

## Cecilia Lindqvist, "ambassador" of Chinese culture

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Professor Cecilia Lindqvist is not only the one who introduces Chinese characters in a very vivid way to the Swedish people and people in many other western countries, but also the one who introduces Chinese ancient instrument Guqin to Sweden. What makes her so devoted to this and what's the story behind? People's Daily Online correspondent in Stockholm Xuefei Chen has an exclusive interview with Professor Cecilia Lindqvist.

\* From Stockholm to Beijing \*

Born in Lund in Sweden in 1932, Cecilia Lindqvist went to China at age 28. Her Chinese name is Lin Xili.

"I knew that China had the longest history in the world and I knew the porcelain and all kinds of calligraphy and the paintings and I wanted to see this and study Chinese. If possible to study a Chinese instrument." Professor Lindqvist began with telling me why she went to China.

At the age of five, she started to play piano. "I found the sound was very strong and I was longing for something that is very quiet. Then I found Guqin."

### Cecilia Lindqvist and her Guqin

In 1961, she and her husband went to China via Moscow. In Moscow, She stayed for a few days to meet a professor who had specialized in Chinese instruments. "I thought I would play Pipa, but he said I should learn Guqin. And I got a reference letter from him to the Chinese Guqin Research Institute." To facilitate her trip to China, she even got a reference letter from the Swedish King.

"I was the only student the institute ever had. So they took very good care of me. I was some kind of small Mascot—meaning a small treasure, that everybody wants to take care of. " said Lindqvist.

Whenever she asked questions, she got a satisfied answer because they were all highly educated and experienced people. "So I was diving very deep into Chinese culture through these people. That was my introduction of Chinese culture through these two years." Said Lindqvist proudly.

Life in Beijing was not easy at that time. "They gave us the best they had but a few months later, my hair fell off. And I had to go to hospital". Compared with meat and cheese, the

Chinese food was mainly vegetables at that time. Her body couldn't cope with it.

But she kept herself busy---going to classes in Peking University, going to the Central Conservatory Institute and the Guqin Research Institute.

After two years of studying Guqin with her teacher Wang Di, and other Guqin experts such as Guqin master Guan Pinghu, she played Pingshaluoyan, a famous piece of music with Guqin.

"It was a thrilling experience for me. I made my examination," said Lindqvist.

\*From teaching Chinese to the book of the Kingdom of Characters \*

After coming back from China, Cecilia Lindqvist and her husband and their son went to Latin America. They worked there as journalists. They came back to Sweden in 1970, then she worked as a teacher again. One day, some students said they wanted to study Chinese. But other teachers were laughing and wondering who could teach them.

"Let me take care of them. I will teach them two hours every week and see if it is possible." Said Lindqvist. Having 18 students, she taught them for a year.

After that she wrote to the Minister of Culture, Invar Carlsson who later became Prime Minister and asked him if she could begin teaching Chinese course. After two weeks, Lindqvist got the answer that she could start it next autumn.

"So just with a couple of months, I prepared teaching materials and make some small books to teach Chinese. Then we got 21 students. And I began formally teaching Chinese. They learnt about 1000 Chinese characters during three years. And after two years, I took them to Beijing. We took the trans-Siberian railway to Beijing during the summer holiday. The students stayed in the then Beijing Foreign Language Institute, now Beijing Foreign Studies University. Three teachers in the institute took care of the students every morning from 8 to 12. and then they were free to do whatever they wanted. They all rushed out with the bicycles and experienced Beijing. Actually all these students, now about 20 of them work in China. Two work at the embassy, two at IKEA, whenever I went, I always have students to meet. And two of my old students are teaching Chinese now in Uppsala. They just received the new jobs there. This group paid off my efforts."

Lindqvist said during her teaching, she would teach every word very carefully.

"Every time I write a new character, I will explain why it is written this way and what is the stories behind it. Can't you see this is a roof, this is a hand, and so more and more questions were asked and then I started to make more papers for my teaching and explanation. So if

they are absent one day, they can still understand from the papers. I had to learn a lot in order to answer the questions. As I studied the history of art and a lot of people understand it as archeology. When I went to China, I bought all the archeological books that I could find. At that time, ten years after the revolution and all the reports from the excavations and so on have begun to be published. I had a series of those books. A lot of Chinese friends feel surprised to see that I had so many books. It seemed nobody was interested in such books. And they were very cheap. So I bought all the reports and all the books on excavations. In those reports and books I found a lot of interesting pictures of different kinds. And I show these pictures to students to show how these characters look like. It helps them to remember the characters. There are pictures for the road, the boat and so on, next time when they see it, it is like meeting an old friend. Taking the character jing or well as an example, I found this 'well', at the bottom there is such a thing to keep the water clean. That's why how the character came. It makes the water clean and doesn't hurt the bottom. Having done this for many years, I suddenly realize that oh, this might be an interesting book."

From 1974 to 1989, Cecilia Lindqvist took 15 years to write the book *Hanzi Wangguo* or the Kingdom of Characters. She won the August awards. The book is still selling well. It has been translated into Chinese while the original version is Swedish. It is also translated into English and published in many other countries.

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