

From the Editor

Many anthropologists agree that China, with humanity's longest continuous history, owes much of its perpetuity to its family structures. Wherever the Chinese may be, on the mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau or other places around the globe, the Chinese family has been the subject of both admiration and envy. Unlike in the West, where families are quickly uprooted, where children seldom make their home in the same geographical area as they parents or engage in similar work, the family in China, until recently, remained together, worked together and had as its ideal the prosperity and growth of the family. Children were reared in the belief that no family member ever had the right to disgrace the family name; the family "face" was always to be safeguarded. Moral standards inculcated within the closeknit family circle as well as the scarcity of divorce added to family cohesion. Ancestor tablets reverently honoured in a special place within the home provided a strong bond with all those who had gone before.

There are signs, however, that long standing cultural traditions are eroding. The population has become much more fluid. According to the *Beijing Review*, (Vol. 35, No 9, 1992), 21,000,000 Chinese are away from their homes for more than one year at a time, and at least 70,000,000 spend some time away yearly from their permanent domicile. It is more and more rare today to have four generations in one place, and there are fewer ancestor tablets in evidence. More and more couples, especially intellectuals and those working in urban areas, are giving priority to their career rather than to establishing a family. According to the *Beijing Review*, (Vol. 34, No 30, 1991), many couples no longer think of parenthood as their bounden duty; neither are they so interested in perpetuating the family name. Nevertheless, there is still some stigma attached to women who do not bear children. Some observers maintain that a childless family, although appearing comfortable, is in many ways unstable.

Many factors have contributed to the changes taking place in China's family structures. In a very short time, women went

from compulsory footbinding rituals to becoming powerful communist officers, cadre leaders and Red Guards. China's revolutions over the past 80 years, and especially, the Government's population control programs, family planning programs, with its One Family One Child policy, have changed the role of women in China forever.

New work and educational opportunities for women, especially in urban areas, have changed the relationship between the husband and wife, and divorce, once so infrequent, now is growing at an alarming rate, up from 1.95% in 1980 to 13.4% in 1990.

In this issue of *Tripod* Father John Tong and Anthony Lam examine these changing family structures in terms of marriage, population control, aging and death. Without negating some positive characteristics that China's long suffering Catholics can bring to the Catholics in Hong Kong, the authors offer a Christian reflection and response in these same areas in light of the responsibility Pope John Paul II has placed on the Diocese of Hong Kong to act as a bridge, a Christian bridge, for the Catholic Church in China.

Professor Stephen Lau provides an interesting historical account of China's population control and family planning programs. He discusses the ethical questions involved through the social teachings of the Catholic Church on human rights.

Our issue has a dual theme, however. Remembering that 1992 marks the 300th anniversary of Emperor Kangxi's Edict of Toleration, Fr. Raymond O'Toole analyzes the historical and missiological contexts in which the Rites Controversy took place. Fr. Peter Barry reviews the proceedings of the conference on the same subject sponsored by the Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History in San Francisco. The focus of the symposium was on *The Significance of the Chinese Rites Controversy in Sino-Western History*.

Mindful that we have come to the end of another year, *China Church Update* reviews the major events in the Church in China during 1992 and updates its Church related statistics.

And finally, the *Book Review* of Jung Chang's *White Swans* focusses on the story of the author's remarkable family through three generations. The book is a moving tribute to three remarkable women who lived through China's troubled history and triumphed through the strength of the human spirit.