

Catholic Higher Education in China

Patrick Taveirne, CICM

This paper was especially written for this issue of Tripod.

The topic of Catholic higher education in China deserves an in-depth historical study. Here I can only briefly outline some of the major events and developments in the establishment and termination of the three Catholic universities in Mainland China. As Ruth Hayhoe observed in her review of Peter Ng Tze Ming's book, *Changing Paradigms of Christian Higher Education in China*



(1888-1950), with the movement towards mass higher education in China and the encouragement being given to private higher education as a means of meeting the huge social demand, the experience of the Christian universities is of greater relevance to the future than any of us could have imagined a few years ago. Philip Leung Yuen-sang, one of the four co-authors of the book, also believes, should the trend of liberalization and privatization continue without interruptions, and with more international cooperation and exchanges in the educational field, the possibility of re-establishing a Christian college or university in China is not an impossible dream. Others are naturally much more skeptical.

Aurora University (Zhendan Xueyuan “Aurora Academy”) in Shanghai

Joseph Ma Xiangbo (1840-1939) established Aurora Academy, with the support of Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) and other reform-minded Chinese scholars in 1903. Ma was born in 1840 into a well-to-do Catholic family of Dantu County in Jiangsu Province. He received an education in the Chinese Classics at the local lineage or clan school. At the age of 12, he enrolled at the French Jesuits' newly opened St Ignatius College (Xuhui gongxue, Collège St Ignace) at Xujiahui, Shanghai. At the age of 30, in 1870, he obtained a degree in theology and was ordained a priest. Two years later, he was appointed principal of St Ignatius College. Ma excelled in astronomy, mathematics and Latin. He embarked on an ambitious program of translating European scientific works into Chinese. In 1876, Ma left the priesthood, and began a 21-year career in business and government at the service of the national Self-Strengthening Movement. In that capacity he traveled abroad to Korea, the United States and Europe.

After the deaths of his wife and mother, he re-joined the Jesuits in Shanghai in 1898. Five years later on February 28, 1903, he established Aurora Academy (Zhendan xueyuan) at the Old Jesuit Observatory of Xujiahui. The initial enrollment was 24 students, who came from various provinces in China. For Ma, the name Zhendan (“sunrise from the East”) symbolized the beginning of a bright future for China, like the morning light in the East announces the dawn of a beautiful new day. The academy would specialize in the translation of Western books necessary for the modernization of China, and in the development of textbooks in the sciences and liberal arts needed by Chinese universities. One year later, the roster of 106 students included eight Hanlin scholars, and over 20 who had passed the provincial official examination (*juren*). On September 2, 1905, the Qing government abolished this Imperial Examination System (*kejuzhi*), which had existed for over one thousand years.

Aurora Academy offered a two-year curriculum. Students

were required to study Latin in depth and to specialize in one European language – French, English, German or Italian. Under the guidance of their professors and through independent study, students were expected to expand their knowledge beyond the field of literature. They were given two options: liberal arts (philosophy, geography, politics, sociology, economics, and international law) and sciences (physics, chemistry, mathematics, astronomy, and the natural sciences). Ma opposed the discussion of religious doctrines or proselytizing in the Academy. Although the curricula differed, the traditional Confucian way of learning (master-disciple) was preserved, and on Sundays public debates were held in order to foster critical thinking. One of Aurora's characteristics was its connection with reformist and revolutionary milieus. Famous reformers, like Liang Qichao and Cai Yuanpei, asked Ma to teach them Latin, while revolutionaries such as Yu Youren (pseudonym Liu Xueyu) and others were his pupils at Aurora Academy.

In September 1904, Father François Perrin, a Jesuit missionary in Anhui province, assumed the responsibilities of vice-president and dean of studies, after the French Jesuits had become increasingly uneasy with Ma Xiangbo's unorthodox style of running the Academy. In August 1905, Ma resigned as president of Aurora Academy and joined the 128 students, who had voted against the changes introduced by the Jesuits, in their quest to open a new school. The following Fall, Perrin and his fellow Jesuits reopened Aurora Academy. When Ma and the departing students learned this, they renamed their school the "revive/recover Aurora" (Fudan gongxue, later Fudan University). Ma put his talents at the service of the constitutional movement as a means to secure government funding for Fudan. With the exception of the dean of studies, the teaching faculty was mediocre and the curriculum mainly prepared students to gain entrance to a foreign company or university. According to Jean-Paul Wiest, the reason why Ma also left this new school was the realization that by basing Fudan's identity on purely secular values, as Cai Yuanpei advocated, it would fail. A hardcore nationalist, Ma had come to realize that

nationalism deprived of spiritual values would not result in a solid modern nation. This also illustrates Ma's personal struggle between his devotion to Christianity and the Chinese cultural heritage of which he was a master.

