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Experiences from the 15th Congress of the Cimbalom World Association (CWA)

The Cimbalom World Association held its 15th congress in Hefei (China) from 26 to 31 October 2019. The congress was organized by Chinese Conservatory of Music in Beijing and the Cultural Committee of the Hefei City. The organizing committee was chaired by Li Lingling, a professor at the Chinese Conservatory of Music in Beijing and Vice-President of the CWA. The professor's students and colleagues helped in the organization. This was necessary as almost 800 people from 17 countries attended this large-scale event. Most of the participants came from Asia and cities in China. From Australia came also a Chinese delegation. Few people from Europe and America attended the event compared to pre-applications. According to the feedback, most of them refused to apply because of the high travel costs and the uncertain financial and political situation. I can safely say that those who did not attend the event missed out on a great experience! China has shown how much it supports culture and scientific development, even for us in such a small area as the cimbalom culture.

Hefei is the capital and largest city of Anhui Province with 8 million inhabitants. It is the political, economic and cultural centre of the province. The largest cultural centre of the city hosted congress events: concerts, lectures and exhibitions. The congress's opening and closing events were held in the 2,500-seat theatre hall, the concerts in the 1,200-seat concert hall, the performances in the 800-seat technically equipped lecture hall, and the exhibition in the huge foyer. More hotels were available for the participants. Foreign guests stayed at the Hongrui Junling Grand Hotel, where was the registration of the congress, too. The hosts put great emphasis on making the foreign participants feel good and satisfied with everything. Each of us was greeted with great respect. I, as the President of the CWA and my husband, the secretary of the CWA were waiting at the airport with a large



bunch of flowers and a TV crew. Only we represented Hungary. Slovakia was represented by my student Mykhaylo Zakhariya, who is Ukrainian but now he is living in Slovakia, so he was considered as Slovak. He presented at the congress a solo piece “Splinter” composed by Gyorgy Kurtag. This composition was the obligatory piece by the competition in Budapest, where he won the first prize. Also he played at the congress Slovakian folk songs. From Switzerland, the other Vice-President of the CWA, Johannes Fuchs came to the congress, who is a folk musician and hackbrett master (the hackbrett is the German name of hammered dulcimer). England was represented by Sally Whytehead board member of the CWA and by Geoffrey Smith hammered dulcimer artist. Geoffrey, a representative of free jazz, brought his own compositions to the congress. There was one more German support member from Europe, Manfred Keller, who represented Germany. From the United States hammered dulcimer artist Karen Ashbrock, board member of the CWA participated at the congress. Mexico was represented by Atlas David Zaldívar Briseño, who was presenting classical works on his plucked salterio (Spanish name of the dulcimer).



Atlas David Zaldívar Briseño

From Australia attended the event a Chinese children group led by their teacher, who played on the Chinese hammered dulcimer, yangqin. It was interesting that Chinese-born children in Australia, while preserving their traditional instrument, played Australian music, dressed with the pattern of the Australian flag



Australian yangqin ensemble.

Santoor (the Persian name of hammered dulcimer) was presented by Mehdi Siadat from Iran, and he played Persian music. Two groups came from Seoul, Korea. One is the ensemble of the Korean Yangguem (Korean name of hemmered dulcimer) Association led by Eunhwa Yun (her Chinese name is Yinhua Yin). The ensemble plays not only folk music but also popular music featuring a high level of technical skill, most of pieces are composed by Eunhwa Yun.



Ensemble of the Korean Yangguem Association

The other is the folk music group of the Korean National Academy (Karts) led by Eunjoo Lee. They play the Chinese type of dulcimer, not the Korean type, but their music is based on Korean folk music and folk traditions.



KARTS Folk ensemble

The Japanese delegation consisted of four members. In their program, Junko Sakimura played on the Hungarian-type of dulcimer, Yoko Aoki played on the hammered dulcimer. Kenji Koide took photos, and most of the photos in this article are from him. To them have been associated Yanki Ma with her yangqin playing, who lives and teaches in Hong Kong. Qu Jian Qing, our board member represented Singapore with his student. Their duet was a composition by a Singapore composer. There were three young people from Malaysia who introduced the music culture of their country on the Chinese type of dulcimer. The team from Hong Kong presented a program with mixed music style, among the world music style also.

There were eleven members of Butterfly Studio from Taiwan who performed traditional Taiwanese music.



The Butterfly Studio from Taiwan

Schools from all major cities in China introduced themselves at the congress. Their performance was very wide range of musical styles from folk to classical music through jazz and rock music was also presented. Teachers and their students played together.

