

Seeking Chinese Archbishops for the Catholic Hierarchy in China

Anthony Lam

The Chinese Catholic Hierarchy was established in 1946. This year, 2016, marks the 70th anniversary of that remarkable event. The Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, established 20 ecclesiastical provinces in China so the Episcopal Hierarchy in China consists of 20 provinces. Each ecclesiastical province is made up of an archdiocese, headed by an archbishop, and several suffragan dioceses, headed by bishops.

Not easy to find 20 archbishops

Since 20 ecclesiastical provinces were created, 20 candidates were needed to take up the leadership role of archbishop. By the time of the establishment of the hierarchy in April 1946, however, there were only about 20 Chinese among the nearly 200 Catholic bishops in China.¹

It would be inconceivable if no Chinese bishops were nominated. But it was also impossible that all 20 archiepiscopal sees would be filled by Chinese bishops. On that rushed occasion when the hierarchy was established, the Holy See submitted only one Chinese name for an archiepiscopal see. That was Archbishop Yu Bin (于斌) of Nanjing, then the capital of Nationalist China. At that time, Cardinal Tian Gengxin (田耕莘) was already the Apostolic Vicar of Qingdao (青島). Because the Holy See would like to promote him to a more important place, his name did not

¹ Lam, S.K., *The Catholic Church in Present-Day China: Through Darkness and Light* (Hong Kong: Holy Spirit Study Centre, 1997), 48 (page-numbers cited in this article are in reference to the book's Chinese edition). 林瑞琪, 1999, 《誰主沉浮——中國天主教當代歷史反省》香港，聖神研究中心。

appear on the name list of archbishops. Tian had requested that the Church hierarchy be established, but his own name did not appear.

“At the end of March 1946, after Cardinal Tian became a Cardinal, he expressed the hope that Chinese archbishops would be appointed to Nanjing, Beiping, Hankou and Guangzhou.”²

A rushed compromise

It is fair to say that the name list came out in a rush. Actually the list should contain the names of 20 archbishops on it. But only 15 names appeared. five archdiocesan sees were vacant. They were the following:

Hebei Province, Peking (Beijing) as a metropolitan see
Henan Province, Kaifeng as a metropolitan see,
Hubei Province, Hankou as a metropolitan see,
Jiangxi Province, Nanchang as a metropolitan see,
Fujian Province, Fuzhou as a metropolitan see.

On the day of the establishment of the Hierarchy, one-fourth of the archdiocesan sees were still vacant! On May 10, 1946 the Holy See announced that Cardinal Tian would be appointed as Archbishop of Peking. At that very moment the Cardinal was making a trip to the USA, after he had attended the consistory in Rome. The Papal Delegate to Washington Msgr. Amleto Cicognani told him the news by telephone three days before his return to China.³

Right after that, Msgr. Zhou Jishi (周濟世主教) was made Archbishop of Nanchang, Jiangxi Province (江西教省南昌總主教區). Obviously the Holy See desired to give the most important Archdiocesan sees to Chinese prelates to balance their lack of numbers.⁴

² Chen Fang-chung, “Heavenly Honors Gloriously Bestowed, and A Life of Wandering—A Record of the First Two Chinese Cardinals,” *TRIPOD* Vol. 32, issue no. 166 (2012): 23.

³ Fleckner, J., *Thomas Kardinal Tien*, (in German), (St. Augustin: Steyler Verlag, 1975), 69-70.

⁴ Lam, *Through Darkness and Light*, 49.

The example of Bishop Jarre

Actually, possible Chinese candidates for Archiepiscopal sees in 1946 were far more numerous. However, some foreign missionaries certainly had doubts about whether their Chinese brethren were capable of taking up the post of archbishop or not. At the same time there were some missionary bishops who wanted to pass their positions on to Chinese priests. Msgr Jarre of Jinan, Shandong Province was one of them.

According to Fr. Han Chengliang (韓承良), the then Apostolic Vicar Msgr. Jarre (楊恩賚) of Jinan had planned to pass his Episcopal See to a Chinese priest before the Chinese Hierarchy was established.⁵ Fr. Han even mentioned the suitable candidate in Jarre's blueprint. "In view of the situation, it is the right time to pass the baton. It was not only the suggestion of the bishop himself, but the consensus of most missionaries. Bishop Jarre, without any hesitation, selected Fr. Ludovicus Liu, OFM (劉緒堂) as his successor. But unfortunately his plan did not work out. Now Father Liu has been dead for nearly twenty years (1989). The decision of Bishop Jarre was proved correct, as Fr. Liu was a very talented and capable man. Throughout his life he accomplished a lot of great things for the Church and for his Franciscan Order."⁶ In 1946 Bishop Jarre reluctantly agreed to be archbishop himself.

New changes afterward

Indeed, changes were already on the way. Besides the new assignments to the archiepiscopal sees of Peking and Nanchang, on June 13, 1946, the Holy See announced the assignment of Bishop Theodor Labrador (趙炳文) of Funing (福寧) to be the Archbishop of Fuzhou (福州總教區). The Archdiocese of Hankou (漢口總教區) which Cardinal Tian had suggested be given to a Chinese prelate, was on July 11th assigned to Mgr. Giuseppe Ferruccio Maurizio Rosà, O.F.M. (羅錦章). On December 12, the Holy See appointed

⁵ Han Chengliang, *The Life of Archbishop Jarre*, (Taipei: Zhi jie youxian gongsi, 1999), 215. 韓承良《楊恩賚總主教的生平》，台北，至潔有限公司。

⁶ Han, *Archbishop Jarre*, 215.

