Another great song for incorporating pentatonic music is the Chinese shanty song "Yahu hei". As students sing, I have them pretend to push and pull the oars of a boat on the beat. The lyrics are simple: yahu, yahuhei, yahu, yahuhei, hai yai yai, hai yai yai, yahu, yahuhei.

I of course discuss with the students which instruments are traditionally Chinese and which or not- that part is pretty clear- but it is a great way to showcase many of the instruments from China, see how they are played and what they sound like, and also get a taste of what Chinese music is like while still sounding somewhat familiar for students- this is like the gateway to exploring the traditional music that will sound more foreign and strange to their ears. Plus it is so much fun!

I use these recordings as a starting point to jump into a discussion of Chinese instruments, including the erhu, xiao, dizi,pipa, guzheng (duzheng), and yangqin. After showing one of the "Twelve Girls Band" videos, I usually show them pictures of each instrument, tell them the name of each one, and see if they noticed how each one is played, or what familiar instrument it is most similar to. Then we watch one more video and I have them point out and identify each instrument as we see it. I use that as an introduction to Chinese music as a whole, but in subsequent lessons I will show them short clips of each instrument in a more traditional setting. This one is great for showing both the yangquin and the erhu:

I usually introduce the genre by telling students that Beijing opera is one of the most famous forms of Chinese music historically. I also tell them in advance that it is going to sound and look very different from what they are expecting, but that I want them to tell me what they notice after watching. Most students tell me that they notice the performers moving with the instruments, their makeup and costumes are very dramatic, and they sound like they are half-singing and half-speaking. We often end up having a very good conversation about what the definition of music is, because there are usually some students who question whether or not this "counts" as music at all! You can learn more about the genre here and here.