

ICTM Study Group on Musics of East Asia

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The ICTM Study Group on Musics of East Asia (hereafter, MEA) was founded in 2006, and with the exception of summer 2020 has held biennial symposia ever since. The five main regions considered to constitute East Asia for the purposes of the study group are (in descending order of population size) China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and a major goal of the study group is to increase interaction among scholars and students from the entire area. The founding meeting, held in Yilan, Taiwan, in summer 2006, attracted eighty-one participants, including thirty-four paper presenters. Since 2010, attendance has fluctuated between the eighties and just over a hundred, and the number of paper presentations has risen considerably, with all symposia since 2010 featuring fifty-five or more, and the 2016 and 2018 symposia both listing around seventy (MEA 2016a; Waseda 2016:2; MEA 2018). The appendix to this essay sets out a chronicle of MEA's symposia in tabular form.

Below, three of us who have served as chair of MEA's executive committee describe and reflect upon MEA's history over its first fourteen years. Ying-fen WANG, the chair over 2006–2010, covers the founding of MEA and its first two meetings, from 2006 to 2007; TERAUCHI Naoko, chair over 2014–2016, addresses the maturing of the group over the next three symposia, from 2010 to 2014; and Helen REES, chair over 2016–2018, concludes by analyzing the symposia of 2016 and 2018, commenting on the extent to which we have met our original goals, and suggesting some directions for the future.¹

1 Each of us has, in fact, served MEA in multiple roles. Wang remained a member of the executive committee until 2012. Terauchi served as vice chair over 2012–2014, before becoming chair for the 2014–2016 term; she also co-chaired the local arrangements committee for the 2014 symposium and was a member of the programme committees for the 2010 and 2012 symposia. Rees served as a programme committee member for the 2010 symposium, and programme committee chair for the 2012 symposium, then successively secretary, vice chair, and chair of the executive committee over 2012–2018. Throughout this essay, we capitalize surnames on their first use for reasons of clarity: some of our members prefer to use East Asian name

Founding of study group, 2005–2006

The idea of forming a study group for musics of East Asia was first brought up by TSUKADA Kenichi (Japan) with SHEEN Dae-cheol (Korea), Nora YEH (USA/Taiwan), and TSAI Tsan-huang (Taiwan) at the 38th World Conference of ICTM in Sheffield, UK, in August 2005. They felt the need “to create more opportunities for East Asian ethnomusicologists to present their work in languages other than their own, as well as to encourage younger emergent scholars from this region [East Asia] to present their work at regional conferences,” in order to build up their confidence and prepare them for future participation in world conferences (Tsai 2016:4–5). In order to realize this idea, they sought advice from the Council's then Secretary General Stephen WILD and learned that a founding conference was necessary as the first step. Tsai Tsan-huang was entrusted with the task of seeking funding, and succeeded in getting full support from the National Center for Traditional Arts in Taiwan to host the conference at the Center in Yilan County, in the northeastern part of the island (ibid.).

After a year of preparation,² a founding conference on “East Asian music and modernity” finally took place over three days, 31 August – 2 September 2006. There were eighty-one participants from East Asia, Southeast Asia, Europe, Australia, and the USA, of whom thirty-four presented papers (Waseda 2016:1). TOKUMARU Yoshihiko from Japan gave the keynote speech, while three plenary sessions featured six other invited presenters from the USA, Korea, China, UK, and Australia. With a generous donation from Tokumaru, a prize for best student paper was jointly awarded to Harm LANGENKEMP (Utrecht University) and Hsin-chun Tasaw LU (UCLA) (Wang n.d.).

During the conference, a roundtable meeting was held to agree upon submitting the proposal to ICTM to form a study group, and to appoint the programme

order (surname first, given name second), while others prefer Western order (given name first, surname second).

