in particular enjoy a wide range of activities, many involving modern technology like playing video games, chatting with friends on their cell phones, enjoying DVD's at home and surfing the Internet. While such innovations were once rare or even forbidden in China, today they are more prevalent than ever, allowing the Chinese to reap the many benefits of modern technology, personally and professionally.

The Chinese also adhere to many of the more traditional ways. Many people practice the ancient art of T'ai Chi ch'uan (a Chinese form of exercise and meditation) either alone or in groups in parks. Young people in China enjoy taking day trips to the numerous historical sites such as the Hukou waterfall, the Museum of the Terra Cotta Warriors and Horses, and (yes!) going to the movies. The older people of China, especially the men, gather in restaurants and tearooms to talk or sit quietly, pondering life and its responsibilities. The ambition of most families is to provide their children with a higher education or, if this is not possible, to secure them a good job.

Children in China learn early to appreciate and revere their elderly relatives. Even though living space is at a premium, families try to be responsible for aging parents, grandparents and other elderly relatives. Because these elders have given of themselves to raise and educate the families of tomorrow, the Chinese people give the elderly great respect for their wisdom from life's experiences.

For many, the Chinese government takes over in the education of the nation where the family leaves off. The Chinese government still runs most schools, kindergarten through college, the universities, and the technical schools as well. School begins for children at age 6 when they start Kindergarten. After five years of Chinese language, arithmetic, physical education, music, art, natural science, and political doctrine, Chinese students enter ordinary middle schools. Here, students take classes in politics, Chinese language, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, history, geography, basic agriculture, physical education, music, art, and a foreign language, such as English. Students attend ordinary middle school for six years. Most Chinese students do not return to their studies after middle school and work instead in a factory or on the family farm, join the military, or work in other forms of government service for the rest of their lives.



China has a long and rich theatrical history, dating back many centuries to the Shang dynasty (1523-1028 B.C.). In this period, “seers” performed ceremonial songs and dances to honor the gods, invoking them to drive out pestilence; cause crops to be abundant; or create other “miracles.” By the Han dynasty beginning around 202 B. C., court entertainments were very popular. Clowns, wrestlers, acrobats, singers, and musicians entertained emperors and their attendants by acting out mythical stories and famous fables.

These entertainments were the precursors of Peking Opera, which is a multi-faceted art form, unlike Western Opera. Peking Opera combines music, singing, dancing, acrobatics, martial arts, pantomime, highly stylized acting, costume, make-up, and more to create fantastic stage productions. The fundamental belief of Chinese theatregoers is that theatre, at best, should be an illusion of life. Good Chinese theatre must show the real struggle of humans to succeed and survive as well as display the joys of living.

The drummers, percussionists, and musicians of JIGU! Thunder Drums of China, come from 28 villages within the Shanxi Province, and range in age mainly from 16 to 30 years old. Their skills have been passed down from generation to generation by their families. Their drumming tradition can be traced back centuries in the city of Jiangzhou, within Xinjiang County. Jiangzhou was the home of Emperor Li Shimin of the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-907), and his celebrated drum and percussion orchestra. Some of the earliest archaeological evidence of Chinese drum and percussion music has been unearthed in the Shanxi region. Drumming and percussion music is generally placed in one of two categories. The *yuchui*, (pronounced “Yu-Shwee”) or drum and wind style, is mainly performed at weddings and funerals to bring good fortune and peace to those being honored. The *saishe*, (pronounced “Sigh-Sheh”) or festival style, is performed largely by villagers praying for prosperous weather, and rich harvests. The JIGU! Thunder Drums of China repertoire embraces both of these styles of expressing the more formal tradition, and the more joyful, light-hearted style, found in daily life.

The percussion section is among the most important aspects of Chinese opera. JIGU! Drummers take part of the aforementioned philosophies of Peking Opera, and express it through percussive style. In China, being selected to become a company member of JIGU! Thunder Drums of China, is a great honor and brings with it a great deal of prestige, and the possibility of travel for Chinese young people. Parents encourage their children to audition for musical and percussion schools so they can broaden their horizons and travel the world. However, there are great sacrifices involved in this undertaking, for both the parents and the students.



