

Chinese Pentatonic

Chinese musical scales are all based pentatonic scales. There are five kinds of basic scales and every scale has eight variation. All tones are divided tow class, one is called Zhengyin(means main or chief tone). They are the mainly elements of Chinese scales. The other class called Pianyin(means deviate tone). They are considered deviate from the Zhengyin(Main tone).



Every tone has a name(Chinese Name), They are Gong(宫), Shang(商), Jue(角), Zi(徵), Yu(羽).

1. Basic Scales

Every tone can be considered as the tonic of a scale, As the result there have five kinds of scales, The scale's name is same as the tonic's name.



Gong Scale



Shang Scale

Jue Scale



Jue I Zi II Yu III Gong IV Shang V

Jue Scale

Zi Scale



Zi I Yu II Gong III Shang IV Jue V

Zi Scale

Yu Scale



Yu I Gong II Shang III Jue IV Zi V

Yu Scale

2. Variation Scales

Each scale has many kind of variations. To add one or tow Pianyin(deviate tone) to get a variation scale. For example, we can add an F in the C Gong scale, The scale become a six tone scale. Or add a B to the C Shang scale, etc.

Also we can add tow Pianyin(deviate tone) to a scale to get a seven tone scale. But there are only three kinds of seven tone scale for Chinese music. They are Qin Yue scale(added F and B); Ya Yue scale(added F# and B); Yan Yue scale(added F and Bb).

Here I made a list of all variations. But it looks too small to watch. I will attach the big JPG file in our discussion board.

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Variation Name	Gong Scale	Shang Scale	Jue Scale	Zi Scale	Yu Scale
Qing Jue 6 tone					
Bian Zi 6 tone					
Bian Gong 6 tone					
Run 6 tone					
Qing Yue Scale					
Ya Yue Scale					
Yan Yue Scale					

3. Melody

Chinese scales are looked like medieval scales or some kinds of Jazz scales. But they are composed by distinct method. The key rule is never think they are ordered scales like westerns. Chinese music often be composed as tone groups, And usually the group is formed with 3 or 4 tones(Many books said there are only 3 tones per group, but I often saw 4 tones in a group). That means you may compose a bar or a phase with just 3 or 4 tones. Then another 3 or 4 tones will be composed for next bar or phase. And go on.

For example:

Those groups sounds like a dialog or question-answer. That offers pure eastern flavor.

Another key rule, Never stay in one kind of scale. Chinese music often transform scale from one to another frequently. Sometimes it transform scale even every bar. Those scales should be considered as the basic elements as tones. So to write a long music by one scale is lack in variable.