

## The Foundation of the Regional Association for East Asia of the International Musicological Society

TILMAN SEEBASS  
UNIVERSITÄT INNSBRUCK

In the last forty years, as a distant European observer, I have seen the growth of musicology in many parts of East Asia and became increasingly aware of the diversity, liveliness, and quality of the scene there. However, it was not observed by many. That this development went unnoticed in the West had two reasons: First, the musicological establishment in Europe and North America was very much busy with itself, more than in the first half of the twentieth century; and second, the musicological activities in East Asia were scattered, resembling more an immense meadow of wild flowers than an organism. Moreover, if the West may have had too much of self-contentment, the East could perhaps have used a bit more self-assurance.

One would think that the International Musicological Society would be the body that could provide the mechanism to overcome the isolation of groups of musicologists, or the lack of visibility of some of them, but since its beginnings in the 1920s it succeeded only once to organize a conference in East Asia, a very successful international symposium in Osaka in 1990.<sup>1</sup>

It therefore was a stroke of luck, that during my time as a president of IMS I found in the person of the Korean colleague Suk Won Yi an

East-Asian musicologist, who was willing to go through the trouble of organizing an international congress in Seoul in 2011 with the aim of founding an IMS East Asian Regional Association that would bring the colleagues in the various countries of this region into closer contact with each other. He succeeded, because Seoul National University was generous enough to finance the event, and because he had already good personal contacts with colleagues in Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, who shared his enthusiasm, yet came from very different corners of the field, music history of the East and the West, oral traditions in their own countries, ethnomusicology, and systematics. In a team effort, together with Ryuichi Higuchi from Tokyo as chair of the program committee, two goals were achieved, a display of the regional diversity and the presence of a variety of approaches in the discipline.

The reader can see from the enclosed program of the congress 2011 that we were fairly successful—and will forgive us that we could not avoid that some gaps still remained. We had less than a year at our disposition for planning the event.

Nothing pleases a spiritual midwife more, than if the newborn baby is smiling and confident: The enthusiasm for the new initiative was shared by all participants, who had taken the trouble to come to the meeting. A steering committee was elected,<sup>2</sup> and a plan for future meetings was fixed. These will take place each time at a different place, so that every country has a chance to present itself with its specialties and to bring local musicology in contact with the regional scene.<sup>3</sup>

It was agreed that the purpose of the Association should be to provide a mirror of the regional activities in musicology *tout court*. Outsiders with an interest in the music of the region are, of course, not excluded from participation.

A few items of the task list shared between the IMS Regional Association and the central office of IMS are obvious. First, we will try to involve colleagues from places that were not presented at the first meeting. IMS hopes to encourage members from the People's Republic of China to become members. Second, scholars studying their own musical tradition are often stepchildren in a scientific professional association, because they often feel more closely related to the professional musi-

cians than to the colleagues in academia. Third, we hope that it will be possible to establish contacts with colleagues of the neighboring regions (North Asia and Southeast Asia).

Finally, the RA should make scholars in other parts of the globe aware of the importance and value of East Asian musicology. Indeed the congress in Seoul already had very positive effects. By the end of 2011 the number of East Asian IMS members had more than doubled! As a consequence we have now three representatives of East Asia in the Board of Directors of IMS, and the Board chose Taipei as the host for their upcoming business meeting. Furthermore, at the general assembly in Rome in July 2012, the IMS members-at-large chose Tokyo as the next site of the world congress of 2017.

It has been a privilege for me to be involved in this development, and I wish my colleagues in the RA for East Asia a happy future. May the readers of this journal find it worthwhile to join this enterprise!

## Notes

1. Tokumaru Yoshihiko et al., eds., *Tradition and Its Future in Music: Report of SIMS 1990 Osaka* (Tokyo and Osaka: Mita Press, 1991).
2. The elected committee members are as follows: Ying-fen Wang, Taipei (Chair); Suk Won Yi, Seoul; Daniel Chua, Hong Kong; Ryuichi Higuchi, Tokyo; Tatsuhiko Itoh, Tokyo.
3. By the time this text appears in print, the second conference of the East Asian Association has been successfully held in Taipei. The next congress is planned to take place in 2015 Hong Kong.