If selected, the school they attend will often be far away from family, friends, and the lives with which the students were familiar. Once selected to attend a special musical school, students take their general education classes in the morning hours including reading, writing, and arithmetic along with other studies already mentioned above. In the afternoon, they will practice their musical art with speed and timing to perfect their craft. The students do this every day, six days a week!

Most Chinese musicians begin their life in art at around age 6, but are not selected to become part of a professional performing troupe until around they are 16 years of age. Imagine being chosen for a professional music troupe and traveling the world at such a young age! While on tour, they will see many corners of the globe and will meet new and different kinds of people. The musicians are representatives of their country and their art, and they take great pride in being selected to perform for audiences like you!

A typical day in the life of the performers in JIGU! Thunder Drums of China while they are on tour, consists of early mornings on the bus to drive to the city where they will perform that evening or the next day. Upon arrival, they go to their hotel and settle into their rooms. Then, they go to the theatre where they prepare for their performance. After the performance, there may be a reception or a brief party where they will meet and greet audience members. After this, it's back to the hotel, where everyone has a good night's sleep before starting all over again the next day. During their time off, the performers spend their time much like American young people. They might organize a quick game of European-style football, which we call soccer, or badminton, or table tennis. They listen to Asian Pop or Rap Music, play video games, text, and e-mail their families and friends at home in China, go to the cinema if there is time, enjoy a swim at their hotel, or, read a book and rest. Like most American youth, many of the performers in JIGU! Thunder Drums of China travel with lap top computers or hand-held electronic devices, and e-mail their friends and family often. In essence, these performers are very much like young people here in America, only they are privileged to travel the world sharing their incredible musical talents.

The performers see a great deal of America while on tour and enjoy meeting people from all walks of life in their travels. When they return home to China, they have a wealth of memories that they eagerly share with their family and friends. Becoming a member of JIGU! Thunder Drums of China means hard work and being far from home for long periods of time, but it also offers benefits such as travel and fun!



PERCUSSION

The history of percussion instruments in China is longer than any other category of traditional instruments. The character of 'drum' was first found in the inscriptions on bones and tortoise shells of the Shang Dynasty. At that time, around 1562 – 1066 B.C., more than 50% of musical instruments were percussion.

Percussion instruments produce sound by striking on their surfaces. Common materials used for making percussion instruments in the past were gold, rock, wood and bamboo.

Traditional Chinese musical instruments at one time were classified into eight groups, according to the materials from which they were made. This system of categorizing the instruments was known as the *bayin* classifications (meaning in Chinese, “eight materials”) and they included instruments made from gourds, earthenware, animal hides, wood, bronze, silk, and bamboo. It is said that there were once more than 70 different musical instruments in ancient Chinese orchestras, but many of them have been lost, or are obsolete today. The number eight was selected as it was thought to be a harmonious number in nature, and it was also the number of the Chinese Emperor, who was considered to be the emissary of Heaven to the human race. Even today, remnants of this tradition remain and the number eight is considered to be a lucky number among many Chinese people.

The percussion section is the most important section in Chinese opera, particularly in "martial" scenes known as *wu-chang*. The player of the *bangu*, directs the rest of the orchestra through his or her different methods and positions of striking their instrument. He or she has control over the overall development of the action and creation of atmosphere, and is equivalent to the conductor of a western style orchestra.

Because of the richness of timbre, sound, and variety of Chinese percussion instruments, they are frequently used in western style musical compositions. For example, a large gong can create a stately and imposing atmosphere. Dramatic effects and an atmosphere of mystery can be achieved with the addition of the *tangu*, (a medium sized barrel drum), and the *muyu*, (a woodblock or slit drum).

Percussion instruments were easy to learn and play. As the instrument can produce different sound effects, it is frequently used in joyful and exciting occasions such as harvest, marriage, and dragon boat festivals, as well as more as well as memorial ceremonies.

The more popular Chinese percussion instruments include *luo* (gong), *bo* (bronze cymbals), *gu* (drum), and *bianzhong* (bronze bells).



