Personalities in the Church in China

from the Past

from the Present

People in Tripod: Profiles from the Past

Thoughout the years Tripod has featured a number of personalities who have had great influence on the history of the Church in China. Below are a few examples and brief excerpts from the original articles.

Matteo Ricci, 1552-1610

"On this 400th anniversary of Ricci's arrival in China [1983], once again the questions of 'cultural accommodation', 'East and West', and 'Chinese religiosity' are being discussed avidly. Matteo Ricci has become relevant in this age of global conflict and cultural confrontation. His tolerance, patience, understanding and unique approach to Chinese civilization seem more than adequate for solving many of the problems the world faces today."

Taken from John D. Young, "Some Reflections on the Historical Significance of Matteo Ricci in China."(#14, 1983, p. 37)

"On August 7, 1582 Matteo Ricci arrived in Macao from Goa to begin an intensive study of the Chinese language. Thirteen months later, on September 10, 1583, Matteo, together with his fellow Jesuit Michele Ruggieri, arrived in Zhaoqing in southern Guangdong Province. From that day until now Christian communities have existed uninterruptedly in the great nation of China."

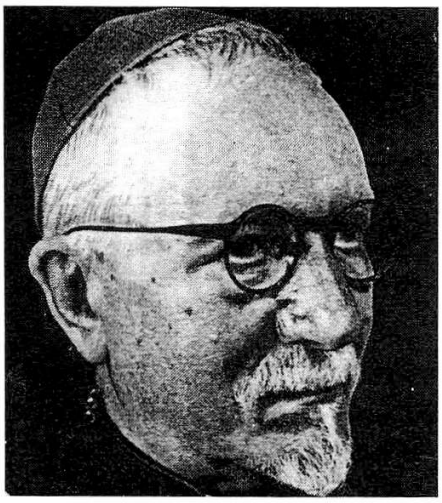
Taken from Edward Malatesta, "Matteo Ricci, friend of China." (#12, 1982, p. 85)

"...Ricci brought a love for the country of China, Chinese culture, and most of all the Chinese people. The quality of his life and love elicited a response of love from the side of China. Through him China came to appreciate the countries, cultures and people of Europe. Through him some Chinese were drawn to share belief in and love for the person of Jesus Christ, the source of his relationship to China." (Ibid., p. 90.)

Xu Guangxi, Scholar, 1562-1633, Statesman and Convert

A scholar from Shanghai, he was baptized in 1603. "After Ricci died on May 11, 1610, his successors regarded Xu as their most valuable supporter, and at times, a much needed protector. Xu used his connections to have the Board of Rites petition the emperor for Jesuit help in revising the calendar....Starting in 1615, Xu had to defend the good name of Christianity against attacks from a highly placed foe....On several occasions Xu was able to secure the release of Jesuits and Chinese Catholics from prison. A patriot as well as a man of faith, Xu suffered greatly from the hostility of Emperor Chong Zhen's corrupt court councilors....Xu, however, remained a faithful and honest servant of the state and of the Church. Willing to sacrifice his career for his faith, Xu spent from 1621 to 1627 in retirement in Shanghai. In 1629 he was recalled to public office....At his death in 1633, Xu was praised both by Chinese officials and missionaries for his private virtue, and his public integrity."

Taken from Michael J. Sloboda, "Xu Guangxi, 1562-1633, Scholar and Convert." (#70, July-August 1993, pp. 17-18)



Celso Costantini, 1876-1958 Apostolic Delegate in China (1922-1933).

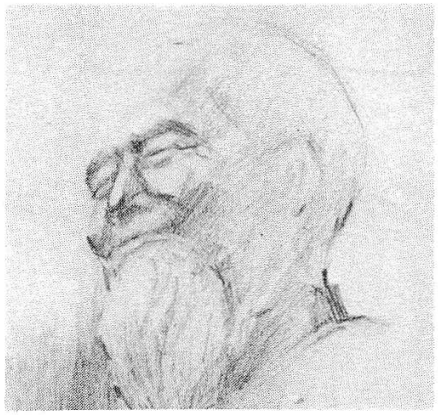
Costantini was born in 1876. He was ordained a priest in 1899 and appointed apostolic delegate to China in 1922. He became a Cardinal in 1935 and. Secretary for Propaganda Fide from 1935 to 1953. He died on Oct. 17, 1958.

