



Music & Culture:

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

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Abstract

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The Pipe Organ and the Jesuits in China: A Brief History

The musical and technical accomplishments in China of Jesuit missionaries, and the esteem shown by a succession of rulers, have long been acknowledged. While the harpsichord's role in this history has been treated to scholarly attention (in relationship to its diplomatic as well as musical position), the pipe organ has fared less well in this regard. However, no one musical instrument more represents the confluence - or perhaps, the amalgamation - of Western musical art, architecture, and religious practice. Piecing together reports and comments in letters, publications, memorials, antiquarian print and photography collections, and a range of biographical writings, a picture can be delineated of a cottage industry dedicated to the manufacture of pipe organs in China, beginning with a small portable made in Macau in 1601; then stretching to Tomás Pereira, Teodorico Pedrini, Karel Slavišek, and Charles (Joseph) Paris, all of whom built or maintained pipe organs in the 17th and 18th Centuries; and finally to the Jesuits at Zikawei, who built the splendid 'Bamboo Organ of Tungkadoo' in the mid-19th Century. This paper will give an overview of this little-known history of cultural-artistic exchange and collaboration, with emphasis on the period 1700-1850, when locally-built pipe organs were giving way to imported instruments. Finally, in light of the present-day 'organ race' in China I will look at the issue of the pipe organ as a sacralizing instrument, and what this may have meant in historical contexts.