



Music & Culture:

Chinese-Western Musical Exchange from the 16th-20th Centuries

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Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History

USF Center for the Pacific Rim

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Abstract

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Matteo Ricci's Eight Songs for a Western Keyboard Instrument

As an outgrowth of my previous work on musical exchange among European missionaries and the Chinese court, I have long wanted to further explore the *Xiqin quyǐ bāzhāng* (*Eight Songs for a Western Keyboard Instrument*) of Matteo Ricci, the 17th-century Jesuit missionary who was the first to successfully settle in Beijing. Although we have the texts, which are beautiful, we lack any documentation of what the music might have been. My paper will offer a brief history followed by a discussion of 16th-century European text-setting traditions, leading to a possible rationale for experimenting with setting Ricci's words to pre-existing music, as was common in the 16th century. Another mystery involves the identity of the keyboard instrument brought by Ricci to Beijing as a gift for the emperor. There has been much speculation about what type of instrument it actually was--a harpsichord or a clavichord? I will discuss this question, based on the language used in contemporary sources, both western and Chinese. This influential instrument later became important to the succeeding emperor, and drew new interest from Jesuits who followed Ricci.