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Singing bowls (also known as **Himalayan bowls**, **rin gongs**, **medicine bowls**, **Tibetan bowls** or **suzu gongs** in Japan) are a type of [bell](#), specifically classified as a standing bell. Rather than hanging inverted or attached to a handle, standing bells sit with the bottom surface resting. The sides and rim of singing bowls vibrate to produce sound. Singing bowls were traditionally used throughout Asia as part of [Bön](#) and [Tantric Buddhist sadhana](#). Today they are employed worldwide both within and without these spiritual traditions, for meditation, trance-induction, relaxation, healthcare, personal well-being and religious practice.

Singing bowls were historically made in [Tibet](#), [Nepal](#), [India](#),^[1] [Bhutan](#), [China](#), [Japan](#) and [Korea](#).^[*citation needed*] Today they are made in Nepal, India, Japan and Korea. The best known type are from the Himalayan region and are often termed *Tibetan singing bowls*.

Origins, history and usage

In Buddhist practice, singing bowls are used as a support for meditation,^[2] trance induction and prayer. For example, [Chinese Buddhists](#) use the singing bowl to accompany the [wooden fish](#) during chanting, striking it when a particular phrase in a [sutra](#), [mantra](#) or [hymn](#) is sung. In [Japan](#) and [Vietnam](#), singing bowls are similarly used during chanting and may also mark the passage of time or signal a change in activity.

As Perry^[3] (1996) and Jansen^[4] (1992) state, little is known in western scholarship regarding Himalayan singing bowls. It is likely they were used in rituals, having a specific function like other instruments (such as the [ghanta](#), [tingsha](#), and [shang](#)). The oral and written traditions from the Himalayan region are vast and largely unknown in the west. To date, no specific texts have been found discussing the use of singing bowls in depth, but according to Joseph Feinstein of Himalayan Bowls (2006), paintings and statues dating from several centuries ago depict singing bowls in detail. Singing bowls from at least the 10th–12th century are found in private collections. The tradition may date significantly earlier since bronze has been used to construct musical instruments since ancient times. Bronze bells from Asia have been discovered as early as the 8th–10th century BC (Feinstein, 2006).

Singing bowls are played by the [friction](#) of rubbing a wooden, plastic, or leather wrapped mallet around the rim of the bowl to produce [overtones](#) and a continuous 'singing' sound. 🗣️ [Audio Sample](#) ([help](#)·[info](#)) High quality singing bowls produce a complex chord of harmonic overtones. Singing bowls may also be played by striking with a soft mallet to produce a warm bell tone. 🗣️ [Audio Sample](#) ([help](#)·[info](#))

Singing bowls are unique because they are [multiphonic](#) instruments, producing multiple harmonic overtones at the same time. The overtones are a result of using an alloy consisting of multiple metals, each producing its own overtone.^[*citation needed*] New bowls can also produce multiple harmonic overtones if they are high quality bronze, but many are made from a simpler alloy and produce only a principal tone and one harmonic overtone.

While it is generally believed that the traditional manufacturing techniques are lost,^[2] there are new hand-hammered bowls being produced in the centuries old tradition. The difference is the quality of the alloy and the aging process itself. The tone improves as they age, so new bowls cannot sound as warm and mellow as a real antique. (Feinstein, 2008)

Both Antique and New Bowls are widely used as an aid to meditation (see the "Meditation and the brain" section in [Meditation](#)) and as a tool for [trance](#) induction. They are also used in [yoga](#), [music therapy](#), [sound healing](#), religious services, performance and for personal enjoyment.

Antique singing bowls

Traditionally, antique singing bowls were made of [Panchaloha](#) (literally meaning "five metals" in Sanskrit): a [bronze alloy](#) of [copper](#), [tin](#), [zinc](#) and [iron](#) and other metals.^[5] Antiques often include [silver](#), [gold](#), [nickel](#) and the most prized "sky-iron" (Wylie: thog chags) from [meteorites](#) and [tektites](#) (as did the [Phurba](#), an accompanying tool).

Antique singing bowls produce [multiphonic](#) and polyharmonic [overtones](#) which are unique to the instruments. The subtle yet complex multiple [harmonic](#) frequencies are a special quality of the high quality bronze alloy. The art of making singing bowls in the traditional way is often called a lost art, but traditional craftsmen do still make singing bowls in the traditional manner in hidden corners of Nepal but few contain sky-iron.

Antique singing bowls are a subset of the general class of household brass bowls that were used for cooking, eating, and storage in Northern India, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet. One reason for the popularity of brass as a material for these uses is the strong anti-bacterial properties of copper. Silver, also a constituent of many singing bowls, has strong anti-bacterial properties as well. It is estimated that millions of these bowls were made over the centuries (Sarnataro, Census Estimate, Profound Himalayan Sounds 2008). Of these millions of bowls a relatively small percentage have the tonal coherence that qualifies them as a "singing bowl". While it is likely the vast majority of brass bowls were made without attention to their sonic qualities it is also likely some bowls were specifically made to produce sound. This is especially true of medicine bowls, flat bottomed bowls used to hold [mandalas](#) of medicinal herbs and ceremonial lingam bowls that have a protrusion in the centre symbolic of the male principle.

Antique singing bowls may display abstract decorations like lines, rings and circles engraved into the surface. Decoration may appear outside the rim, inside the bottom, around the top of the rim and sometimes on the outside bottom.

Antique singing bowls are highly prized and collected worldwide. Their popularity is due to their fine craftsmanship and remarkable sound. The aging process greatly improves the tone^[citation needed] and centuries old antiques produce an incredibly rich and beautiful sound.

Modern Development

Singing bowls are manufactured today. New bowls may be plain or decorated. They sometimes feature religious [iconography](#) and [spiritual motifs](#) and [symbols](#), such as the Tibetan [mantra](#) *Om mani padme hum*, images of Buddhas, and [Ashtamangala](#).

New singing bowls are made from bronze just as the antiques were. However, the bronze alloy does not contain gold and silver as some of the antiques. New singing bowls are exported from [Nepal](#) and [India](#). The best hand made examples are made in Nepal. High quality new singing bowls are made in [Japan](#) and [Korea](#) but are not widely exported.

Some people claim that a phenomenon akin to [water memory](#) can be demonstrated by filling a singing bowl with water, producing sounds with the bowl until the water begins to vibrate (due to the vibrations of the bowl), stopping and letting the water to rest, and then re-starting the whole procedure: the water will pick up the same vibration much faster than the previous attempt.