

DEVELOPMENT OF CLARINET AND CLARINET ENSEMBLE IN CHINA

Li Yuanyuan,¹ Rujee Srisombat²

Faculty of Music, Bangkokthonburi University¹⁻²
China¹, Thailand²

Email: yuanyuanli_cl@163.com¹⁻²

Received: February 4, 2025; **Revised:** March 10, 2025; **Accepted:**
August 15, 2025

Abstract

The development of the clarinet in China is deeply intertwined with cultural beliefs, religious influences, and historical transitions. Initially introduced by Western missionaries during the Qing Dynasty, the clarinet, referred to as the "Western Xiao," symbolized early cross-cultural exchanges facilitated by religious outreach. With the expansion of Western orchestras in China during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the clarinet became a tool of both musical and ideological transformation, reflecting the broader impact of Westernization on Chinese music education and performance. Following the founding of the People's Republic of China, government-led cultural policies emphasized the integration of Western instruments into Chinese music institutions, further embedding the clarinet within a nationalistic framework that sought to balance modernization with traditional values. In contemporary China, the clarinet's presence in ensembles, compositions, and education reflects an evolving musical identity that harmonizes global influences with indigenous cultural elements. This article explores how the clarinet's development in China has been shaped by religious encounters, cultural adaptation, and the shifting landscape of musical expression, illustrating the broader dynamics of belief systems and artistic transformation in Chinese society. This article presented (1) development of clarinet, and (2) clarinet ensemble in China.

Keywords: Development; Clarinet; Clarinet Ensemble

Introduction

Clarinet, also known as the clarinet, is known as the "orator" in the orchestra and the dramatic soprano in the woodwind instrument. Its high register is clear and clear, the middle register is pure and clear and beautiful, and the low register is deep and thick. The clarinet, an instrument that uses a reed to sound, is one of the woodwind instruments that originated in ancient Greece and was produced in the late 17th century. Clion Lawson, a senior professor at the University of Sheffield in the UK, wrote in the Cambridge Music series *The Clarinet*, His book on The history of the clarinet, *The Chalumeau In Eighteenth Century Music*, The origin of the clarinet is recorded in J. G. Doppelmayr's 1730 *Historical Materials of Mathematics and Art at Nuremberg*, and in the biography of the maker Johann Christoph Denner: "His artistic passion compelled him constantly to seek ways of improving the aforementioned instrument (clarinet) which he had invented, and his laudable purpose yielded the desired results. At the beginning of the century, he invented a new pipe, the so-called clarinet, which greatly excited the music lovers, rediscovering the stick or rackett bassoon, which had been well known since ancient times, and finally a modified Salumeau (Colin & Bin, 2007).

In 1689, Denner added two keys under the mouthpiece, so that the instrument can play a higher range of notes, in the scores of early composers, usually marked the clarinet as Chalumeau, and because the tone quality of the middle and high voice, much like the sound of the trumpet clear and loud, so the name clarinet was used. This is where the modern clarinet gets its name. Between 1730 and 1740, a third key appeared on the clarinet, and in order to play this bass, a clarinet with a trumpet was introduced, so that the instrument that could only be played to the lower xi could be connected to the new xi note, which is now the high key of our thumb. In 1750, the five-key clarinet appeared, and the fourth and fifth keys, the left and right pinky fingers respectively, were already able to barely play the chromatic scale (Pagliaro, 2024).

In 1806, the German Miller improved the instrument liner into a circular gasket made of leather, which made the air tightness of the sound hole better. And added the right thumb key to the instrument. In 1812, the early 19th century German clarinetist Iwan Muller invented the 13-key clarinet with a long lever in

two keys, and he is considered the second most important figure in the history of clarinet development. In 1839, Carlos and Louis Buffay produced the Bohm system clarinet. The needle spring was added to the clarinet, and the connectable ring key technology improved for the flute by Mr. Boehm, a German instrument manufacturing technician, was applied to the clarinet, thus producing the French Bohm system clarinet that we are now widely used. In 1860, the famous German clarinetist Carl Baermann and the instrument manufacturer George Ottensteiner cooperated, applying the advantages of ring keys and long shafts to the instrument, and the Baermann Ottensteiner system clarinet appeared. In 1920, Oskar Oehler redesigned the Bellman system to incorporate all ring designs and developed the Oehler system German system clarinet (Pickett, 2018).