Percussion Instruments Commonly Used by JIGU! Thunder Drums of China

Bangu (Single-headed Frame Drum)



(ban: flat board; gu: drum)

It is also commonly called *Jing Bangu* (*bangu* for Peking opera) and *Danpi* (single drumhead). The drum's frame is constructed of thick wedges of hard wood glued together in a circle, wrapped with a metal band. Its body is bell mouthed in shape, and open at the bottom. Its top surface (C.25cm), covered with a piece of pig or cow-hide, has a small convex central circular opening (about 5 or 6 cm in diameter), which is called the *guxin* (drum heart), the actual sounding position. The player strikes on this central area with a pair of bamboo sticks. The type used for Peking opera and other northern musical dramas, with a smaller central striking area, has a relatively solid tone quality. The type used for the southern gong and drum ensemble, with a larger striking area, is loose and soft in tone. The southern type is fit for solos with a variety of techniques and rhythms. The *Jing Bangu* leads the percussion section in the instrumental ensemble of the Peking opera.

Bo (Pair of bronze cymbals)



They were frequently used in Sui and Tang dynasties (A.D. 581- A.D. 907) with varying designs. Now it is commonly made of high-tin bronze. The performer strikes the pair together. The most common type now is the *jingbo* (the prefix *jing* referring to *Beijing*), a name from the instrument's use in the Peking opera. This type is clear and forceful in tone quality. It is also used in other regional opera genres and instrumental ensembles, and is one of the four major instruments (drum, large and small gongs, and cymbals) in the jubilant *luogu* (gong and drum) music. In local operas, the instruments are often employed as musical accompaniment for acrobatic stage fighting.



Percussion Instruments Commonly Used by JIGU! Thunder Drums of China

Luo (Gong)



Chinese gongs are made of high-tin bronze, hammered into a sifter shape. Its central resonating area can be either flat or convex. Its long history can be traced back to the early Western Han period (206 B.C.- A.D. 24) according to an archaeological find from a tomb of that period in Guangxi. In the Tang text (A.D. 618- A.D. 907) it is called *shaluo* (sand gong), the earliest evidence in classical literature. Modern varieties are great in number with varying tone qualities. The name is usually preceded by a prefix to specify the different kind of tones. The largest type (over 120cm in diameter) called *dachaoluo*, with the name derived from its deep and grave tone, and it is used in weddings, funerals, and temple ceremonies. The smallest *goujiao luo* (dog-call gong), is only 8cm in diameter, and can often be seen in theatrical musical ensembles in the southern Fujian province. Both the larger and the smaller versions of these gongs, include a series of types under different names, and in varying tone qualities. There are also derivative types of gongs found in the music of many ethnic minorities with individual acoustic features, functions, and performing styles.

Diameter: 35-50 cm (larger type) and 8-23 cm (smaller type)

Tangu (Medium-sized Barrel Drum)



(tang: hall; gu: drum)

The drum is listed as "hide" in the traditional *ba yin* classifications. The common type is similar in shape to a barrel. Its wooden shell, entirely painted red with decorative patterns, is covered with two drumheads of cowhide or pig skin. Four lateral iron rings around the shell allow the drum to be vertically suspended in a frame. It is struck with a pair of wooden beaters. Tone quality can be modified by moving the point of striking closer to the centre of the surface, with varying dynamics. The *tangu* is constructed mainly in two types. The larger one can produce a deep and sonorous tone, while the smaller one is solid and forceful in tone quality. The drum is traditionally used with other instruments like *luo* (gong) and *bo* (cymbals) in folk festivals and celebrations, and in theatrical ensembles or accompaniments as well. Types for local operas are mostly smaller, e.g. The *jing tangu* in Peking opera. Diameter: over 1m (large drum); 20-30cm (small drum).



