

*Wei Weinyun*

## CHINESE FOLK SONG: TRADITIONS AND MODERNITY

*Вей Вейньюн*

### КИТАЙСЬКА НАРОДНА ПІСНЯ: ТРАДИЦІЯ ТА СУЧАСНІСТЬ

Chinese folk music has ancient roots, stretching back over 2,000 years. Traditional Chinese folk songs were passed down orally and often reflected the everyday lives of people — farmers, fishermen, workers, and villagers. These songs typically included themes of nature, the seasons, rural life, love, and struggle. Common instruments used in traditional folk music included:

- “Guqin”: A seven-string zither;
- “Erhu”: A two-stringed bowed instrument;
- “Pipa”: A four-stringed lute;
- “Dizi”: A bamboo flute;
- “Guzheng”: A plucked zither.

The Chinese folk song (中国民谣, “zhōngguó mínyáo”) refers to a genre of Chinese folk music that combines traditional Chinese folk styles with modern elements, creating a unique sound often associated with social commentary, nostalgia, and personal storytelling.

The term “penny” here is colloquial, reflecting a down-to-earth, everyday quality, similar to “penny” used in English to describe something modest or common. Although Chinese folk music has a rich history going back thousands of years, the specific “folk penny” genre, with its modern influences, began to take shape in the 20th century.

Traditional folk songs varied greatly by region, with northern folk music being more rhythmic and robust, while southern styles were more lyrical and melodic.

In the early 20th century, China went through significant political and social upheaval. Folk music began to be influenced by external factors, including Western music, the rise of urbanization, and new technologies like radio and phonographs.

During this period, folk music began to blend with popular music and urban culture, incorporating Western instruments like the guitar. This was also a time when music became a medium for expressing the emotions of the working class and addressing social issues, especially during the era of the May Fourth Movement (1919), which promoted modern ideas and social change.

After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, folk music took on a new role. The Communist Party encouraged music as a tool for political messaging, and traditional folk tunes were often adapted into revolutionary songs (“红歌, hóng gē”) to promote socialist ideals. Many folk musicians were involved in creating patriotic anthems and songs that glorified the working class and the rural peasantry.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), traditional and modern folk music faced suppression, as it was often labeled as “bourgeois” or counter-revolutionary. However, revolutionary songs and state-approved music flourished, often drawing on folk themes but with overtly political lyrics.

After the Cultural Revolution, China experienced economic reforms and an opening to Western culture during the 1980s under Deng Xiaoping’s leadership. This period saw a revival of traditional Chinese culture, including folk music. A new generation of musicians began exploring folk traditions while blending them with modern, often Western, musical elements.

“Cui Jian” (崔健), often called the “father of Chinese rock”, was a central figure in the blending of folk and rock music. In the late 1980s, his songs combined folk sensibilities with rock, addressing themes of social alienation, youth rebellion, and political dissatisfaction. This period marked the rise of a more rebellious and introspective form of folk music, sometimes labeled “Chinese folk rock”.

By the early 2000s, “Chinese folk penny” became associated with a new generation of musicians who further merged traditional folk elements with modern styles, including indie, rock, and pop music. These musicians often performed with acoustic instruments, focusing on storytelling through their lyrics, which reflected personal experiences, nostalgia for rural life, and social commentary on contemporary Chinese life.

Key characteristics of this modern genre include:

- “Acoustic, guitar-based sound”: While traditional Chinese instruments may still be used, the guitar became central to the genre, offering a simple, stripped-down sound that highlighted the lyrics;
- “Nostalgia and social reflection”: Many songs look back on simpler times or reflect on the rapid modernization and urbanization of China, addressing the struggles and isolation faced by individuals in modern society;
- “Simplicity and authenticity”: The term “penny” in this context can symbolize the simplicity and authenticity of the music, which avoids heavy production in favor of raw, acoustic soundscapes.

Notable artists in the contemporary folk scene include “Zhao Lei” (赵雷), “Ma Di” (马頔), and “Li Zhi” (李志). Their songs often focus on personal journeys, love, and the changes in China’s urban landscape. Zhao Lei’s hit song \**成都*\* (Chengdu) is a prime example of how modern folk music captures the feelings of nostalgia and longing associated with specific places or experiences.

The “Chinese folk penny” genre is a continuation and modernization of traditional Chinese folk music, blending acoustic sounds and heartfelt lyrics with contemporary influences. Its history is shaped by China’s cultural, social, and political changes, and it remains a powerful genre for expressing personal and societal reflections in modern China. The simplicity and directness of its sound allow it to connect deeply with listeners, making it a genre that both honors the past and speaks to the present.

СЕКЦІЯ:  
СВІТОВІ ТА НАЦІОНАЛЬНІ ПАРАДИГМИ РОЗВИТКУ  
ХОРЕОГРАФІЧНОГО МИСТЕЦТВА

*М. Колногузенко*

**МАЕСТРО УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ХОРЕОГРАФІЇ**

*М. Kolnoguzenko*

**MASTER OF UKRAINIAN CHOREOGRAPHY**

Ім'я народного артиста України, академіка, професора, Почесного громадянина Харківської області Бориса Миколайовича Колногузенка по праву знаходиться серед імен видатних балетмейстерів народно-сценічного танцю України останньої чверті ХХ — першої чверті ХХІ століть.