Development of Clarinet in China

The first stage: 1900-1949: During the reign of Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty in the mid-18th century, western missionaries came to China and presented a number of western Musical Instruments, among which there was a musical instrument called "Western Xiao", which was later inferred by music scholars to be the early shape of the clarinet. After the Opium War, clarinet was once again introduced into China along with religious culture. In the middle of the 19th century, the British Heard served as the customs and tax department in China and established the first Western orchestra, which recruited young students in Beijing and Tianjin as members of the orchestra and hired professional foreign teachers to teach professional music knowledge and repertoire to the members. Among them, Mu Zhiqing, who is known as the first clarinet in China, is cultivated by the Herd Band. Mr. Mu Zhiqing has a great contribution to the development of Chinese clarinet art, and is the pioneer and sow of China's wind music cause.

Pan Xinyang of Zunyi Normal University published an article in the 16th edition of Guangming Daily in May 2022 entitled "Mu Zhiqing: the first clarinet in China".Pan Xinyang. Mu Zhiqing: the first clarinet player in China. Guangming Daily, 2022-05-20 (016). Mu Zhiqing was born in Beijing in 1889, a Manchu, and was very fond of music since childhood. In 1904, Mu Zhiqing began to learn clarinet, and after graduating from middle school, he was admitted to a music training class set up by foreigners. In 1922, the Peking

University Music Study Institute was established, CAI Yuanpei served as director, educator Xiao Youmei served as director, and Mu Zhiqing served as wind tutor. It has cultivated a large number of outstanding musical talents such as Xian Xinghai, Tan Shuzhen and Wu Bochao. Subsequently, Shanghai National Conservatory of Music (1922), Jinling Women's University (1913), Sun Yat-sen University (1924), Lingnan University (1918), Southwest Music College (1936), etc., all opened clarinet art education, cultivating the first batch of teachers for the development of Chinese clarinet art (Zhao, 2011).

The second stage: 1950-1978: After the founding of New China, the state attached great importance to the construction of music culture, and symphony orchestras were established in various places, such as the Central Orchestra (1952), the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra (1952), the China Film Orchestra (1949), and the Central Opera and Dance Theater Orchestra (1964), providing platforms for the creation and performance of clarinet art. Under the instructions of Premier Zhou Enlai, a number of professional higher music colleges were restored and established, such as the establishment of the music Department of Beijing Normal University in August 1949, the art department of Hebei Women's Normal College, and the art Department of Northwest Normal University in October 1949, which marked the beginning of music education in China Normal University and improved the pattern of music education. In June 1956, the Ministry of Education issued the "Music Teaching Syllabus for Normal Schools (Draft)", which stipulates that the specific teaching contents of music classes in normal schools include singing, music theory and solfeggio ear training, music appreciation, primary school singing teaching method, instrumental music and extracurricular music activities. Clarinet as a kind of musical instrument was also introduced, which began the development of clarinet education in normal schools. Clarinet players such as Mu Zhiqing, Qin Pengzhang, Gu Peng and Zhang Wu shoulder the important task of cultivating clarinet talents. Outstanding domestic clarinet students have also made gratiling achievements. For example, Tao Chunxiao won the third prize in the 7th World Youth Festival Wind Competition in 1959, which impressed the international clarinet community and also proved the outstanding performance of Chinese clarinet education. It is the real beginning of the international exchange of Chinese clarinet academic circle. Bai Wenshun is the first generation of famous clarinet players and educators after the founding of New China. In 1964, he recorded a single solo album, which is the first clarinet album in China. In order to let the clarinet go deep into the hearts of Chinese people and take the clarinet "Chinese", Mr. Zhang Wu has made indelible contributions to the national development of the clarinet (Zhu, 2016).

Zhang Wu (1927-2005) is a famous clarinet player and educator in China. He once taught at the Central Conservatory of Music. The most representative Chinese clarinet work "Variations in Subei", is still performed by many clarinet students. The work was created in 1952, and the music is easy to understand, with rich singing melody and rigorous structure. It describes the rural life and labor situation in Anhui province, and creates a new idea of clarinet composition by combining western composing techniques with Chinese folk tunes. Subsequently, a large number of Chinese works emerged. According to statistics, nearly 30 Chinese clarinet works were published between 1952 and 1963, including original works such as Xin Huguang's "Grassland Singing", "Mongolian Love Song", Zhang Wu's "Xinjiang Dance Music", "New Year Dance Music", etc., and transplanted and adapted works such as "The Stream Flowing", "Shepherdess", "Madrigal", "Embroidered Lotus Bun", etc. In 1962, it was included in the "Central Conservatory of Music Clarinet Teaching Music Selection" and became a teaching repertoire.

