

The Chinese Catholic Hierarchy and The Role of Archbishops in China Today

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The year 2006 is the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the Chinese Catholic hierarchy. Although there is no big celebration on either side of the Strait to commemorate this historical moment, I think this is an opportune point in time to present a special issue regarding this historical event.



On September 20, 2005, I was invited by the SVDs and three other organizations to give a speech on the occasion of the Freinademetz-award Conferment Ceremony in Rome. The topic of my paper was “The Importance of the Chinese Catholic Hierarchy for Evangelization in China Today.” In the speech I raised a question: “Is the Chinese Catholic hierarchy still functioning in China now?” Nowadays most people agree that the Chinese Catholic hierarchy is still functioning well despite difficulties.

The Chinese Catholic hierarchy was established in 1946. The Holy See promulgated the document *CONSTITUTIO APOSTOLICA: EPISCOPALIS HIERARCHIA IN SINIS INSTITUITUR* in 1946. Pope Pius XII established 20 ecclesiastical provinces in China. Within these 20 provinces there were 99 dioceses, together with some 38 apostolic vicariates and apostolic prefectures.

Twenty ecclesiastical provinces together with 20 archbishoprics were established in China. They are:

1. in Monglois [Mongolia] Province, Suiyuan as metropolitan see;
2. in Manchuria Province, Fengtien or Mukden (now Shenyang) as metropolitan see;
3. in Hebei province, Peking [Beijing] as metropolitan see;
4. in Shantung [Shandong] Province, Jinan as metropolitan see;
5. in Shanxi Province, Taiyuan as metropolitan see;
6. in Shaanxi Province, Xi'an as metropolitan see;
7. in Gansu Province, Lanzhou [Lanzhou] as metropolitan see;
8. in Jiangsu Province, Nanking [Nanjing] as metropolitan see;
9. in Anhui Province, Anqing as metropolitan see;
10. in Henan Province, Kaifeng as metropolitan see;
11. in Sichuan Province, Chungking [Chongqing] as metropolitan see;
12. in Hubei Province, Hankou as metropolitan see;
13. in Hunan Province, Changsha as metropolitan see;
14. in Jiangxi Province, Nanchang as metropolitan see;
15. in Zhejiang Province, Hangzhou [Hangzhou] as metropolitan see;
16. in Fujien [Fujian] Province, Fuzhow [Fuzhou] as metropolitan see;
17. in Guangdong Province, Guangzhou [Guangzhou] (Canton) as metropolitan see;
18. in Guangxi Province, Nanning as metropolitan see;
19. in Guizhow [Guizhou] Province, Guiyang as metropolitan see;
20. in Yunnan Province, Kunming as metropolitan see.

Some people have suggested that the metropolitan sees no longer exist (Gu, 2002). I do not share this view. In my book *Power and Struggle* (2006), there is a very clear elaboration of the existence and functioning of the Chinese Catholic hierarchy today.

By 1951, quite a few of the vicariates and prefectures had been raised to full dioceses (Chao, 1980, pp. 130-140). On August 7, 1952, Taiwan was made a new ecclesiastical province, separated from Fujien [Fujian]. As the two sides of the Strait are in

completely different social situations, we concentrate our discussion on the mainland side. Most of the metropolitan sees match with provincial capitals.

Changes of political domains over the 60 years

The Church's territorial administrative divisions in China have changed often since 1949, but the territorial divisions of the dioceses have remained unchanged. The government, however, insists that diocesan domains correspond to administrative divisions. There is a great discrepancy between government divisions and Church divisions. Basically, there are four ways of changing diocesan domains:

(1) Merger

In places where priests in a province are few, the provincial government tends to merge all the dioceses into one.

Example:

Jilin, (Jilin, Xipingjie, Yanji merged into one);

Liaoning, (Shenyang, Fushun, Rehe, Yingkou merged into one);

Guangxi, (Wuzhou, Guilin, Nanning merged into one).

(2) Consolidation

Occasionally when there are two small dioceses within one administrative region, the local government will demand they consolidate into one.