Percussion Instruments Commonly Used by JIGU! Thunder Drums of China

Lion Drum



The size of a Lion Drum is very big, and this instrument is widely used for the traditional Lion Dance. There are normally 2 types, the northern Lion Drum (normally in red color) and southern Lion Drum (in black color). It is a single headed drum, if its size and the colour doesn't draw a crowd, then the glorious booming sound is sure to get lots of attention. The Lion drum has a thick durable goat-skin head, and a wooden body, normally with beautifully hand painted decorations.

Bianzhong (Collected Bronze Bells)



(bian: collected; zhong: bell)

This instrument, listed as "metal," heads the *bayin* classifications. Its long history dates back to the Shang dynasty (1766-1122 B.C.), when a set of 3 bronze bells was common, though the earlier pottery type of the late Stone Age have also been discovered in Shanxi province. From the 5th to the 3rd century B.C., the number of bells was increasing over time, mostly to 9, then up to 13. The largest set ever seen was from the tomb of Zenghou Yi (the 5th century B.C.) in Hebei province. This archaeological find has become a focus of world academic attention. The set consists of 64 bells, hung in three layers. The upper ones are called *niuzhong*, (bells with bronze loops for vertical suspension); those on the two lower layers are called *yongzhong*, (bells with handles for suspension at a slight angle). Because of the bells shape, two different pitches, a major or minor third apart, can be produced on any of the bells, depending on the two striking locations, the frontal or the lateral. Twelve semi-tones are found in the set, with a range of 5 octaves. The inscriptions on the bells unite to form a literature of a large tone system, and have proved to be valuable sources for the study of the musical culture in the Warring States Period (475 - 221 B.C.). With the construction for two different pitches from a single bell, and the unique casting technology, the *bianzhong* has established itself as the eighth wonder of the world!



Percussion Instruments Commonly Used by JIGU! Thunder Drums of China

Yunluo (Set of small bronze gongs)



(yun: cloud; luo: gong)

The *Yunluo* was first mentioned in China as *yun-ao* in the Yuan dynasty (1271 – 1368 A.D.). The small gongs in the set, usually 10 in different pitches, are suspended vertically in the same wooden frame. Each is attached to a cubicle within the frame by cords. The gongs are all of the same diameter but of varying thickness. In tuning, thicker dimensions give higher pitches, and thinner ones, lower pitches. The instruments are struck with a small beater. In the redesigned type, the number of gongs has increased, ranging from 29 to 38, and two mallets with either hard or soft tips, are used for different tonal effects. Some sounds are clanging and solid, while others are soft and drifting. Owing to the enlarged range, modification in thickness cannot produce any other pitches. Thus varying diameters are used for the new tones. The *yunluo* are mostly seen in instrumental ensembles and, more recently, for solos as well.

Muyu (Woodblock or Slit drum)



(mu: wooden; yu: fish)

Used originally to accompany the Buddhist chant, an account of this instrument was found in the literature of the Ming dynasty (1368 -1644 A.D.): "The *muyu* is carved from a block of wood and into the shape of a fish, and then its interior is hollowed out. Sounds can be produced by striking." Since the Qing dynasty (1645 A.D. -1911 A.D.) the instrument has appeared in folk instrumental ensembles. The *muyu* is mostly made of mulberry or Chinese toon wood. The larger type is primarily used in Buddhist temples, but recently has appeared in sets, varying in diameters and tone qualities. The set is mainly used for regular rhythms in the accompaniment. Diameter: 5-50 cm (or more) and 8-16 cm (types in sets)

[Recommended Further Reading on Chinese Musical Instruments](#)

*Please Note: The above is intended as a brief introduction to Chinese percussive and musical instruments. Not all instruments shown may be used in our performance. For further information on these and other musical instruments, see our bibliography attaches, or pay a visit to your local Public Library.



COSTUMES



Costume, referring to what an actor or actress wears on the stage, is technically termed in Peking Opera and local Chinese operettas *xingtou* (pron. shing TOO) or, more popularly, *xiyi* (pron. shee YEE). The Peking Opera costume is traced back to the mid-14th century. With the passing of time, traditional costumes underwent changes, gradually and continually, until they emerged to what we see on stage today.