2 For more details of the preparation, see Tsai (2016).

committee, together with two co-opted members, to serve as the interim executive committee. Ying-fen Wang was chosen as the acting liaison officer. The meeting also decided that the study group would hold its conferences every two years, would be as inclusive as possible, and would welcome members from all regions, but would also particularly encourage interaction among scholars working in East Asia, as well as student participation (*ibid.*).³

Based on this decision, the interim executive committee came up with the following mission statement for the study group:

The mission of the Study Group is to provide a forum for ICTM members from all parts of the world who share an interest in the music of East Asia, broadly defined musically and geographically, including East Asian music in the diaspora as well as indigenous, transplanted, and syncretic music within East Asian countries. Other performing arts related to music will also be part of the subjects of study. (MEA n.d.c)

The proposal and the mission statement were soon approved by the ICTM Executive Board, and the study group was formally founded in 2006, with Ying-fen Wang serving as the first chair of the executive committee. The website that was first created for the founding conference continued to serve as the website for the study group during Wang's term.

First symposium in Shanghai (2007), and development of operating procedures

Although the first symposium should have been held in 2008, the Shanghai Conservatory of Music proposed to host it in 2007 as part of its eightieth anniversary celebration. The executive committee accepted the proposal, and as a result, MEA held its first symposium at the conservatory in Shanghai, China, 20–22 December 2007. The location was especially significant because the Shanghai Conservatory is the oldest music conservatory in China, and in the early twenty-first century has become a hub of ethnomusicological research and innovation.⁴ The keynote speech was given by the Council's

then president, Adrienne KAEPLER. There were fourteen paper sessions, with thirty-nine papers presented and sixty participants from around the world. The symposium themes were as follows (MEA 2007):

1. The role of Shanghai in East Asian musical development
2. Issues in traditional music
3. East Asian musics and colonialism
4. Music, identity, and the nation-state imagination
5. Interpretation of East Asian musical notation
6. New research

As WASEDA Minako noted in her report on the symposium, “many of the paper sessions were organized under specific issues and problems shared among East Asian musical traditions, which stimulated cross-cultural discussions and lively exchanges of ideas among the participants” (Waseda n.d.). In addition to the paper sessions, a concert on the second evening showcased performances of works by four composers who drew inspiration from traditional East Asian materials. Students of Chinese music at the Shanghai Conservatory also performed at the opening ceremony (*figure 1*) (MEA 2007). With a generous donation from Kaepler and Secretary General Stephen Wild, the prize for best student paper was formally set up on a permanent basis (Waseda n.d.).

Before and during the symposium, the executive committee held several virtual and physical meetings to develop the operating procedures. The finalized version was presented and approved at the general meeting on 22 December 2007 (MEA 2016b). In order to ensure that no country or region would dominate or be excluded from the committee, it was decided that “the Board will normally consist of seven members, representing the various countries and regions in East Asia and including at least one member from outside of the region” (Witzleben n.d.).⁵ In Shanghai, it was announced that the next symposium would be held in Seongnam, South Korea, in summer 2010; it would be hosted by one of our executive committee members, Sheen Dae-chol, at his institution, the Academy of Korean Studies (*ibid.*). In addition, a mailing list was set up for the members to exchange information and has been maintained since then by J. Lawrence WITZLEBEN, who went on to serve as vice chair and then chair of the executive committee (2008–2010, 2010–2012).⁶

3 Until 2012, MEA referred to its meetings as “conferences.” However, in the lead-up to the Hong Kong meeting, the ICTM Executive Board asked study groups to use the term “symposium” for their meetings. All our documents from 2012 on reflect this change in nomenclature. For the sake of consistency, in this essay we use the term “symposium” for all meetings from 2007 on.

4 The symposium was organized by XIAO Mei, a member of the conservatory's faculty and of MEA's executive committee (2006–2010). This led to the conservatory hosting the 2013 ICTM World Conference, and to Xiao Mei joining the Council's Executive Board (2013–2019). Hence, the 2007 MEA symposium constituted a significant milestone in the conservatory's (and China's) increasingly active presence in the international ethnomusicological community.