"The more pressing issues that Costantini had to deal with in his China sojourn were: the tension existing between the Chinese and the foreign priests, the promotion of a local Chinese clergy leading to the consecration of Chinese bishops, the renewal of the apostolate among Chinese intellectuals, and the liberation of the Church from the political influence of the French protectorate....He considered the

'protection' of the Church by foreign powers to be one of the chief obstacles to growth of the Church in China.... (p. 41)

"What is striking in his approach was that it was based on the methodology of the Apostles of the infant Church. He constantly makes reference to them in his writings and is rightly regarded today as a reformer in the mission history of the twentieth century." (p. 45)

Taken from Arnulf Camps, "Celso Costantini: Apostolic Delegate in China (1922-1933". (# 44, 1988, pp.:40-46)



Bp. Luo Wenzao (c.1611-1685)

Luo Wenzao was born in Fu An county in Fujian Province. In 1650 he joined the Dominican Order and on July 4, 1654 was the first Chinese to be ordained a priest. In 1674, Pope Clement X appointed him Bishop of Nanjing, but he was not consecrated until April 8, 1685.

Many objections were raised to his appointment: "Luo did not have sufficient qualifications in philosophy and theology to handle the task....Since foreign missionaries enjoyed the support and protection of the governments of their native countries, only they should be named bishops. The time was not yet ripe for a Chinese priest to be appointed a bishop in China."

Luo Wenzao saw the need for training many more Chinese priests. At the same time he saw that Latin was oftentimes an insurmountable hurdle to the ordination of local priests. Once Luo appealed to the Holy See for exemption from learning Latin for twelve Catholic intellectuals who had all the qualifications for priesthood except ability in this foreign language. Had Luo's appeal been successful, the Catholic Church in China might now be in a totally different situation. During his lifetime Luo Wenzao regrettably ordained only three Chinese priests...all Jesuits."

Taken from Anthony Lam, "Bishop Luo Wenzao". (# 26, 1985, pp.108-111).

Matteo Ripa (1682-1746)

Matteo Ripa was ordained in 1705 and arrived in China in 1710.

"In 1711, Father Ripa was appointed by the Kangxi Emperor to serve as a teacher of art in the imperial palace...Two years later the Emperor, who had a keen interest in modern printing but was unable to find a skilled engraver, set Father Ripa ...to produce a new set of maps covering the entire Qing Empire....Father Ripa produced a series of 44 detailed copper engravings...The death of the Kangxi Emperor, the storms over the Rites Controversy and the squabbling among the missionaries, all led to Ripa's decision to leave China and return to Italy in 1723...."

Fr. Vincent Lebbe (Lei Ming-yuan), (1877-1940)

Vincent Lebbe was born in Ghent, Belgium, on August 19, 1877, and died in Chongqing, China, on June 24, 1940, at the age of 62. "A faithful son of St. Vincent de Paul, Vincent Lebbe was remarkable for his kindness to the poor and needy. He soon won the hearts of the Chinese who recognized his love for them and their culture. He was relentless in urging Western missionaries to love the Chinese and in denouncing what he interpreted as their patronizing behaviour towards them. He was thoroughly convinced that in order to prosper the Church in China had to become truly Chinese." (#78:41)...He influenced Roman mission policy. "Benedict XV's Apostolic Letter, *Maximum illud,* of November 30, 1919, aimed at putting the leadership of the Church into native hands." (#78:44)..."But the greatest signal that the Church in China was fully recognized as an equal among the local churches was the episcopal ordination of six Chinese bishops on October 28, 1926 in St. Peter's in Rome." (#78:45).

