

# Revelations

**Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company**

**Student Guide**

**March 6, 2002**



## About the Performance

Dance is a language—the language of movement. Chinese dance tells about the culture of China through stylized, or conventional movements, including hand gestures, martial arts movements, and circular patterns of dance. Dancers also use props like fans, swords, and long, flowing ribbons. Many of the dances are classical dances from the ancient Chinese emperor’s court. Others are traditional folk dances that celebrate festivals. Nai-Ni Chen, the director of the company, has also choreographed modern dances that draw on these traditional folk and court dances. The Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company reflects Chinese people and history, both in ancient times and today.

## Chinese Dance: What To Look For

Like western ballet, Chinese dance is graceful and elegant. But some elements of Chinese dance are special.

■ The **circle** is a symbol of harmony in Chinese art. When you watch the dancers, look for circular movements of the body and circular patterns of dance.

■ Chinese dancers emphasize **movements** of the eyes and hands. Look for these and other stylized movements and gestures.

■ Chinese dancers often use **props** to tell a story. After the show, make a list of the props:

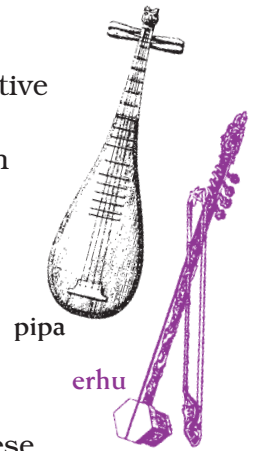
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## Chinese Music

The music of China has a distinctive sound. The orchestra includes woodwind, string, and percussion instruments. Listen carefully for the drums and gongs which play important roles. Some instruments, like the four described here, have been in use for thousands of years.



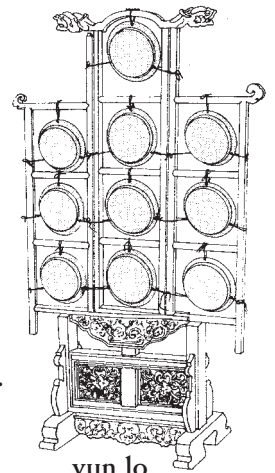
pipa

erhu

The **pipa** is a four-stringed Chinese lute. Finger picks are used on the silk-covered steel strings to create a strong sound.

The **erhu** is a two-stringed instrument similar to the violin.

The **yun lo** or **yun ngao** is a gong chime. Each of the 10 gongs have different thicknesses to produce different tones when hit with a felt beater.



yun lo

The **goblet drum** is



goblet drum

strapped over the shoulder and played with the right hand. For festivals, it is often decorated with brightly colored feathers, ribbons, and cords.



## A PICTURE SAYS A THOUSAND WORDS: CHINESE LANGUAGE

Language is a living thing, always changing. Spoken language changes so fast that often parents and children use different words to express similar ideas (like **phat** for great). Written language also changes with time, although more slowly. Let’s see how the Chinese written language developed over thousands of years.

The ancient Chinese used pictographs to communicate. Using the clues given, determine the meaning of these pictographs.



I am the \_ \_ \_ .

*I stay up late in summer, go to bed early in winter. I make each cloudless day bright.*



I am a \_ \_ \_ \_ .

*My roots grow deep in the earth. My head brushes the sky. Birds nest in my hair.*



I am the \_ \_ \_ \_ .

*Sometimes I’m round and full, sometimes just a sliver. The night is blind without me.*

Over time, the pictographs became ideographs—characters that express a whole word in one character.

Below are some modern ideographs.



TREE



SUN



MOON

## Where in the World is China?

Like the United States, China is a nation of many geographic areas and different nationalities. Each has its own history, dialect, and traditions, and maintains its own customs and styles of dress. The Han make up the majority (93%) of the population. Some of the larger minority groups are the Mongols, the Uygurs, the Tibetans, the Dai, and the Miao. There is also a large population of Koreans living in China.

Learn about the people and land of China in books or on the Internet. Find illustrations of people living on stilts in the tropical rain forests, in "yurts" on the plains, in city apartments, and on the coasts, mountains, or near hot springs. Discuss ways in which geography affects clothing, customs, foods, and lifestyles.



How does the music and dance of Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company reflect the Chinese lifestyles you learned about?

## Write it . . . in Chinese

**Calligraphy** is a word used to describe beautiful penmanship.

Each character is written one brush stroke at a time. In China, school children practice seven basic strokes—horizontal, vertical, hooks, dots, diagonal, and sweeping right and left strokes—before putting them in order to form a word.