5 For a list of executive committee members since 2006, see MEA (n.d.b).

6 After this symposium, Hugh DE FERRANTI proposed an “Interest Group for Research on Music and Colonial Modernity in East Asia” to function as a subgroup of MEA. This was approved in 2010, and from October 2011 on it was co-chaired by De Ferranti and Joys CHEUNG. As acting chair from August 2012 on, Cheung set up a mailing list for the sub-



Figure 1. Performance by students at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music during the first symposium. Shanghai, 2007 (photo by Terauchi Naoko).

MEA matures: The symposia of 2010, 2012, and 2014

Following the success of the meetings in Yilan and Shanghai, MEA has continued with symposia held every two years in one of the five principal East Asian regions. At the second symposium, held in Seongnam in 2010, there were twenty-one sessions and fifty-seven paper presentations; the keynote speech was delivered by KWON Oh-Sung, chair of the ICTM Korean National Committee. Six themes were set by the programme committee, ranging over both more traditional and newer topics (MEA 2010):

1. Intangible cultural heritage in East Asia: History and practical results
2. Recordings and films: The potential and pitfalls of audiovisual technology and materials
3. Reconsidering the sacred and profane in East Asian ritual music

4. Asian music in music textbooks for primary and secondary schools in East Asia
5. Asian soundscapes and cyberspace
6. New research

Among these themes, the second and fifth topics anticipated hot-button issues of later years.⁷

The third symposium was held in 2012 and hosted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The keynote speech was given by YAMAGUTI Osamu. The themes of the symposium were:

1. World music and Asian traditional music
2. Music education and Asian identities
3. Cultural destruction and revival
4. Cultural tourism and cultural policy
5. Music at East Asia's cultural crossroads
6. New research

Almost sixty papers were presented. One of the sessions was dedicated to the sadly topical issue of "Natural disaster and revival of performing arts," in relation to

group and issued three "Members List and News" mailings in August 2012, November 2012, and February 2013. The subgroup organized two panels for the MEA 2012 symposium in Hong Kong, and two panels for the ICTM world conference held in Shanghai in 2013. Cheung stepped down in August 2013. The interest group has been dormant since January 2015 (email from Hugh De Ferranti to Ying-fen Wang, 29 Sep 2018; email from Joys Cheung to Ying-fen Wang, 30 Sep 2018).

7 For example, in addition to later presentations at MEA's own symposia, the third joint forum held by ICTM and four other international music research societies at Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music in July 2018 chose the ambitious theme "Approaches to research on music and dance in the Internet era" (ICTM [2018]).

the great Tohoku earthquake that hit Japan in 2011. The panel reported on three case studies, in Japan, Indonesia, and Thailand (MEA 2012).

The fourth symposium took place in 2014 in Nara, one of Japan's most important historical and cultural centres, and location of three UNESCO World Heritage sites. Alison TOKITA gave the keynote speech. The programme committee set the following themes:

1. East Asian musics from a cross-cultural perspective
2. Music in digital culture/mass media
3. Music and ritual
4. Restoration and reconstruction of musical traditions
5. Music and gender
6. New research

There were almost sixty paper presentations and two workshops with performances, both of which addressed the fourth theme. The first of these, “*Gigaku* in the 21st century,” showcased several attempts since the 1960s to revive the lost performing art of *gigaku*, a masked pantomime. The second, “The importance of silk strings revisited,” examined the difference in sound and technique between traditional silk and modern synthetic fibre strings used on the Japanese zither *koto*, the Chinese zither *qin*, and the Japanese three-string plucked lute *sangen* (MEA 2014).

Since the late 1990s, meetings such as those of MEA have often discussed topics rooted in contemporary or recent musical cultures, with an emphasis on cross-cultural perspectives, the reception of Western music, transformations of tradition, restoration or revival, gender, digital technology, mass media, etc. At the Nara symposium, however, a modest revival of more historically focussed studies was evident, with eight papers focusing on ancient and pre-nineteenth century music based on the analysis of old manuscripts.

