

Book Review: Tracing the History of Wind Bands in Macau

Resenha de Livro: Rastreado a História das Bandas de Sopro em Macau



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Abstract: This review discusses *Tracing the History of Wind Bands in Macau* (2025), a landmark contribution by Dai Ding Cheng and Sio-keong Hong. The book examines the history of wind bands in Macau from 1600 to 1950, situating the city as a gateway for Western music into China. Based on archival sources, photographs, and press materials, it highlights the multiracial character of Macau's musical life, the role of churches, military and police bands, and the rise of school ensembles. The work fills a significant gap by documenting Chinese participation in pre-war wind bands, offering valuable perspectives for Chinese music historiography and cultural exchange studies.

Keywords: Macau; wind bands; Chinese music history; cultural exchange; historiography.

Resumo: Esta resenha aborda *Tracing the History of Wind Bands in Macau* (2025), contribuição marcante de Dai Ding Cheng e Sio-keong Hong. O livro investiga a história das bandas de sopros em Macau entre 1600 e 1950, destacando a cidade como porta de entrada da música ocidental na China. A partir de fontes de arquivo, fotografias e periódicos, evidencia-se o caráter multirracial da vida musical macaense, o papel das igrejas, bandas militares e policiais, além do surgimento das bandas escolares. A obra preenche uma lacuna ao

documentar a participação chinesa nas bandas de sopros anteriores à guerra, oferecendo perspectivas relevantes para a historiografia musical chinesa e para os estudos de intercâmbio cultural.

Palavras-chave: Macau; bandas de sopros; história da música chinesa; intercâmbio cultural; historiografia.

Dai Ding Cheng and Sio-keong Hong, *Tracing the History of Wind Bands in Macau* 澳門管樂歷史追蹤1600-1950, Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (H.K) Co., Ltd., 2025. 295 pp. \$14.00. ISBN 9789620457111.

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Macau music scholar Dai Ding Cheng and his student, retired officer of the Public Security Police Force of Macao Sio-keong Hong, published a book titled "*Tracing the History of Wind Bands in Macau*" in August 2025. Published by Joint Publishing in Hong Kong, this book focuses on the history of wind bands in Macau from 1600 to 1950, as clearly indicated in the Chinese title, though the English title does not specify this timeframe. This work holds great significance not only for Macau but also for the history of wind bands in the Lingnan region (Southern China). The book not only repositions Macau's status in Chinese music history but also guides future research directions in the historiography of Chinese music.

The book is structured with a preface, six chapters, and several appendices. The foreword is essentially a revised version of a paper Dai previously published in the *Journal of Macao Polytechnic University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)* in 2022, focusing on Macau's overall music history and its uniqueness (Dai, 2022). The most essential viewpoint presented is that Macau, as a place where Chinese and Western cultures collided, served as the gateway through which Western music entered China. Dai believes that the development of Macau's music history can help fill many academic gaps in Chinese music history, responding to the call by Chinese music history academia to "rewrite music history" and re-establish conceptual and ideological thinking. Although the preface does not directly discuss the status of wind bands in Macau, Dai approaches Macau's wind band history from a broader perspective, arguing that Macau's overall musical development and history have had a direct influence on the development of Chinese music history as a whole. This viewpoint forms the central thesis of the book.

Based on this perspective, the two authors organize Macau's wind band activities and history in chronological order. Chapter Two discusses how Macau's wind band culture was closely tied to the churches and military bands of the time. The authors dedicate considerable space to discussing Macau's first wind bands, indicating that some wind band activities existed in the 16th century, with confirmed records of military band performances

dating back to the 17th century in Macau. This is an essential discussion because Macau, as the first Chinese territory to encounter Western music, represents a significant discovery in Chinese music history. The origins and history of wind bands in China are crucial for reconstructing the overall musical historical context. For instance, Portuguese military bands stationed in Macau may have included military musicians who could have been Macau's earliest wind band instructors or even Macau musicians themselves. This historical discussion helps Chinese music history scholars trace the development of Chinese music history.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five focus on historical descriptions of Macau's wind band history. Chapter Three discusses wind band activities recorded in the 19th century, Chapter Four examines military bands, police bands, and municipal wind bands in the first half of the 20th century, and Chapter Five covers the rise of school wind bands in the first half of the 20th century. The book indicates that considerable material exists on 19th-century Macau wind band history, much of which consists of primary sources not previously recorded in earlier research on Macau's wind band history. The most critical viewpoint in these chapters concerns Chinese participation in Macau's wind bands, particularly their pre-war involvement, which represents one of the book's contributions.

Existing research on Macau wind bands primarily includes Oswaldo da Veiga Jardim Neto's 2002 master's thesis *"The role of the military and municipal bands in shaping the musical life of Macau, ca.1820 to 1935,"* and his 2018 book adapted from this thesis, *"Watching the band go by: religious faith and military defence in the musical life of colonial Macau 1818-1935,"* published by the Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Macao S.A.R. Government. Both are written in English. Chinese-language books include the Macau Band Directors Association's 2016 *"Oral History of Wind Bands in Macau"* and Sio-keong Hong's 2021 *"In Support of Macao's Musical culture: 70 years of Macao PSP Music Band."* *Tracing the History of Wind Bands in Macau* is the fifth major study focusing on Macau wind bands. Oswaldo da Veiga Jardim Neto's research primarily examines

wind band development in Macau from a Portuguese perspective, focusing on the development of military bands and religious music (Jardim Neto, 2002, 2018). The Macau Band Directors Association's book is an oral history that focuses mainly on post-war Chinese wind band development (Macau Band Directors Association, 2016), whereas Sio-keong Hong's work specifically addresses the development of the Macau Police Band after 1951 (Hong, 2021). Therefore, this book fills the gap regarding Chinese participation in pre-war Macau, including school bands, military bands, and non-profit organization bands.