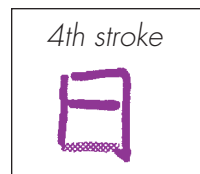
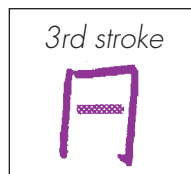
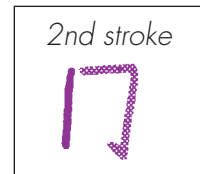
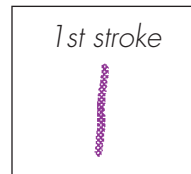
Chinese characters are traditionally drawn with brushes and ink. Because they are very beautiful, artists put them on paintings, dishes, and other objects as decoration.



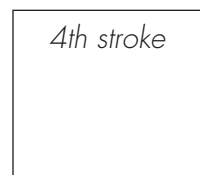
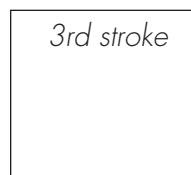
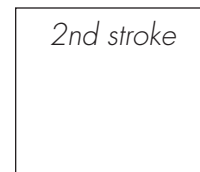
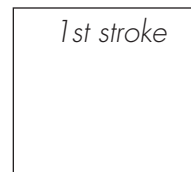
This is the Chinese character for sun



This is how to write the character for sun:



Now, you write the character for sun:



## Movement in Space



Many dance movements are based on the fluid motion of the artist's calligraphy brush.

Trace this character in the air with your hand and fingers.

Now recall how the dancers moved at the performance.

Compare a dancer's movements to the calligraphy. How are they different? How are they similar?



**TAKE IT HOME!**  
PARENT & KID CORNER

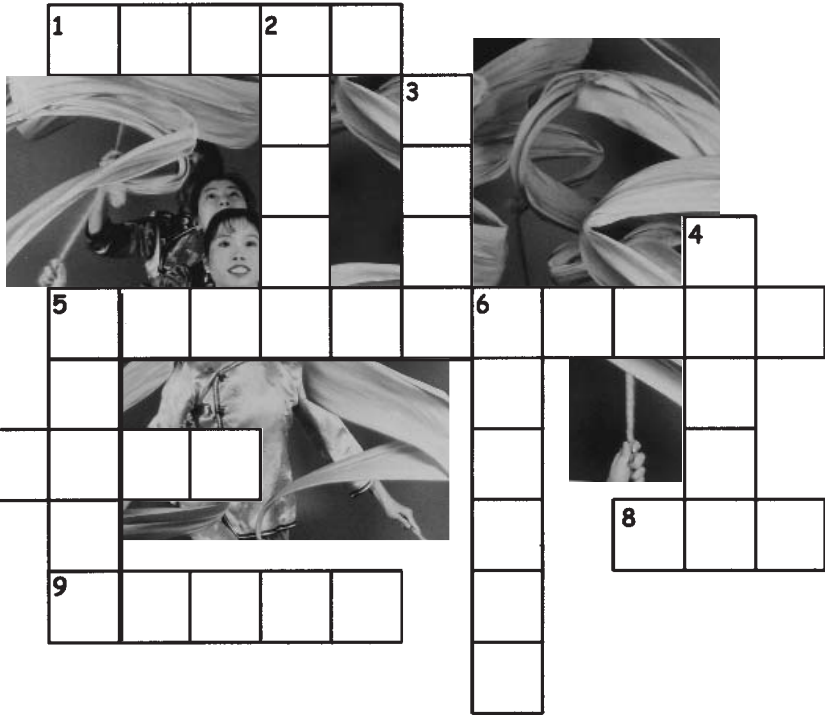
Have fun together completing this crossword puzzle. All the answers to the clues are mentioned in this Guide.

**Across**

- 1. Nai-Ni Chen is a \_\_\_\_\_ company.
- 5. The ancient Chinese used the art of \_\_\_\_\_ to communicate in writing.
- 7. Traditional \_\_\_\_\_ dances celebrate festivals.
- 8. 93% of China's population is made up of this ethnic group.
- 9. This dance prop is also a weapon once used by Chinese warriors.

**Down**

- 2. Classical dances were once performed in the Chinese emperor's \_\_\_\_\_.



- 3. The *yun lo* is a \_\_\_\_\_ chime.
- 4. The Nai-Ni Chen dancers perform dances from \_\_\_\_\_.

- 5. Another word for hand-held items (such as fans or swords) used in dances.
- 6. This dance prop is a long and flowing \_\_\_\_\_.

CREDITS:

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Answers to Crossword Puzzle:

Across: 1. Dance, 5. Dance, 6. Ribbon, 7. Folk, 8. Han, 9. Sword. Down: 2. Court, 3. Court, 4. Han, 5. Dance, 6. Ribbon, 7. Folk, 8. Han, 9. Sword.

**REVELATIONS:** Arts Education for Young People is presented by Colden Center for the Performing Arts, Queens College, CUNY.

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