Example:

In Shangdong, Yanggu and Linqing became Liaocheng Diocese.

In Hebei, Xiwanzi and Xuanhua became Zhangjiakou Diocese.

(3) Reversion

For a variety of reasons, some dioceses which had been combined into one, reverted to their original domains.

Example:

Henan: In the early 1980s, nine dioceses were amalgamated into three, and in 1990 reverted to their original number.

(4) Division

Some dioceses are split into two. When a diocese extends over two administrative regions, it is common practice that the local government treats the two parts as two separate dioceses.

Example:

Baotou separated from Hohhot, Inner Mongolia;

Yuncheng separated from Changzi, Shanxi Province.

Comparison between the hierarchy and the government sanctioned demarcation

If we compare the distribution of the dioceses according to the hierarchy, and the dioceses according to the government's division, we will find that there is some discrepancy between the two. This difference in demarcation causes great problems to the Church leaders who are taking up the roles of bishops or archbishops.

Based on the information we have in hand at the present moment, I would like to draw a rough picture of the change in demarcation between the two systems. I have to apologize for failing to have a complete picture at the moment, but it is good enough to show the seriousness of the problem.

Province	Dioceses according to the hierarchy	Dioceses according to government's division	Remark
MONGLOIS [MONGOLIA]	Suiyuan	Suiyuan	Unchanged
	Jining	Jining	Unchanged
	Chifeng	Chifeng	Unchanged
	Xiwanzi	Zhangjiakou	Now part of Hebei, combined with Suanhua [Xuanhua]

	Ningxia	Ningxia	Now an independent province
		Dengkou (Bameng)	A diocese in Inner Mongolia
MANCHURIA	Shenyang	Liaoning	Combined into one diocese
	Fushun		
	Rehe		
	Yingkou		
	Jilin	Jilin	Combined into one diocese
	Xipingjie		
Yanji			
HEBEI	Beijing	Beijing	Now a metropolitan see
	Anguo	Baoding	Combined into one
	Baoding		
	Zhaoxian	Shijiazhuang	Combined into one
	Zhengding		
	Xianxian	Xianxian	Unchanged
	Jingxian	Jingxian	Unchanged
	Shunde	Xingtai	Part of another diocese merged into Xingtai
	Suanhua [Xuanhua]	Zhangjiakou	Combined with Xiwanzi
	Yunping	Tangshan	Unchanged
	Yungnien [Yungnian]	Handan	Unchanged
	Tianjin	Tianjin	Now a metropolitan see
	Daming	Daming	Became part of Henan
SHANDONG	Jinan	Jinan	Unchanged
	Yantai	Yantai	Unchanged
	Zhowcun [Zhoucun]	Zhoucun	Unchanged
	Yizhow [Yizhou]	Yizhou	Unchanged
	Caozhou [Caozhou]	Caozhou	Unchanged

	Qingdao	Qingdao	Unchanged
	Yanzhou [Yanzhou]	Yanzhou	Unchanged
	Yanggu	Liaocheng	Combined into one
	Linqing		
SHANXI	Taiyuan	Taiyuan	Unchanged
	Fenyang	Fenyang	Unchanged
	Lu'an	Changzhi	The diocese split into two
		Yuncheng	
	Shuozhou [Shuozhou]	Shuozhou	Unchanged
	Datong [Datong]	Datong	Unchanged
	Yuci	Yuci	Unchanged
	Hong Tong [Hongdong]	Hongdong	Unchanged
SHAANXI	Xi'an	Xi'an	Unchanged
	Fengxiang	Fengxiang	Unchanged
	Hanzhong	Hanzhong	Unchanged
	Sanyuan	Sanyuan	Unchanged
	Yan'an	Yan'an	Unchanged
	Zhouzhi	Zhouzhi	Unchanged
GANSU	Lanzhou [Lanzhou]	Lanzhou	Unchanged
	Tianshui	Tianshui	Unchanged
	Pingliang	Pingliang	Unchanged
JIANGSU	Nanjing	Nanjing	Unchanged
	Haimen	Haimen	Unchanged
	Suzhou [Suzhou]	Suzhou	Unchanged
	Shanghai	Shanghai	Became an independent metropolitan see
ANHUI	Anqing	Anhui	Combined into one diocese
	Bangbu [Bengbu]		
	Wuhu		
HENAN	Kaifeng	Kaifeng	These dioceses had once been combined into
	Zhengzhou [Zhengzhou]	Zhengzhou	