People in Tripod: Profiles from the Present

In its news items throughout the years, Tripod has often published short accounts of the life and influence of personalities who have left their mark on the Church in China today. Below are shortened accounts of some of these notable persons.

Archbishop Deng Yiming (Dominic Tang SJ) "was released on June 9, 1980 after 22 years in prison, seven of which he spent in solitary confinement. In November of that year, he was allowed to go to Hong Kong for medical treatment. He then went to Rome where Pope John Paul II made him Archbishop of Guangzhou. The reaction of the Chinese government was swift and harsh. Bishop Tang realized he could never return to China." After spending over a decade in Hong Kong, he moved to the United States. He died there in Stamford, CT., on June 27, 1995 at age 87. He had just attended a triple celebration for his good friend Cardinal Ignatius Kung (Gong)." (#90, p. 64)

Bishop Peter Joseph Fan Xueyan, of Baoding, Hebei, (1907-1992) was ordained a priest in Rome in 1934 and in 1935 returned to China to begin his priestly ministry. Consecrated bishop on June 24, 1951, he is [was] one of the last Rome-appointed bishops. Sentenced to a labour camp in 1958 for loyalty to the Pope and opposition to the CPA, he returned home in 1969. "Suspected of being counter-revolutionary, the bishop was arrested again on April 15, 1978, released on January 14, 1980 and re-instated as bishop of Baoding. He was re-arrested on April 13, 1982 and released from the Hebei jail in 1988 but

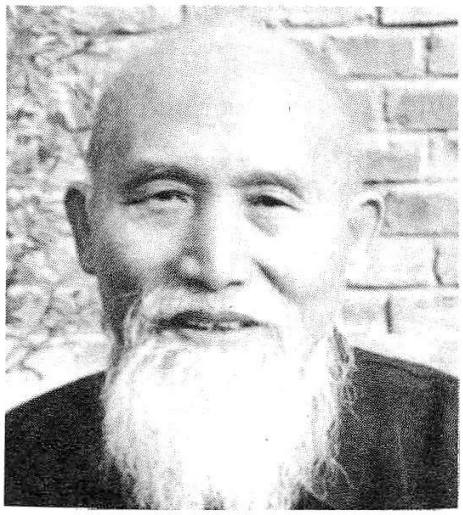
placed under house arrest. "In November 1990, during a government crackdown against the unofficial church, Bishop Fan disappeared from Baoding and was not seen alive again. When his body was returned home under heavy police guard, thousands cut through the police barriers to pay their respect to this extraordinary figure of strength and faithfulness and uncontested leader of the underground church in China." (#69, pp. 2-3)

Bishop Gong Pinmei, [SJ] Bishop of Shanghai, arrested on September 8, 1955, spent thirty years in prison before being released on parole on July 3, 1985. He regained total freedom in 1988. On May 29, 1991, the Vatican announced that Bishop Gong had been made a cardinal in 1979. To the Chinese Foreign Ministry, this "was interference in China's internal affairs and was unacceptable." Cardinal Gong received his 'Red Hat' in Rome in June 1991. He presently lives in the USA." (#90, p. 65)

Bishop Francis Han Tingbi, of Hongdong, Shanxi, (1908-1991) studied at Taiyuan Seminary and was ordained a priest on July 22, 1934. He served as rector of the minor seminary in Hongdong, was consecrated a bishop by Pius XII in 1950. In 1958 when the Anti-Rightist Campaign intensified, Bishop Han was arrested and sent to feed pigs on a farm for 20 years. In 1979, the government released Bishop Han and he returned to his diocese. In spite of his advanced age, Bishop Han gathered the priests and the Sisters together and for the next 12 years industriously set about opening churches, a minor seminary and a convent. In May 1980 when bishops and diocesan leaders from throughout the country gathered in Beijing to set up the Chinese Bishops' Conference, Bishop Han also attended. For more than 40 years Bishop Han had been in poor health, a condition he willingly bore referring to it as a grace from God. During his lifetime many people considered Bishop Han a saint-- an honor he richly deserved. (#67, pp.69-70)