Zhendang Academy under the direction of the French Jesuits developed into a full-fledged school of higher education, with initially a two (without a preparatory course) or three-year course of studies, and finally a four-year curriculum in liberal arts and sciences. In 1906, 172 students registered. They were not allowed to join any revolutionary activities. The next year the Academy established a new campus in the Lujiawan district. In 1909, Zhendan Academy established St Mary's hospital (later renamed Guangci hospital, and today known as Ruijin hospital) and a medical college with a two-year preparatory course. In 1912, the medical college had a five-year curriculum and, in 1917, a Ph.D. degree course in medicine was added. In 1934, a school for nurses was also established. In the hospitals run by the Catholic Church in China, more than 75% of the doctors were graduates of Aurora. In 1947, 290 students were enrolled in the medical college.

In 1917, the name of Zhendan Academy was changed to Zhendan daxueyuan and, in 1930, to Zhendan daxue ("Université l'Aurore"). In 1932, Zhendan's four faculties (law, literature and arts, science and engineering, medicine) were registered with the government. In the same year a Chinese president was appointed, Hu Wenyao (from 1932 until 1952), after several French Jesuit Fathers had served as president for short periods of time since 1905. In the 1930s foreign students also entered the university. In 1934, 113 students from 22 different countries were enrolled. In 1937, Zhendan University established a female subsidiary (*wenli xueyuan*) subsidized by the American Sacred Heart Sisters.

In 1952, the Chinese government abolished all private schools. All the faculties of Zhendan University were respectively combined with the faculties of Fudan, East China Normal (Huadong Shida), and Shanghai Number Two Medical Universities.

Furen University (Furen Xueyuan) in Beijing

The name of the Catholic Furen (Fu-Jen) University established in 1925 at a former Manchu Princely Mansion (*beilefu*) in Beijing originates from a saying of a disciple of Confucius, Zengzi who said: “A gentleman makes friends through being cultivated, but looks to friends for support in benevolence” (*zunzi yi wen hui you, yi you fu ren*) in chapter 12, verse 24 of the Analects (Lunyu).

After the French Vicar Apostolic Msgr. Alphonse Favier, CM (1837-1905) turned down the request of the Qing government to direct the newly established Metropolitan University (*Jingshi daxue tang*) in 1898, later called Beijing University (*Beijing daxue*), the American Presbyterian missionary William A.P. Martin (1827-1916) accepted the offer. In 1869, he had been appointed president of the Translators College (*Tongwenguan*), which was now combined with the Metropolitan University. The establishment of the Metropolitan University signaled the beginning of the Wuxu Reform Movement. Following the Boxer Uprising, the idea of starting a Catholic University in Beijing was discussed during the Fourth Regional Synod held in Beijing in 1906, but it was not implemented.

In July 1912, two Chinese Catholics Vincent Ying Lianzhi (1867-1926) and Joseph Ma Xiangbo wrote a letter to Pope Pius X asking support for the creation of a Catholic University in Beijing. Ying and Ma were long time friends. Ma had encouraged Ying to study Christianity through the writings of Adam Schall, which resulted in Ying's conversion in 1895 at the age of 28. The letter did not mention the new Aurora (Zhendan) Academy founded by Ma and run by the French Jesuits in Shanghai since 1905. Since Rome did not answer their letter, Ying Lianzhi established a private school, *Furen she* in the Western Mountains (Xiang Shan) near Beijing. Due to financial difficulties, this school was closed in 1918. After World War I, Pope Benedict XV reconsidered the initiative of the Chinese Catholics, and asked the Apostolic Visitor Msgr. Budes de Guébriant, MEP (1860-1935) to study the feasibility of their proposal.