Overall, as is evident from the steady increase in the number of paper presentations, MEA seems to have become firmly established during this period among researchers of East Asian music, both in East Asia itself and in other regions of the world. This has been the case especially among younger scholars and students, a number of whom return year after year.

The second decade of MEA begins, 2016–2020

Fittingly, ten years after the founding meeting held in Yilan, the fifth symposium returned to Taiwan in August 2016, with the theme “East Asian ethnomusicologies?” (figure 2); this was chosen “to be as inclusive



Figure 2. Poster for the fifth symposium. Taipei, 2016 (courtesy of Hsin-chun Tasaw Lu).

as possible, while encouraging reflexivity of approach and understanding” (MEA n.d.a). This time, MEA came to Taipei, where the hosting institutions were Academia Sinica’s Institute of Ethnology and Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA). Impeccably organized by a local arrangements committee headed by Hsin-chun Tasaw Lu of Academia Sinica and LEE Ching-huei of TNUA, the symposium featured a lively mix of conventional twenty-minute papers, shorter “lightning papers,” poster presentations, a roundtable, workshops, and performances. Ninety-two participants are listed in the conference programme; of the seventy-one paper and poster presenters, approximately equal numbers (between eleven and thirteen) listed their current institutional affiliation as being in Taiwan, China, South Korea, or Japan, with six currently working or studying in Hong Kong, and seventeen outside East Asia (MEA 2016a).⁸ The keynote speech was given by PARK Mi-kyung.

⁸ It bears mention that people’s institutional affiliations as given in each symposium’s programme booklet do not necessarily reflect their citizenship: many East Asian citizens are studying or working at universities in Europe, North America, and Australia, while universities in all five East Asian regions employ faculty from other East Asian regions or further afield, and also recruit foreign students.



Figure 3. Participants at the opening of the sixth symposium. Seoul, 2018 (photo courtesy of National Gugak Center).

The symposium provided a perfect balance between emphasizing local arts and encouraging participants to look further afield, to consider connections among different locales. The opening and closing ceremonies showcased students of TNUA performing characteristic local genres: *beiguan* music and a Taiwanese lion dance at the opening, *nanguan* music at the closing. The formal concert on the second evening brought listeners to a different region nearby, with Hong Kong group The Wind and Silk presenting a programme of primarily Cantonese traditional music. Their use of silk strings, in an attempt to revive an older timbre of Chinese silk and bamboo music, gave many audience members a rare opportunity to experience a gentler, more subdued aesthetic than is generally encountered today.

The performance workshops covered a wide geographical range, starting at the plenary session on the opening day with a beautiful demonstration of Paiwan nose flutes by Taiwanese Paiwan performers Giljegiljau Pa’adrius and Remaljiz Pa’adrius; this was followed later by sessions on the Chinese plucked lute *pipa*, Mongolian and Tuvan music, and the North Indian tabla drum-set. Quite a number of papers and panels addressed cross-cultural topics, encouraging participants to think about both intra-East Asian musical connections and connections between East Asia and other areas. An entire panel, for example, focussed on “Traditional musics of Japan in colonial Taiwan (1895–1945),” while individual papers addressed topics such as a comparison of professional modern Chinese orchestras in Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Taipei; the history of Chinese revolutionary music and dance in Burma/Myanmar; and an analysis of Korean *p’ansori* storytelling on the international scene. The prize for best student paper was awarded to Kae

FUJISAWA (CUNY Graduate Center) for a presentation in this mould; her paper “A *bunraku*-style puppet and Cio-Cio-san in a fantastic Asia” addressed representations of Japanese characters on the European opera stage. The final roundtable, presented by speakers based at universities in Korea, Japan, Taiwan, China, and the UK, considered the definitions and characteristics of “East Asian ethnomusicologies” (MEA 2016a).