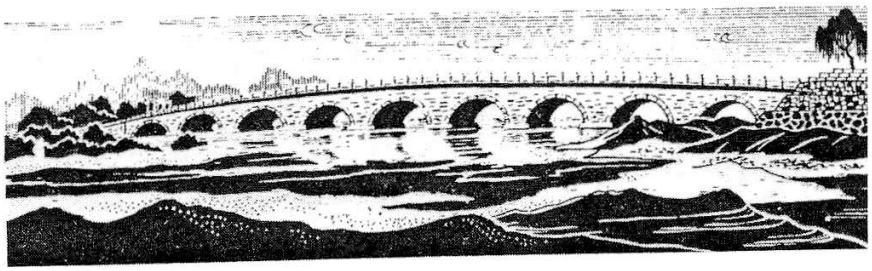
Father Vincent Zhu Hongsheng, SJ, (1916 -1993) came from a prominent old Catholic family in Shanghai. He spent more than 30 years of his life either in prisons, labour camps or in other forms of detention. He joined the Society of Jesus in 1935 and was ordained a priest in France on June 24, 1944. He returned to Shanghai in 1947 to teach. By the end of 1951, the Communist government had closed Fu Jen University in Beijing and the Jesuit Aurora University in Shanghai. All Catholic institutions were quickly nationalized.

Vincent Zhu's arrest on October 3, 1953, came as no surprise. Arrested three times, he was placed on bail for medical treatment in February 1988. He was then permitted to live with his relatives in Shanghai and free to walk around the city but prohibited from leaving it. Although quiet and unassuming, Father Zhu was much sought after by people in all states of life. They came just to see him and talk with him. He was also well known outside of China and admired for his courage and loyalty to his own conscience. (#77, pp. 47-48)



Bishop Peter Chen Jianzhang (1920-1994) was born in 1920, in Xiegangying Village, Xushui County, Hebei Province. He was ordained a priest in 1947. He later studied at Furen University in Beijing. Staunch in his faith, he was arrested in 1954 and released on parole only in 1980. He was a good friend and follower of the undisputed leader of the underground church in China, Bishop Peter Joseph Fan Xueyan. In 1983, Bishop Fan consecrated him as bishop of Yixian, Hebei. His activities in the underground church led to his being re-arrested in 1986. He was released in 1987. In 1988 Bishop Fan appointed him as his successor. Following the death of Bishop Fan in 1992, Bishop Chen was the leader of the underground church in Baoding, Hebei, until his death on December 23, 1994. He was mourned by thousands of loyal followers.

Bishop Zong Huaide, bishop of Jinan and Zhoucun, Shandong, was elected president of the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, during the Fifth National Catholic Representatives' Congress in Beijing in September 1992. (#71, p.58) He was the consecrating bishop at 11 of 19 episcopal consecrations from Oct. 16, 1988 through Feb. 24, 1992. (#68, p.59-61) He was born of a Catholic family in Shandong province, eastern China, on May 18, 1917. He was ordained a priest in Shandong on April 25, 1943, and was among the first bishops to be consecrated after China broke ties with the Vatican in 1958. (#71, p.61)

Bishop Zong died of a heart attack on June 27, 1997. Funeral services were postponed until after the celebration of the handover of Hong Kong. Li Ruihuan of the Politburo attended his wake. A message of condolence from Party Central on July 4 praised Bp. Zong as "a lifetime patriot who loved the church, who resolutely walked the road of an independent, self-governing and self-propagating church, and who sacrificed himself for this cause."

At his memorial Mass in Beijing on the morning of July 11, some 2000 people, including 30 priests, and 11 bishops, with Bp. Michael Fu Tieshan of Beijing as the main celebrant, prayed for the repose of his soul.