The third stage: 1979-present: Since the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee in 1978, China's social politics, economy, ideology and culture have recovered in an all-round way, and the clarinet art has also ushered in a spring of its own development, and the Chinese clarinet art has achieved good development in theoretical research, creation, education, performance and exchange.

The first is the creation of clarinet. There have been three styles of trend school, traditional school and popular school, and a large number of excellent works have been created. According to statistics, there are more than 300 pieces. For example, Chen Qigang's "Morning Song" and "Dream Journey" won the first prize of scholarship award in the 34th West Germany Damshta International Music Festival in 1988, Hu Bijing's "Pamir Voice" won the first prize of China's symphonic works Competition, and Zhou Long's "Ding" for clarinet, percussion and double bass won the first prize of the German International Chamber Music Composition Competition in 1990. In addition, there are many excellent Chinese music styles: First, the theme melody of the music uses different materials of Chinese folk music, such as "Donkey Cart" and "Xinjiang Dance Music" of Xinjiang music, Mongolian music style "Song of Herding Horses", "Happy Nadam", "Mongolian Love Song" and so on. Ethnic

music style "Water-sprinkling Festival", "Miao Village Scene", "The same village thought", "Red Sun shining Yao Village", "Qiang Song" and other works. Second, with folk songs, ancient music, national instrumental works as the material for creation and adaptation, such as "Spring River flower Night", "Embroider purse", "LanHuahua", "Shepherd girl", "Why Flowers so Red" theme Fantasia "and so on. Third, the combination of Chinese musical elements and Western composition techniques, such as Huayan · Guan, He, Zen, etc. (Yang, 2020).

Chinese Clarinet Ensembles

Shanghai Conservatory of Music Clarinet Ensemble: Shanghai Conservatory of Music Clarinet Ensemble was founded in 2015, led by clarinet educator Professor Zhao Zengmao and famous conductor Professor Lin Yousheng as music director and conductor. The clarinet Ensemble consists of young teachers, undergraduates and postgraduates from Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Under the care and support of the leaders at all levels of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, the orchestra conducts regular training, and regularly Tours in various domestic art troupes-General Military Orchestra, Central Conservatory of Music, Xi'an Conservatory of Music, Sichuan Conservatory of Music, Zhejiang Conservatory of Music, Nanjing University of the Arts, and holds a number of public performances, which are highly praised.

Xinghai Conservatory of Music Clarinet Ensemble

Xinghai Conservatory of Music Clarinet Ensemble was established in 2007. Li Yuanyuan, clarinet teacher of the Orchestra Department of Xinghai Conservatory of Music, serves as the instructor and conductor. The members of the orchestra are mainly composed of undergraduate students from Xinghai Conservatory of Music. Since its establishment, the orchestra has positioned itself as the best in China and the best in the world. With long-term rigorous, scientific and careful rehearsals and cooperation, and with the long-term efforts of all members, the performance of the orchestra has been constantly improved. It has received professional guidance and praise from Mr. Lin Yousheng, Mr. Zhang Haifeng, Mr. Ronald Spedunker and Mr. Andrei Kov. Professor JAMES GLIIESPIE, editor-in-chief of the world's most authoritative clarinet professional magazine, interviewed the orchestra and made a special report on

the Clarinet Ensemble in the 3rd issue of the magazine in 2010. To introduce this Chinese Clarinet Ensemble to the world. He has been invited to participate in the concert performances of the International Clarinet Art Festival, the Domestic Clarinet Art Week, the 7th China Music Golden Bell Award, the 9th China Music Golden Bell Award, the 3rd "China Wind Cup" National Primary and Secondary School Students Solo Performance Competition, and held exchange concerts at the Central Conservatory of Music, the Chinese People's Liberation Army Military Orchestra, and the Macao Academy for Performing Arts. And held nearly 30 clarinet ensemble special concert, achieved a complete success, and won the domestic wind expert praise. Won the Gold medal of Demonstration Orchestra in the Third Inter-School Wind Festival of Guangdong Province in 2021 and the Gold Medal of Demonstration Orchestra in the fourth Inter-School Wind Festival of Guangdong Province in 2024 (Jin & Qin, 2014).