The costumes worn in Chinese Opera performances are based broadly on the dress in China about four centuries ago during the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644 A.D.). Exaggerated flowing sleeves, pennants worn on the backs of military officers, and pheasant feathers displayed on head-wear were added to heighten the dramatic effect of the stage choreography and add symbolism to the plays. These extra touches bring out the different levels of gesture and rhythm of movement. Like facial make-up, Chinese Opera costumes tell much about the character wearing them. In the past, Chinese Opera singers would rather wear a worn and torn costume than one that did not correctly represent the character they were portraying.



Facial make-up in Chinese Opera, besides giving information about the personality traits and mind-set of a character, also has inherent artistic interest. The designs and colors employed all have specific meanings. Red symbolizes loyalty and courage; black represents a bold and swashbuckling character; blue shows a calculating nature; and white portrays a deceitful and conniving individual. Silver, gold and yellow are reserved for the exclusive representation of the supernatural, spirits and gods and heaven. A face that is made up in a straightforward and consistent manner is called a "complete face"; one that incorporates many diverse elements is referred to as a "fragmented face."



SUGGESTED VOCABULARY LIST

audition	a trial performance, as by an actor, dancer or musician to demonstrate suitability or skill
capitalism	an economic system in which the means of production and distribution are privately or corporately owned
communism	an economic theory or system of the ownership of all property by the community as a whole
commute	to travel regularly between one's home and work or school.
compensation	that which is given or received as an equivalent for services, debt, want, loss, suffering, etc.; amends; remuneration; recompense
dedication	selfless devotion
doctrine	something taught; teachings
dynamics	The branch of mechanics that is concerned with the effects of forces on the motion of a body or system of bodies, especially of forces that do not originate within the system itself. Also called <i>kinetics</i>
dynasty	a lord, ruler; a succession of rulers who belong to the same family; also, the period during which a certain family reigns
fossil	any hardened remains or traces of plant or animal life of some previous geological period, preserved in rock formations in the earth's crust
invoke	to call upon for blessing, help, inspiration, protection, etc.
mutual	shared in common; having the same feelings one for the other
neolithic	designating the latter part of the Stone Age, during which man developed polished stone tools and weapons, raised cattle, etc.
pantomime	a drama played in actions and gestures to the accompaniment of words sung by chorus or music.
percussion instrument	a musical instrument in which the sound is made by one object striking another or by being scraped or shaken

(continued on next page)



SUGGESTED VOCABULARY LIST

percussionist	a musician who plays percussion instruments
pestilence	any virulent or fatal contagious disease
philosophy	the study of the principles underlying conduct and thought
ponder	to think deeply; to deliberate; to meditate
precursor	one who or that which goes before
revere	to regard with deep respect, love, awe, and affection
sacrifice	to give up one thing for the sake of another
seers	a prophet; one who foretells; a soothsayer
troupe	a company or group of touring musicians, actors, singers, dancers, or other performers
bayin classifications:	an ancient system of classifying Chinese musical instruments according to the materials of which they are made. This includes instruments that were made from gourds, earthenware, animal hides, wood, bronze, silk, and bamboo. Literally translated, <i>bayin</i> means “eight materials” in Chinese.



BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR FURTHER READING

Bannister, Judith, *China's Changing Population*. (Stanford University Press, 1987).

Birch, Cyril and Keene, Donald, eds., *Anthology of Chinese Literature*, 2 volumes. (Grove, 1965, 1972).

Fraser, S.E., *China: Population, Education and People*. (La Trobe University Press, 1984).

Qifeng, Fu, *Chinese Acrobatics through the Ages*. Foreign Languages Press, 1985).

Qin, Zhong, *Everyday's Chinese*. (China Books, 1985).

Turner-Gottschang, K., and Reed, L.A., *China Bound*. (National Academy Press, 1987).

China People Promotions, Rushden, England (2001-2009) www.chinesemusic.co.uk

Wikipedia Foundation, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida (2001-2009) www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanxi

Travel China Guide, Xi Duan, Xian, P.R.C. (1998-2009) www.travelchinaguide.com

China: An Inner Realm, Think Quest (1998) <http://library.thinkquest.org/20443/home.html>