Before the congress's opening ceremony, the leaders of the city, leaders of the organizing committee and a representative from the Ministry of Culture welcomed the leaders and representatives of the CWA at a dinner. At the opening ceremony, which was held in the theatre hall of the Cultural Centre, the Chinese Ministry of Culture, Mayor of Hefei City, President of the organizing China Conservatory of Music in Beijing and me, as the president of the CWA, delivered a welcoming speech. The opening concert was hosted by the host country. Their program was featured yangqin in a variety of formats, with symphony orchestra, with chamber orchestra, with folk instruments, and in solo. The Anhui Symphony participated in the orchestral productions conducted by Taiwan and Singapore conductors. China's most famous yangqin artists and teachers presented their productions, which had the star artist, the mean organizer of the congress, the Vice President of the CWA, Mrs Li Lingling.



Li Lingling and the Anhui Symphony orchestra conducted by Ye Cong

The participants of the concert had also a wide age range, from the small children to the oldest age we could see and hear representatives of the Chinese dulcimer.

In particular, I would like to highlight the children, who have stunned the audience with their disciplined behaviour and excellent play. On the stage we saw and heard many types of yangqin, the most interesting of which is the small yangqin, which can be used not only for learning music but also as a toy for children. The instrument was designed and manufactured by the instrument manufacturer for the direct purpose of using this toy for children to enjoy. I have been recommending this to Hungarian instrument makers for over 30 years, but until now I have not succeeded in making the Hungarian cimbalom a child-friendly instrument.



Small yangqin for the children

During the concert, in addition to yangqin, various types of dulcimers were also introduced which were attending by the congress. For this, a compilation was presented, featuring the play of yangqin, hackbrett, hammered dulcimer, santur and cimbalom. As each instrument sounded, a film presented the country of the instrument players in the background.



Herencsár Viktória, Johannes Fuchs, Li Lingling, Mehdi Siadat, Geoffrey Smith

The film screening was not only performed by foreign guests but also during the Chinese program. The background film featured the characteristics of different regions of China.





After the concert a reception was held at the Hongrui Junling Grand Hotel with Chinese and European cuisine.

The next morning, the exhibition opened, where the leaders of the instrument factories presented their products, which were not only exhibited but were also available for purchase. In China, there are 17 instrument factories, which a make yangqin. Among them, the three largest have brought their products, the Beijing, Shantou and Hebei musical instrument factories. Each instrument factory produces approx. 6000 yangqin of different sizes yearly.



At the opening of the exhibition, instrument makers and performers together

The exhibition took place in the lobby of the building, where, besides musical instruments, musical instrument accessories, sheet music, the performances of leading artists and leading teachers were displayed on huge posters. A separate poster indicated the program of the congress and the names of the supporters. The exhibition featured a variety of yangqins of various sizes and types made in the manufactory which I wrote earlier. The Chinese dulcimer

underwent much development since the establishment of the CWA. They have increased their volume, and the newer models have a pedal system similar to the Hungarian cimbalom. Musical instruments could be tried and, of course, purchased. Instrument accessories included bamboo mallets, ingredient cases, tuning keys, which are included with every yangqin when purchased, but can also be purchased separately, with different materials to tie the mallet's head, and more. Sheet music, CDs, video recordings changed hands. For three days the music hall was loud, with musicians and teachers alike testing the exhibited instruments.



Photos about the exhibition



Lounge with photos of the participants and the exhibition of instruments

At congressional concerts all regions and schools of China, outside of foreign countries, presented their dulcimer culture. The programs were varied and of high quality. Many of the teachers presented their own compositions in folk music processing, world music, and European classical

music style. It was good to hear and see the enthusiasm, great technique and musical sensibility of children and young people playing on their instruments. It was interesting how diverse and diverse the music culture of the regions was when they introduced the regions of China, despite playing the same type of instrument. Inner Mongolia presented Mongolian traditions. In this area the Mongolian culture is heavily guarded, not only in their music and clothing, but also in playing on the Chinese instrument, which called yochin in Mongolia.



Inner Mongolia yangqin ensemble

Participants also came from Uyghur area. Their tuning is different from Chinese tuning, so they can't easily play each other's instruments. The sound of their music is also completely different, their music is characterized by a tight, bouncing rhythm. Bamboo mallets are also used there, but the shape of the mallets is different and much harder than the Chinese mallets. Although they say that the Uighurs is related to the Hungarians, I did not understand anything in the Uyghur language as much as in the Chinese. The character of their music is similar to the Hungarian folk music.



The Uyghur production

We could also infer the musical style of the characters from the characters' dress. Folk music artists performed in traditional dress, classical compositions performed in very beautiful evening dresses, while performers of the popular genre did not emphasize their attire.

In addition to the concerts there were lectures on the history, development, technical mode of playing and literature of the instrument. I have presented my book "World of cimbalom", which provides a complete overview of the international world of cimbalom. This book has been published in Slovak translation this year and I am planning to publish it in English next year due to the great interest. The Chinese have no problem translating texts because they have excellent translator programs that translate texts from any language into Chinese simultaneously. Through this I communicated with those who did not speak any other language than Chinese. We understood each other perfectly through the translation program.

