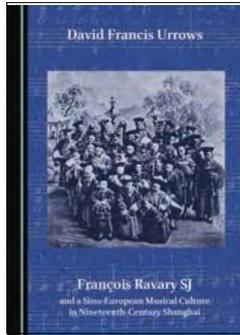


BOOKS REVIEW



FRANÇOIS RAVARY SJ AND A SINO-EUROPEAN MUSICAL CULTURE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY SHANGHAI,

David Francis Urrows. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021. 280 pp. ISBN 9781527574618.

Through newly translated letters, primarily from François Ravary (1823–1891), a Jesuit missionary, musician, and organ-builder, this book explores the musical culture of the Jesuits in 19th-century Shanghai, inclusive of the construction of their “bamboo organs.” Urrows has written extensively on the history of the pipe organ in China, having already provided us the most comprehensive source written on the topic as his previous book: *Keys to the Kingdom: A History of the Pipe Organ in China* (Leuven, Belgium: Ferdinand Verbiest, 2017). Additionally, Urrows founded the Pipe Organ in China Project,

which now continues as a website (OrganCN.org); it serves as a database for organs, both extant and not, throughout China, dating back to the 17th century.

While Urrows’s previous research had already given us details about the construction of the Shanghai bamboo organs, this book provides a view of the culture and the people who made and heard the instruments. It also offers new information, proving an earlier date for the first brass band (1858) and the first publicly performing orchestra in China (at least a decade before 1879). A history told through the perspectives of individuals and their musings, with glimpses of their personalities, this book is engaging and genuinely interesting to read.

Chapter 1 lays the groundwork for understanding the political, religious, and cultural worlds of China and France during the 19th century. The complicated story of the Jesuit missionaries in China after the suppression of the order in 1773 (1775 by the time it was put into effect in China) and their subsequent readmittance is summarized so that someone with no familiarity with missiology might still follow. Through brief biographical sketches, chapter 2 introduces the primary “characters” in Ravary’s letters. The most important of these are Hippolyte Basuiiau (1824–1886) and Léopold Deleuze (1818–1865). Basuiiau, in Paris, was the recipient of all but one of the letters from Ravary presented in this book. The two had studied together at Brugelette, where they worked with composer-musician Louis Lambillotte (1796–1855), known now for his setting of the *Panis angelicus*. Lambillotte’s compositions were featured prominently in Ravary’s programs in China. With the help of Chinese workers (unfortunately unnamed in the book), Deleuze, a lay brother, was the primary craftsman behind the bamboo organs.

The core of the study is the letters of François Ravary, which Urrows has translated from the original French into English

as chapter 3. Urrows also provides informative footnotes and introductory material for each letter. Interested readers can find the French as transcribed from the original letters in an appendix. Eschewing a dogmatic, literal approach to translation, Urrows has brought the letters and Ravary’s vibrant personality to life; it is quite clear why he earned the nickname *Le Père la joie*. From his playing a little seraphine for Chinese listeners, to his involvement in the construction of the bamboo organs, to the activities in which he took part, these letters are fascinating to their core.

There are xenophobic passages in Ravary’s letters that can be difficult to read. Nevertheless, his writings paint a picture of a man who, at least for his time, was interested in cross-cultural exchange, including, for instance, the use of traditional Chinese instruments alongside the organ. Urrows acknowledges that “readers will also note the almost-entire reliance on Western-language sources, and this is not by choice. Nothing contemporary with Ravary has so far surfaced to tell any part of this specific story from the Chinese side.” He periodically revisits this problem throughout the text, showing that scholars face a significant challenge in studying 19th-century missiological history in China. We are limited in our understanding by our perspective and the influence of colonialism.

In chapters 4 and 5, Urrows presents a critical analysis of the material contained in Ravary’s letters, as well as what we can surmise about music made by Jesuits and their students in Shanghai—and perhaps even who heard it. He also presents photographic evidence for the musical ensembles mentioned in the letters. The book’s chapters and various subdivisions are well organized and easy to navigate. Urrows has distilled a complicated story in a way that provides us an intriguing glimpse at the Jesuit musical culture of 19th-century Shanghai.

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