Mgr. Caetano Pollio (陽霖) as Archbishop of Kaifeng, Henan Province (河南教省開封總主教). Then all the archepiscopal vacancies were filled.

During the period from 1949 to 1955, the Holy See appointed altogether 18 Chinese bishops, including Archbishop Ignatius Pi Shushi (皮漱石) of Shenyang (瀋陽總教區) and Archbishop Francis Wang Xueming (王學明) of Hohhot (綏遠). During this period, in August 1952, the Holy See announced the establishment of the Taiwan Ecclesiastical Province, and made Taipei (台北) an archdiocese. It became the 21st ecclesiastical province, with Bishop Joseph Kuo CDD (郭若石主教) as Archbishop of Taipei.

The role of archbishops in China today

In the same period of time, the Paris Foreign Missions Society Archbishop Anthony Fourquet of Canton (廣州總教區) resigned on December 11, 1947. It should have been a good chance to appoint a Chinese archbishop there. But most recommended candidates refused the appointment. It was only in October 1950 that the Holy See eventually found a Jesuit Fr. Dominic Tang (鄧以明) to take up the position. But his appointment was as Apostolic Administrator of the Archdiocese of Canton and Titular Bishop of Elatea.⁷ It was not until June 6, 1981 that Pope John Paul II appointed Bishop Tang as Archbishop of Canton, while he was making his *ad limina* visit to Rome. This appointment reflected that the Holy See would like to reaffirm the existence of the Catholic Hierarchy in China. It reminded people that the role and responsibility of archbishops are still important today for the Church in China.

In recent decades the Catholic Church in mainland China has been blessed with the leadership of a few brilliant archbishops. They included the late Archbishop Wang Xixian (王希賢) of Hohhot, Inner Mongolia (內蒙古呼和浩特總教區), the late Archbishop Zhao Ziping (趙子平) of Jinan, Shandong (山東省濟南總教區), the late Archbishop Jin Peixian (金沛獻) of Shenyang,

⁷ Tang, Dominic, *How Inscrutable His Ways! Memoirs* (Hong Kong: Aidan, 1987), 31.

Liaoning (遼寧省瀋陽總教區), the late Archbishop Li Du'an (李篤安) of Xi'an, Shaanxi (陝西省西安總教區), the late Archbishop Zhang Xin (張信) of Taiyuan, Shanxi (山西省太原總教區) and the current Archbishop Li Jiantang (李建唐) there. Together with many archbishops not recognised by the government, who would like to keep their names in low-profile, they have made great contributions to the Church in China.

The authority of archbishops as stated in Canon Law

The authority of archbishops is clearly stated in both the 1917 and the 1983 versions of Canon Law. Father Deng Zizhou (鄧及洲) whom the Holy See appointed as Bishop of Jiading, Sichuan Province (四川嘉定教區) in 1949, had written in a 1947 article:

Can. 284 states that every 20 years the ecclesiastical province should host a meeting. The role of the Archbishop is very important in this meeting. He has the right to call and to chair the meeting. The archbishop decides the agenda, the arrangement of the opening and closing ceremonies, and the extension and changes of venue of the meeting. But the venue is usually within the domains of the archdiocese. Can. 292 also states that every five years the archbishop should try his best to get bishops of the province all together at the archdiocese or other dioceses, to discuss any new developments in the province and to prepare for future provincial meetings.⁸

In the 1983 version of Canon Law, most of the articles relating to archbishops in the 1917 version have been kept. Another article relating to the rights and the responsibilities of archbishops (who are also called metropolitans) is Can. 436, on the matter of visitations:

§1 Within the suffragan dioceses, the Metropolitan is competent:

⁸ Deng Jizhou, "What are Archbishops?" *Vox Cleri Monthly*, Vol. 1, issue no. 4 (1947): 2-3. 鄧及洲:「甚麼是總主教」,收錄於《鐸聲月刊》1947年5月25日第一卷第四期,頁2-3。四川省成都教區。

1. to see that faith and ecclesiastical discipline are carefully observed and to notify the Roman Pontiff if there be any abuses;
2. for a reason approved beforehand by the Apostolic See, to conduct a canonical visitation of a diocese if the suffragan Bishop has neglected it;
3. to appoint a diocesan Administrator in accordance with canons 421 §2 and 425 §3.

§2: Where circumstances require it, the Apostolic See can give the Metropolitan special functions and powers, to be determined in a particular law.

§3 The Metropolitan has no other powers of governance over suffragan dioceses. He can, however, celebrate sacred functions in all churches as if he were a Bishop in his own diocese, provided, if it is the cathedral church, the diocesan Bishop has been previously notified.⁹

Conclusion

Whether the archbishops can and should exercise their leadership functions depends on the actual situation. During peaceful and normal times, an archbishop is only *primus inter pares*. He will not actively interfere in the church affairs of the suffragan dioceses. But when there is any episcopal vacancy or disputes on personnel issues, the importance of archbishops is very clear.

It is understandable that due to historical reasons the central government and the local officials in China do not have a clear concept of the hierarchy and the role of archbishops. But it doesn't mean that they do not exist.

Although the concept of the Chinese Catholic hierarchy was seldom mentioned in the documents or publications of the open Church communities, it does provide badly needed protection to the Church in China. The Chinese Catholic hierarchy should be treated as a treasure for the Church in China.

⁹ The Canon Law Society Trust, trans. *The CODE of CANON LAW* (London: Collins Liturgical Publication, 1983).