Guangzhou "Happy Friday" Clarinet Ensemble

Guangzhou "Happy Friday" Clarinet Ensemble was founded in 2009 by Professor Xi Weilong, vice chairman of China Wind Music Society, chairman of Guangdong Wind Music Association and famous clarinet educator. It is a single music ensemble with a high standard of "hobby and professional standard". The members come from many primary and secondary schools in Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Dongguan and Shunde. In 2010, the Ensemble was invited to participate in the "Guangxi Nanning International Clarinet Art Festival" and won the gold medal, the fourth "South China Wind Percussion Invitational Competition" won the first gold medal for ensemble, in 2012 to Australia and Melbourne Youth Symphony Orchestra exchange performance, in 2013 to Germany, Austria, Czech Republic tour exchange performance. Czech Republic won the gold medal in the "International Youth Wind Festival", participated in the 34th International Youth Art Festival in Germany in 2014, participated in the 9th Music Golden Bell Award concert at the invitation of China Music Association in the same year, participated in the Spanish International Art Festival in Spain in 2015, and toured five European countries in 2016. The First Prize competition of the First Buffi Cup (China) Youth Clarinet Group in 2019, the Gold Medal of Demonstration Orchestra in the First Inter-School Wind Festival in Guangdong Province in 2019, the Gold Medal of Demonstration Orchestra in the Third Inter-School Wind Festival in Guangdong Province in 2021, and the Gold Medal of Ensemble in the Wind Competition of the Kobe

International Art Festival in Osaka, Japan in 2023. Won the Gold Medal in the Band category at the 2024 Incheon International Youth Music Competition.

Qingdao clarinet Ensemble

Qingdao clarinet Ensemble was established on July 1, 2013. It is composed of several young clarinetists and teachers, with excellent clarinet students of all ages as the main body of the orchestra. He mainly plays clarinet chamber music ensemble pieces and clarinet ensemble pieces, and holds a number of special concerts. On November 30, 2013, the first special concert was held in Qingdao Concert Hall; on July 20, 2014, the special concert was held by Qingdao Song and Dance Theater Dream Theater; on October 1, 2015, the Qingdao Clarinet Chamber Orchestra successfully held a special concert in Sichuan Conservatory of Music; on November 20, 2016, the third anniversary concert was held in Qingdao Concert Hall. On May 13, 2017, Qingdao Clarinet Ensemble held a special concert at Shandong College of Arts, on December 20, 2018, it held a 5th anniversary concert at Qingdao University of Science and Technology, and on December 22, 2019, it held a 6th anniversary concert at Qingdao University. In addition to daily rehearsals and regular concerts, Qingdao Clarinet Ensemble regularly organizes special activities such as music art salons, expert lectures, master classes, promotion of outstanding students by famous universities, recommendation of various professional competitions at home and abroad, and professional summer camps around the country during holidays (Di & Dong, 2023).

Guangzhou Yuyi Clarinet Ensemble

Guangzhou Yuyi Clarinet Ensemble was organized by Mr. Wang Lihui, clarinetist and educator of Xinghai Conservatory of Music. The teaching team is composed of professional teachers who graduated from Xinghai Conservatory of Music. The members of the ensemble come from various universities, middle schools and primary schools in Guangdong Province, as well as social clarinet enthusiasts. Since its establishment in 2011, the orchestra has performed and held special concerts in many cities in China, winning unanimous praise from the industry. He won first place in the first Buffay Cup National Clarinet Competition in 2019, first place in the second Buffay Cup National Clarinet Competition in 2021, and first place in the third Buffay Cup National Clarinet competition in 2023.

Sichuan Youth Clarinet Ensemble

Sichuan Youth Clarinet Ensemble is a dynamic and passionate group, established under the support and leadership of the Symphonic Arts Committee of China Mass Music Association and the Orchestra Department of Sichuan Conservatory of Music. Adhering to the concept of "exchange and progress, the pursuit of excellence", we provide a high-quality development platform for students who love the art of clarinet ensemble and have a certain playing foundation. The ensemble has hired Mr. Xiang Zhenlong, professor of clarinet from Sichuan Conservatory of Music and president of Sichuan Wind Music Federation, as its artistic advisor, and a group of excellent teachers from Sichuan Accent as its artistic guidance. Since 2014, many clarinet concerts have been held in Sichuan Yin and other venues in Chengdu, which have been highly praised.

