

China: Shanren

About the Artists

Shanren is a folk band from Yunnan and Guizhou, two provinces—similar to states in the United States—located in Southwestern China. The band’s name, which translates to “Mountain Men,” refers to the mountainous terrain of Southwestern China, a region that is home to many of China’s ethnic minority groups.

The band incorporates traditional Chinese instruments and folk melodies from the Buyi, Wa, and Yi ethnic minority groups into their songs as a way of preserving their region’s musical traditions. However, the band is also influenced by music from around the world including rock, reggae, ska, and heavy metal.

Members

Qu Zihan	Guitar and vocals
Ou Jianyun	Drums and percussion
Li Guohua	Bass guitar
Xiao Bu Dian	Traditional ethnic instruments

Traditional Stringed Instruments in China

Except for the drummer, all the members of Shanren play stringed instruments that include guitar and bass as well as traditional lutes. Within China, there are many different kinds of lutes, which are played by holding strings down against frets on the neck of the instrument and using the fingers to pluck the strings over the body of the instrument.

There is tremendous variation in the size and shape of Chinese lutes, but one common feature is that the frets are much higher than on lutes from other countries, which means that the strings are held farther away from the neck and can be more difficult to play.

Video

Check out a video of Shanren on YouTube:
<http://youtu.be/FBkHSdvrJVQ>



Photo of Shanren



Photo of Shanren



Video of Shanren

China: Shanren



Kouxian

Pronounced KOO-shee-ehn. The *kouxian* is a small harp that is sometimes referred to as a “jaw harp” or “tooth harp.” It is an ancient instrument, with versions existing in cultures throughout the world. The Chinese *kouxian* looks like a small brass fan that the player presses into the mouth and plucks with the thumbs. The player’s mouth resonates with the distinctive sound and serves as part of the instrument.



Photo by Alex Stoll (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Dizi

Pronounced DEET-zuh. The *dizi* is one of many traditional Chinese flutes. It is made of bamboo, and the player holds it horizontally (called a transverse or side-blown flute) as opposed to a flute played vertically (called an end-blown flute). The *dizi* has a thin, high-pitched sound that is characteristic of traditional music throughout China.

Ask the musicians!

How many instruments can you play?

Qinqin

Pronounced CHEEN-sheen. The *qinqin* is a lute that resembles a banjo with a round or hexagonal body. It is played by plucking the strings with one hand and holding down the frets with the other hand. The tuning of the traditional *qinqin* is different from most Western stringed instruments, so it sounds very unusual to a Western listener and might sound out of tune if not played by an experienced performer.



Photo by Alex Stoll (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Yueqin

Pronounced YUEH-cheen. The *yueqin* is a four-stringed instrument that is either round or octagonal, with strings grouped in sets of two. The *yueqin* has a shorter neck than the *qinqin* and a larger, hollow body. The *yueqin* is a traditional instrument of the Yi ethnic group from Yunnan Province.



Ask the musicians!

Where do the stories in your songs come from?



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.