In 1920, Propaganda Fide invited the Benedictine Order (St Vincent Archabbey of Latrobe, Pennsylvania) to establish the University. After the establishment of a preparatory school, the "MacManus Academy of Chinese Studies" in 1925, the Chinese government officially recognized the school in 1927, under the title of "Furen University." Father Dr George Barry O'Toole, OSB was its first president from 1925 until 1929. Furen started with a college of literature and arts (*wenxueyuan*) consisting of four departments (Chinese, History, English, and Philosophy) and an enrollment of 150 students. The Chinese Republican government required the establishment of a school management board which consisted of 15 members: the president, vice-president, and three professors (two Chinese, one foreign) of the University, the bishop, seven priests, and two other members invited by the chairperson of the board. When in 1929 the government promulgated new regulations for private schools, the management board of Furen was reorganized, and included besides educators, well-informed political figures, dynamic entrepreneurs and religious representatives, in order to raise the standard of the university.

In 1925, Willem Marinus Cardinal van Rossum, CSSR (1854-1932) in Rome, the Apostolic Delegate in China Celso Costantini (1876-1958) and Ying Lianzhi invited the Belgian architect Dom Adelbert Gresnigt, OSB from the Abbey of Maredsous to Beijing. Gresnigt blended Western architectural features into a traditional Chinese unified whole or gestalt. The architecture of Furen University in Beijing (1925-1929), the convent of the Chinese Congregation of the Disciples of the Lord in Xuanhuafu, Hebei Province (1927) and the Chinese Southern Regional seminary in Hong Kong (1930), the present Holy Spirit College and Seminary, provide visual evidence of Costantini and Gresnigt's sensitivity to the Chinese cultural context. The same blending of Chinese and Western architecture took place in many of the other Christian colleges.

In 1929, besides the faculty of literature and arts, Furen developed a faculty of natural sciences (*lixueyuan*) with the

departments of mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology. In 1931, the Belgian missionary Father Joseph Rutten, CICM (1874-1950) established a laboratory of microbiology at Furen University in his fight against the epidemic (louse-borne) typhus fever in Northern China. In the same year, he brought the Weigl vaccine to China. One of his students, Zhang Hanmin (b. 1895), a native of Shanxi Province, who had studied medicine at Aurora (Zhendan) and Leuven Universities, further expanded this laboratory and the department of biology. Furen University also created a faculty of education in 1929 and a faculty of agriculture in 1936. Since the financial burden of the University became too heavy for the American Benedictines, the responsibility for running the University was transferred to the Society of the Divine Word in 1933.

Two recent mainland Chinese publications, one by Sun Banghua and another by the Alumni Association of Beijing Furen University, provide up to now the most extensive Chinese materials on the history of Furen University in Beijing. The publications cover a historical overview, the creation of academic journals such as *Monumenta Serica* (in 1935), the administration of the university, the history of the faculties and subsidiaries, and short biographies of lecturers and graduates. They also cover the emergence of student movements, such as the resistance movement against Japan during the Sino-Japanese War, descriptions of life on the campus, the associated primary and secondary schools, the alumni association, and a chronology of main events. Appendices contain the names of past presidents, deans, lecturers, and administrators, name lists of students and the dates of their registration in the various faculties, the names of seminarians, and statistics.

Furen University was well known in the 1920s and 1930s for the high quality of its liberal arts curriculum and its early emphasis on national studies (*guoxue*). Among the famous lecturers one finds the names of Chen Yuan (1880-1971), a native of Guangdong province and a Chinese historian, who was president of Furen University from 1929 until 1952, Ying Qianli (1900-1969),

son of Ying Lianzhi and a graduate of London University, and Hu Shi (1891-1962), a leading Chinese intellectual in the 1920s, and later Chinese ambassador to the United States and president of the Academia Sinica in Taiwan. The list of lecturers includes famous writers and literary critics, such as Zhou Zuoren (1885-1967), the brother of Lu Xun (Zhou Shuren, 1881-1936), Zheng Zhenduo (1898-1958), Shen Congwen (1902-1988), and Tai Jingnong (1903-1990), linguists such as Shen Jianshi (1886-1947), Luo Changpei (1899-1958), and Zhou Zumo (1914-1995), the calligrapher Qi Gong (1912-2005), the scientists and historians Zhang Xinglang (1888-1951), Zhu Xizu (1979-1944), Deng Zhicheng (1887-1960), Fan Wenlan (1893-1969), and Rong Zhaozu (b. 1897), the paleographers Tang Lan (1901-1979) and Yu Xingwu (1896-1984), the philosophers Zhang Dainian (1909-2004) and Zhu Guangqian (1897-1986), and the Indologist Ji Xianlin (b. 1911). The historian Father Maurus Fang Hao (1910-1980), a native of Zhejiang Province, was also on the faculty. He had originally been baptized in the Anglican Church, but in 1920, the whole Fang family converted to Catholicism.