Jinan Qinlexing Clarinet Ensemble

Jinan Qinlexing Clarinet Ensemble, founded and coached by Yang Wenzheng in 2011, has a history of 13 years. It is a professional clarinet youth ensemble in Shandong Province. The members of the ensemble are all excellent professional students from primary and secondary schools in Jinan City. They not only have excellent skills, but also show their infinite love and pursuit of music. Over the years, with their outstanding artistic performance, the members of the orchestra have successfully passed the art special student examination and entered high-quality high schools such as Shandong Experimental High School and Affiliated High School of Shandong Normal University for further study. Many members have gone overseas to pursue their dreams in the world's top music institutions such as Tchaikovsky Conservatory and Lenin Normal University of Russia. It is also in China such as Soochow University, Shandong University, Ocean University of China, Shenyang Conservatory of Music, Shandong University of the Arts and other institutions of higher learning to shine. No matter in the domestic and foreign music competitions, or in the international music festival, Qinlehang Clarinet Chamber Orchestra has won widespread praise for its excellent performance level and profound music literacy.

Sichuan Xinghan Junior Clarinet Ensemble

Sichuan Xinghan Junior Clarinet Ensemble is the first professional excellent student clarinet ensemble in Southwest China, which is composed of amateur primary and secondary school students and equipped with complete vocal instruments. Founded at the end of 2010, the ensemble aims to help more people understand and appreciate the clarinet, and also provide a stage for outstanding young clarinet students to show and accumulate more professional playing experience (Shan, 2019).

New Knowledges

DEVELOPMENT OF CLARINET

- The first stage: 1900-1949
- The second stage: 1950-1978
- The third stage: 1979-present

CLARINET ENSEMBLE IN CHINA

- Shanghai Conservatory of Music Clarinet Ensemble
- Xinghai Conservatory of Music Clarinet Ensemble
- Guangzhou "Happy Friday" Clarinet Ensemble
- Qingdao clarinet Ensemble
- Guangzhou Yuyi Clarinet Ensemble
- Sichuan Youth Clarinet Ensemble
- Jinan Qinlexing Clarinet Ensemble
- Sichuan Xinghan Junior Clarinet Ensemble

Figure 1: the clarinet's development in China has been shaped by religious encounters, cultural adaptation.

Conclusions

The development of the clarinet in China has undergone a remarkable evolution, from its early introduction by Western missionaries to its establishment as a vital component of Chinese music culture. From the pioneering efforts of Mu Zhiqing in the early 20th century to the flourishing clarinet education and performance scene post-1949, the instrument has steadily gained prominence. The latter half of the 20th century saw the rise of

distinguished clarinetists, the creation of Chinese clarinet compositions, and the establishment of professional music institutions that nurtured new talent. In the contemporary era, China's clarinet landscape continues to expand, with diverse musical styles, innovative compositions, and internationally recognized performances. The proliferation of clarinet ensembles across the country further highlights the instrument's growing significance, reinforcing China's place in the global clarinet community while maintaining a unique national identity in its music.

References

Colin, R. & Bin, Z. (2007). **Clarinet**. Cambridge Music Series. People's Music Publishing House.

Di, X., & Dong, D. (2023). **Clarinet solo and ensemble pieces rearranged according Chinese folk songs**. Shanghai Music Publishing House

Jin, G., & Qin, L. (2014). **Works of Chinese Clarinet Ensemble**. Central Conservatory of Music Publishing House.

Pagliaro, J. (2024). **The clarinet, how it works: a practical guide to clarinet ownership**. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Pickett, J. (2018). **Clarinet**. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (Fifth ed.). Houghton Mifflin.

Shan, H. (2019). **Research on Clarinet Ensemble performance teaching**. Popular Arts, 2019(3), p. 185.

Yang, G. (2020). **Overview of the development of clarinet in China**. Theatre House, 2020(23), p. 116.

Zhao, D. (2011). **Research on Chinese Clarinet Art History** [Master's Thesis]. Hebei Normal University.

Zhu, Y. (2016). **Thoughts on the nationalization of clarinet art**. Music of the North, 2016(14), p. 148.