The book makes several significant historical discoveries. First, Macau's 19th-century military bands were already multiracial, including Macanese, Chinese, Indians, and Filipinos. This provides essential historical documentation for analyzing the pre-war population distribution and international status of Macau. Second, they discovered that before 1872, the band from St. Joseph's Seminary and Church in Macau had performed publicly in Hong Kong, representing a significant historical discovery for Hong Kong music history as one of the 19th-century foreign wind band performances in the City. Additionally, the Private Affiliated High School of Canton University's band came to Macau in 1938 when the school relocated due to the fall of Canton, a previously unrecorded historical event. Schools like the Private Affiliated High School of Canton University and Pui Chi Middle School continued operating in Macau after relocating from Canton, along with their accompanying bands, which sometimes performed music filled with Chinese nationalism. This history contributes to scholarly research on wartime Macau's ambiguous position between the Allies and Japan.

The book also suggests two future research directions. First, as mentioned above, redefining Macau music history's position in Chinese music history. Second, the authors suggest comparing Macau's Instituto Salesiano band with Shanghai's Shanghai Poor Children's Home band, as these were among the few all-Chinese youth bands of the time. They believe this would academically

contribute to understanding the spread of wind band culture in Chinese regions and the history of how Western music entered the East through Macau.

The book contains numerous valuable photographs that serve as precious historical documents, accompanied by introductions from the authors that help readers better understand the relationship between these photographs and various historical events. The book also includes some historical records, some of which are in Portuguese, that the authors have translated into Chinese, enabling readers to understand the document contents fully. This represents a valuable contribution.

This book focuses on textual analysis, with the primary method being the analysis of old newspapers and old photographs to reconstruct the history of Macau's wind band music. Many of these old newspapers and pictures can be found online or in libraries, but considerable time is still required for searching. Additionally, a substantial number come from various private collections, making each photograph, newspaper clipping, and document hard-won. Most of these photographs have never been publicly released before, which represents a valuable contribution.

This research makes a specific contribution to the academic field, but it also has some limitations. Although the book contains academic elements, such as footnotes, it is not an entirely academic publication, but rather a historical reference work. While it proposes a theoretical framework and is committed to building a literature foundation, it lacks the depth of analysis typically expected in academic research. Moreover, due to its non-academic nature, the book lacks the methodological rigor typically found in scholarly research.

The book includes considerable material that directly reproduces newspaper content verbatim. While these are essential historical materials, this approach seems unnecessary, or such content could be placed in appendices. Additionally, some sections raise questions about their purpose in the book,

such as Chapter Six, which discusses “Disclosure and Insights of Related Materials in Music Historical Records of Greater China and Neighboring Japan.” This content primarily focuses on a discussion of Chinese music history, with the authors noting that Chinese music history lacks records of wind band and military band traditions in Macau. However, this entire chapter appears to have no direct relationship with the rest of the book and may require further analysis to demonstrate the significance of Macau wind band history in Chinese music history. For example, the book mentions that Father Jacob Lau wrote the first book on Western music, which focused on military music that was essentially wind band music. During the late Qing and Republican periods, China needed military music to promote modernization and nationalism (Lin, 2024). If the authors could analyze how Macau wind bands participated in this historical trend, it would make a greater contribution to Chapter Six’s role in the overall book. Additionally, the section on the author’s published works and academic evaluations has no relationship to the book’s main content and could be omitted.

The book has a potential issue that may hinder its recognition among many academic circles. First, this book is not published by a traditional university press or academic publisher. The book’s primary market targets general readers or those interested in history. Chinese music history scholars may obtain information about this book directly through Professor Dai’s network. Second, from a traditional musicological perspective, wind band research is relatively marginalized; therefore, this book may not elicit responses in musicological circles. Third, the book is written in Chinese, making it difficult for many non-native Chinese-speaking scholars to access its content and knowledge.

Despite these limitations, this book represents a landmark contribution to the field of Chinese music history and Macau studies. The authors have successfully filled a significant gap in scholarship by documenting Chinese participation in pre-war Macau wind band culture and revealing the multiracial nature of musical life

in colonial Macau. Their meticulous research, utilizing primary sources including rare photographs and newspaper clippings from private collections, provides invaluable documentation that recontextualizes Macau's role as a crucial gateway for Western musical influence in China. While the book may function more as a historical reference work than a traditional academic study, its comprehensive scope and rich archival material establish it as an essential resource for researchers interested in modern Chinese music history, colonial music cultures, and the broader cultural exchange between East and West. The book's significance extends beyond regional history, offering insights that could reshape our understanding of how Western musical traditions took root and evolved in Chinese contexts, making it a foundational text for future scholarly inquiry in this critical but understudied area.

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