

# It's revival time for the chin

THERE are probably no more than two dozen serious students of the chin in the world, and three of them will be giving recitals at the City Hall on Tuesday.

The three are Professor Sun Yu-chin from Taiwan, local musician Tong Kin-woon and a young American resident of Hongkong, John Thompson.

John, who is a teacher at the British Council, has been studying the ancient art of the chin for three years.

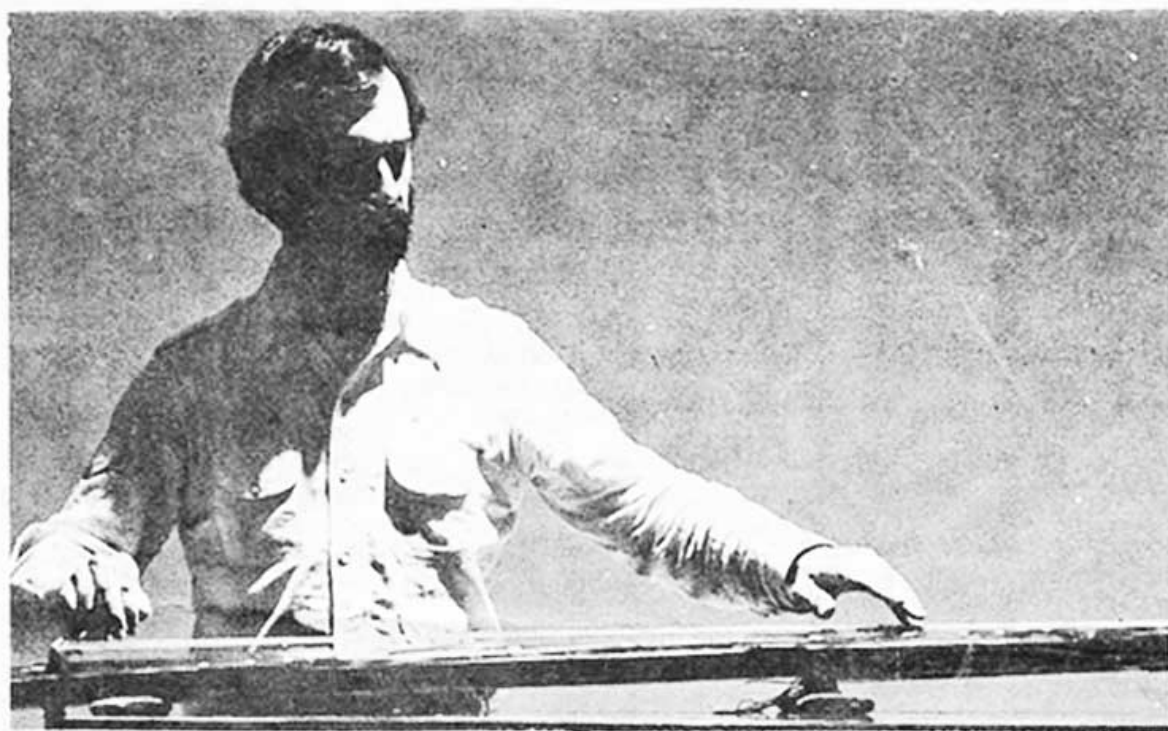
"I was attracted to the chin, which is sometimes referred to in the West as the Chinese zither or lute, when I heard a recital in the United States and after finishing a first degree in music and a master's in Chinese studies, I decided to go to Taiwan to study the instrument."

John says the chin is one of the few instruments that can be said to be purely Chinese. For hundreds of years it was studied by scholars and aristocrats. No one else was supposed to play it.

"The old books even proscribe who should and should not play it. No merchants were supposed to touch the instrument, neither were women. And the books say that the chin should not be played after drinking or sexual intercourse."

The chin should also be played totally dispassionately, with the minimum of gestures but of course with the maximum degree of perfection.

The silk made strings are plucked with the thumb and first three fingers of the right hand, while the left holds



John practising an ancient tune on a chin.

and occasionally pats the strings.

The finger nails of the right hand have to be grown long to facilitate the string plucking, while the left hand nails must be kept short.

"But in the old days in China the scholars grew their nails to a considerable length as a sign of refinement and their status. So they would have to actually trim their nails to a manageable length in order to play the chin."

In his recital John will be playing music from a book printed in 1425 which was edited by a prince.

The other two musicians giving recitals in the same programme as John have both been his teachers.

Sun Yu-chin is the oldest player of the chin in Taiwan,

and is a Professor of Chinese philosophy at Fujen University.

Tong Kin-woon is one of the world's leading authorities on the chin, having written several books and articles on the subject. He is also one of the few chin makers and has a small workshop in his flat in Taipo.

It takes Mr Tong more

than 300 hours to make just one instrument, to find the right wood, fashion and treat it so it's capable of lasting hundreds of years.

The chin recital will be held in the City Hall Theatre and tickets, at \$5, \$7, \$10 and \$15, are available at the four branches of Yuet Wah Music Co, the Chinese University and the City Hall Box Office.

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South China Morning Post  
18 April 1978