Throughout its history in Beijing (1925-1952) a total of 12,355 students had registered at Furen University. Among its 5,000 graduates, the editors of the Alumni Association book only chose the biographical data of Wang Guangmei (b. 1921), the widow of state president Liu Shaoqi (1898-1969), and 282 other prominent Chinese figures. In 1936, the University started to enroll female students. Many Catholic religious Brothers and priests also studied at the University.

The impression that outsiders had of campus life was that it was rather conservative. Most of the students and teachers wore traditional Chinese dress. In 1929, the university established a theatre group, which performed such traditional Peking opera works as "Snow in June," "Spring in the Jade House," "The Battle of Chang Ban Po," "Silang Visits his Mother," "Lord Guan catches and then releases Cao Cao." A modern drama troupe staged well-known romantic works and other Western plays, with male and

female actors. In the field of sports, Furen's soccer team, "Purple Star," often beat the teams of the other four famous universities in Beijing (Beida, Qinghua, Shida, and Yanjing).

With the establishment of the PRC in 1949 the era of a Catholic University in mainland China came to an end. A new establishment followed in Taiwan in 1963. On the former campus of Furen University is now located the Beijing Normal University (Beijing shifan daxue), with which it was amalgamated in 1952.

The University of Industry and Commerce (Gongshang Xueyuan, Institut des Hautes Etudes Industrielles et Commerciales) in Tianjin

The Higher Institute of Industrial and Commercial Education in Tianjin was founded and directed by the Jesuits of the Vicariate Apostolic of Xianxian in Hebei Province. Its original name was the Sacred Heart College (Shengxin shuyuan). When the institute moved to Tianjin in July 1921 it was renamed the University of Industry and Commerce (Gongshang daxue). The new campus was located on Race Course Road of the English foreign concession in Tianjin. In 1923, the University started a preparatory course with 48 students. In 1927, it established the faculties of engineering and commerce. In 1931, the number of enrolled students increased to 600. In 1933, the University was officially registered with the government under the name of Tianjin Gongshang Xueyuan.

The University also included a museum of natural history, named Huanghe-Baihe or Beijiang Museum. This museum was the result of the geological research expeditions in North China of two French priests Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ (1881-1955) and Emile Licent, SJ (1876-1952) during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Father Pierre Jubaru, SJ (1862-1930), a French missionary and doctor in Literature and Arts, was appointed the first president of the University (from 1923 until 1925). The University further developed under the dynamic leadership of its presidents Father

Henri Bernard, SJ (from 1925 until 1931) and Father Zhao Zhensheng, SJ (from 1931 until 1949), who received a doctorate in theology in Belgium and was consecrated bishop of Xianxian diocese in 1937. In 1943, the University established a faculty of literature and arts for female students. Since academic requirements were very strict, the number of students at the University was relatively small. In 1947, the total contingent of the university was 761 students and 91 professors. In 1948, it was renamed, and became known in China as Jingu University.

In 1952, Jingu University was combined with Tianjin, Nankai and Tianjin Normal Universities. Later, all these institutions of higher education were united into Hebei University, which moved to Baoding (Hebei Province) in 1970, and celebrated its 80th anniversary in 2001.

Bibliography

Jean-Paul Wiest, *Ma Xiangbo: Pioneer of Educational Reform in China*. CSRCS Occasional Paper No. 9, Hong Kong, March 2002.

Sun Banghua, ed., *Huiyou Beilefu – Furen daxue*, Hebei Education Press, Shejiazhuang, 2003 (Zhang Kaiyuan, ed. *Jiaohui daxue zai Zhongguo* [The Missionary Universities in China]).

Alumni Association of Beijing Furen University, *Beijing Furen daxue xiaoshi* [History of Furen University in Beijing], Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, 2005.

“Zhongguo Tianzhujiao sansuo daxue zhi yi – Tianjin Gongshang xueyuan yu qita / Furen daxue / Shanghai zhendan daxue [One of China’s Three Catholic Universities – Tianjin University of Industry and Commerce and Others / Furen University / Shanghai Aurora University],” *Xinde-Faith Press*, No. 260 (20 March 2006), 261 (1 April 2006), 262 (10 April 2006).