It was a great surprise to me that Li Lingling, lecturer at the China Conservatory of Music in Beijing introduced my pedal technique on yangqin. In 2005, when I was invited as a guest professor to the Chinese Conservatory of Music, there was no pedal system on the yangqin. Then the Chinese instrument makers experimented with solving the pedal structure on the yangqin. My pedal technique, which is widespread in Europe and I teach this to my students, of course, was introduced to Chinese students at the Hungarian cimbalom. And the students learned this technique on the cimbalom, because the Chinese Conservatory of Music bought several types of dulcimer, so that students could learn how to play other types of dulcimers. A few years later, the yangqin with pedal appeared which was not perfect yet. But now, at the congress, we saw instruments with a perfect pedal system, which was used of widespread among students at the Chinese Conservatory and now among teachers. When they bought cimbalom, I thought they would distribute them in China, and later the Chinese instrument manufacturers would make cimbaloms. But that's not so happened. They maintained their national instrument by developing it further along the lines of the most advanced cimbalom type, the Hungarian instrument. My pedal technique has been incorporated into their instrument, which can now express perfect musical characters.



Alsó pedálrendszer

These instruments have the same or larger volume as ours, because often the contra A is deepest and 4-line C is the highest, which is more than 5 octaves, while our instrument has less than 5 octaves.



Yangqin with pedal system

Between the lectures, we took time out for a meeting of our Association, where we welcomed our new members, talked about our work so far, made suggestions for the tasks ahead, and discussed suggestions for the next congress venue. As we were unable to decide on the next venue for the congress, the board of CWA suggested that this be decided at a later date and that everyone be notified in writing of the outcome. Two years later, our Association is celebrating its 30th anniversary, so we need to consider the location of the 16th Congress to be a venue to celebrate this anniversary.

As usual, at the closing concert we closed the congressional days with the participants performing and playing together. As the congress had many participants, local teachers and soloists gave concerts outside of the foreign delegations, because if all the participants had played, the concert would have been very long. The concert was opened by my performance. I presented my composition "The Sun and the Moon", which I wrote for the cimbalom and a symphony orchestra. The Anhui Symphony Orchestra has collaborated with me conducted by Ye Cong, guest conductor from Singapore. The symphonic orchestra's devoted and exemplary attitude to the works was demonstrated several times during the congress. Well-trained musicians followed the conductor's instructions without a word during rehearsals and did everything they could to make the music a success. Their disciplined behaviours have yielded

results, with all of the music pieces that have been highly successful with high-quality play. The conductor's preparedness and attitude towards the pieces were exemplary. Ye Cong is a conductor of the Chicago Philharmonic and a conductor of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, and is well versed in interpreting both European classical and Chinese folk-inspired compositions. His professional musical knowledge has greatly influenced the music he conducts. My music was received with great enthusiasm by the audience and many people asked for the score.



I performed with the Anhui Symphony Orchestra conducted by Ye Cong



After the concert with the conductor

My production was followed by a yangqin concert by a Chinese composer, which he composed directly for this congress. Performers of the premiere were Wu Huanghuang,

Teacher of the Beijing China Conservatory of Music, student of Li Lingling with the symphony orchestra conducted by Ye Cong, who premiered the yangqin concert „Time in hands”. written by Wen Zhanli. This concert piece represents the European classical style.



Wu Huanghuang yangqin artist with Ye Cong conductor and the Anhui Symphony Orchestra

Orchestral productions were followed by delegations' programs. At the end of the concert the participants played together according to tradition. As the number of participants was very high, leading delegates and schools featured prominent Chinese soloists in this production. Even so, more than 60 dulcimers came to the stage where all the dulcimer types were seen and heard: santur, hackbrett, hammered dulcimer, cimbalom, yangguem, yangqin. The cimbalom orchestra was conducted by Taiwanese conductor Chih Sheng Chen and of course we performed a Chinese song called "Jasmine".



Concert finale. Everyone plays music together.

The congress took place in a friendly, family atmosphere. Our programs have been influenced by the love for our instrument and its development, respect and respect for one another. Old friends were happy to meet again, the new friends were making new friendship. The young people could learn a lot at this congress, but there were many new things for the older generation as well.

Everyone said good-bye happily, with lots of unforgettable experiences, informative information from the congress and from each other so that we meet in 2021. The day after the congress, a small team closed their stay in Hefei with sightseeing.



We thank the city of Hefei, the China Conservatory of Music in Beijing, the organizing committee and Li Lingling for the professional organization of the congress. We thank the participants for appearing in such a large number and for considering it important to attend the congress that will help us improve our instrument.



The board members at the congress:

**Sally Whytehead (UK), Horváth István (H), Li Lingling (VRC), Herencsár Viktória (H),
Johannes Fuchs (CH), Qu Jianqing (SGP), Karen Ashbrook (USA)**



Photo about the participants before the place of the congress