In 2018, MEA made its second visit to the Republic of Korea: the sixth symposium was held in August at the National Gugak Center in Seoul, hosted by the Center and the Korean Musicological Society. Now under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture, Sport, and Tourism of Korea, the National Gugak Center has since its proclamation in 1950 been the central hub for professional documentation, development, performance, and dissemination of Korean traditional music in South Korea (National Gugak Center n.d.). Thus it was especially interesting for MEA members to visit this renowned institution (figure 3). KIM Heesun, director of the Division of Music Research at the National Gugak Center, and KIM Woojin, director of the Korean Musicological Society, collaborated to lead a local arrangements team characterized by meticulous attention to detail and generous hospitality.

The main theme was advertised as “Performing arts and social transitions in East Asia,” and one of the highlights was a concert of traditional and neotraditional Korean music and dance performed by outstanding professional artists affiliated with the Center. The programme attracted 777 people to the combined symposium and concert. Of these, ninety-seven were listed as attending the symposium, which included conventional paper sessions, three workshops, and a film session. Once again,

all five major East Asian regions were well represented both in terms of subject matter and in terms of speakers, with Korea itself fielding the greatest number of regular paper presenters (twenty-one out of seventy-six) (National Gugak Center n.d.; email from Heesun Kim to Helen Rees, 13 Sep 2018; MEA 2018). The keynote address was given by Bell YUNG.

Many panels created by the panellists themselves, or by the programme committee, brought together people from different regions working on similar themes in different parts of East Asia, offering a great opportunity to learn what their counterparts from different areas are doing. In one particularly notable example of sustained cross-border collaboration, four presenters—two based in China and two in Korea—organized a workshop on their long-running international cooperative project to document the history and ethnography of porcelain hourglass drums, restore selected drums and kilns, and compose new music for the drums (MEA 2018:51–52). The workshop included spoken explanations, numerous posters documenting different stages of the project, and a performance. It attracted great interest, with several dozen audience members in attendance and lively informal discussions at the end.⁹

The seventh symposium was planned for August 2020, to take place at the Inner Mongolia Normal University in Hohhot, China. Unfortunately, however, after much work by the local arrangements committee, the programme committee, and the MEA executive committee, the coronavirus pandemic resulted in its cancellation. As of the time of writing (July 2020), the seventh symposium will be rescheduled for summer 2022, at a location yet to be determined (MEA 2020).

Achievements of the first fourteen years, and future goals

MEA's founding goals, as described on the ICTM website, include "increas[ing] communication and interaction among scholars working in East Asia and ... facilitat[ing] greater exchanges of ideas both within East Asia and between scholars in the region and those elsewhere" (Wang n.d.). The founding goals were articulated against a background of quite divergent local traditions of music-focussed scholarship; for historical reasons, during the twentieth century, China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan each developed their own research foci and methods, with varying levels of communication across borders.¹⁰ In the last few

years, we have seen noticeably more equal levels of participation in MEA by people from all five main East Asian regions, and less difficulty securing equitable representation of all regions on programme committees and the executive committee.

To achieve this, members of the executive, local arrangements, and programme committees have sometimes had to think up creative ways to overcome obstacles to broader participation. For example, simply relying on our own e-list and the ICTM *Bulletin* does not reach all the scholars and students in all five East Asian regions and elsewhere who might like to submit abstracts for the biennial symposia. Since local scholarly networks and website access vary greatly, we rely on executive committee members and longstanding members from each area to use local e-lists and social media to spread the word. On occasion, when this has not worked in one or another locale, we have extended the abstract deadline and redoubled our efforts to inform people, which has generally been effective. What we have had less control over is visa difficulties. In particular, citizens of China generally need visas for entry to other parts of East Asia, and at some symposia we have lost two or three would-be participants to visa denials. We try to help by having local arrangements committees find out and announce months in advance what the visa requirements are.

