

Commentary on the “Hakka Mission Yesterday and Today”

By Father John Wong

Dear Father Barry,

I read the article “Hakka Mission Yesterday and Today” which was published in the October issue of *Tripod*. I am extremely grateful and thankful for your sincere concern over the development of the Hakka mission in Meixian. The only thing that bothers me, however, is the conclusion of the article, ‘...continued growth for the Christian community in the “Hakka Mission.” And this community will be a great credit to the missionary forebears, both French and American, who lived for a time among them.’

Such conclusion appears to me as if the Paris Foreign Mission Society and Maryknoll Missioners are the only people who contributed to the development and continuity of the Meixian Diocese. You seem to indicate that the contributions of local priests was negligible. I don’t think this is quite accurate.

Firstly, during the long transitional period from the Shantou (Swatou) Diocese to the Maryknoll Missionary Society, there were two Chinese priests who stayed to help the American priests. They were Father Lin Xinran and Father Han. Their contribution should be acknowledged. Meanwhile, Father Cai Ren and Father Cai Renyu, a graduate from the Pontifical Urban University in Rome, also agreed to serve the Meixian Diocese. The *Morning Star Magazine* initiated by Father Cai Renyu attracted considerable attention, making Meixian Diocese well known to many people, including people overseas.

Secondly, since the Maryknollers in Meixian were ordered by the Communist Party to leave China in 1949, the diocese has been cared for by local clergy. For the last 50 years, Chinese priests have been working in Meixian. These include Fathers Zhang Hongkang, Zhong Chuanzhang and Xie Delu. Among my classmates were Fathers Lu Zhongsu, Lan Guorong and Ouyang Xiu. They have all faced persecution for the faith and for the mission of the Church. It is disappointing not to find them mentioned in your article. They too are part of the Meixian history.

Father Barry, I am writing about all these mainly because I am a native of Hepo Leigongkang. My ancestors moved to Kuitan, Huilai, in the 19th Century to avoid religious persecution. Both Father Han and Father Cai Renyu are my relatives. Father Huang Bolu, my uncle, was the parish priest of Beidousai from 1920 to 1930. I was there in 1928 for vacation. I also know Father Vacquerel, who used to work in Baishi, Shangshan and Daxixie. I entered the South China Regional Seminary and was ordained a priest in 1940. I was familiar with a dozen priests there before I graduated from the seminary. Father Lan, the late administrator of the Meixian Diocese, had been writing to me before he died, enabling me to know something about his diocese. Forgive me for saying so, but your article strikes me as chauvinistic, giving all the credit to foreign missionaries for the development of the Hakka mission.

The bridge in Meijiang was built by the French Father Joseph Constancis of Tangkeng, an experienced engineer, and not by Father Vacquerel. Father Constancis also supervised the construction of the bishop's residence in Shantou. The church in Tangkeng was one of the most outstanding buildings of the Shantou Diocese. I attended Father Vacquerel's 50th anniversary celebration in 1927. It was impossible for him to have been in charge of the bridge construction.

With every best wish for your continued contribution to the Church.

Sincerely yours,
Father John Wong

Nov.5, 1998

Dear Father Wong,
You are right. The contribution of the Chinese Fathers to the development of the church in Meixian should have been included in my article. It was a glaring omission. Thank you for calling it to my and the readers' attention. Thank you also for the correct name of the Meizhou bridge-builder, Constancis instead of Vacquerel.

Yours sincerely,

Fr. Peter Barry