Another major obstacle, especially early on, has been the differing levels of English fluency across East Asia. It was decided at the outset that MEA would function in English, since it is the only language that virtually all students in East Asia learn, and thus the sole means of communication for everyone. Furthermore, MEA's symposia offer the perfect opportunity for non-native speakers to try out English-language papers in a supportive setting. Historically each East Asian region has had different levels of access to English instruction and practice, with Hong Kong students typically having the most opportunities. Particularly in the early years of MEA, programme committee chairs had to impress upon their committee members that, provided an abstract was clear and comprehensible, the level of English needed to take a back seat to the originality and interest of the subject matter. Standards of spoken and written English have risen rapidly over the (so far) fourteen years of MEA's existence, so this is now less of a problem.

In addition, many people have readily rendered assistance on an ad hoc basis. Most obviously, perhaps, audience members at panels where a speaker has had difficulty understanding questions have been happy to leap in and interpret. Individually, many of us have made other attempts to help; for example, I (Rees)

9 Evaluative comments on and descriptions of events at the 2016 and 2018 symposia come from personal observations by Helen Rees.

10 The development of most of these locally distinct scholarly traditions is addressed by Lee (2000), Tsuge (2000), Wang

(2000), Sameda (2002), Jones (2003), and Xiao (2007).

have run workshops in Shanghai and Taipei on writing English-language abstracts, and have coached younger colleagues from China on writing and delivering papers (as, indeed, senior Chinese colleagues have done for me in reverse). As I commented at the tenth anniversary of the founding of MEA, “seeing someone give their first paper in English in our friendly and supportive setting, and then seeing them go on confidently to successful English-language presentations at conferences in other parts of the world, has been one of the greatest joys of my commitment to MEA” (Rees 2016). At the business meeting in Seoul in 2018, pre-symposium practice run-throughs were suggested as a means to improve the situation still further.

For the future, we plan to maintain our custom of rotating the symposia round venues in each of the five major East Asian regions, and to encourage the welcome trend of energetic participation by citizens and residents of all five regions and numerous other countries. Those of us who helped create and develop MEA in the first fourteen years have been pleased to witness MEA’s role in extending professional networks and contacts. We look forward to passing the leadership torch on to up-and-coming scholars; we are confident that they will come up with innovative ideas to help MEA better serve its constituents, wherever they may be located. Indeed, Kim Heesun, the executive committee chair for 2018–2020, has already proposed a new initiative for more systematic online archiving of our documentation, an excellent idea that would have been of great assistance in preparing this account of our history.

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Appendix: Chronicle of MEA meetings and symposia, 2006–2018

<i>date</i>	<i>event</i>	<i>location</i>	<i>main or first theme</i>	<i>keynote speaker</i>	<i>keynote lecture</i>
31 Aug – 2 Sep 2006	Founding meeting	Yilan (National Center for Traditional Arts)	East Asian music and modernity	TOKUMARU Yosihiko	Modernisation, acculturation, and inner development: A case of Japan
20–22 Dec 2007	First symposium	Shanghai (Shanghai Conservatory of Music)	The role of Shanghai in East Asian musical development	Adrienne KAEPLER	Music of desire and the death of the exotic
24–26 Aug 2010	Second symposium	Seongnam (Academy for Korean Studies)	Intangible cultural heritage in East Asia: History and practical results	KWON Oh-Sung	Directions for the future of East Asian musicology in the 21st century
31 Jul – 2 Aug 2012	Third symposium	Hong Kong (Chinese University of Hong Kong)	World music and Asian traditional music	YAMAGUTI Osamu	East Asian networks of music in retrospect, inspect, and prospect
21–23 Aug 2014	Fourth symposium	Nara (Nara University of Education)	East Asian musics in a cross-cultural perspective	Alison TOKITA	Musical modernity and regional identity in East Asia
25–27 Aug 2016	Fifth symposium	Taipei (Academia Sinica Institute of Ethnology, Taipei National University of Arts)	East Asian ethnomusicologies?	PARK Mi-kyung	Stylistic transformation of the Korean traditional music genre <i>kagok</i> in the global environment
21–23 Aug 2018	Sixth symposium	Seoul (National Gugak Center)	Performing arts and social transitions in East Asia	Bell YUNG	Exploring creativity in traditional music