	Chumadien [Zhumadian]	Zhumadian	three in the 1980s, and reverted back in 1990s. Zhengzhou has been the provincial capital ever since 1948.
	Guide	Shengqiu	
	Luoyang	Luoyang	
	Nanyang	Nanyang	
	Sinyang [Xinyang]	Xinyang	
	Weihui	Anyang	
SICHUAN	Chongqing	Chongqing	Became an independent metropolitan see
	Wanxian	Wanxian	
	Chengdu	Chengdu	Has been the provincial capital since 1949.
	Jiading	Leshan	Unchanged
	Xufu	Yibin	Unchanged
	Shunqing	Nanchong	Unchanged
	Ningyuan	Xichang	Part of the diocese assigned to Yunnan
	Kangding (Tatsenlu)	Kangding	Unchanged
HUBEI	Hankou	Wuhan	Combined into one diocese
	Hanyang		
	Wuchang		
	Chichow [Chichou]		
	Puqi	Puqi	Unchanged
	Yichang	Yichang	Combined into one diocese
	Shinan		
	Laohekou	Xiangfen	Combined into one diocese
	Xiangyang		
Shashi	Shashi	Unchanged	
HUNAN	Changsha	Hunan	Merged into one diocese
	Changde		
	Hengchow [Hengchou]		
	Yuanlin		

JIANGXI	Nanchang	Jiangxi	Combined into one diocese
	Ganzhou [Ganzhou]		
	Ji'an		
	Nancheng		
	Yujiang		
ZHEJIANG	Hangzhou [Hangzhou]	Hangzhou	Unchanged
	Ningpo [Ningbo]	Ningbo	Unchanged
	Taizhou [Taizhou]	Taizhou	Unchanged
	Yongjia (Wenzhou)	Wenzhou	Unchanged
FUJIAN	Fuzhou [Fuzhou]	Fuzhou	Unchanged
	Xiamen	Xiamen	Unchanged
	Funing	Funing	Unchanged
GUANGDONG	Guangzhou [Guangzhou]	Guangzhou	Shaozhou merged into Guangzhou
	Shaozhou [Shaozhou]		
	Jiayang [Jiaying]	Meixian	Unchanged
	Jiangmen	Jiangmen	Unchanged
	Beihai	Beihai	Move to Guangxi Province
	Santou [Shantou]	Shantou	Unchanged
	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	A Special Adm. Region
GUANGXI	Nanning	Guangxi	Combined into one diocese
	Wuzhou		
GUIZHOU	Guiyang	Guizhou	Combined into one diocese
	Anlung		
YUNNAN	Kunming	Yunnan	Combined into one diocese
	Dali		

A few apostolic prefectures have been upgraded to dioceses between 1946-1951. Due to political difficulties, the Holy See has not made any amendment to the demarcation of dioceses in mainland China since 1951.

The role of archbishops

We remember that in 1981 our late beloved Pope John Paul II appointed Mgr. Dominic Tang as Archbishop of Canton. This is a clear indication that the Holy Father wished to highlight the importance of the role of archbishop in China.

According to Canon Law (1983), "If the Bishop is unlawfully absent from the diocese for more than six months, the Metropolitan is to notify the Holy See. If it is the Metropolitan who is absent, the senior suffragan is to do the same."(Can. 395 §4)

When a bishop is impeded or when there is a vacant see, the Metropolitan should report the case to the Holy Father:

Can 415 If the diocesan Bishop is prohibited from exercising his office by reason of an ecclesiastical penalty, the Metropolitan is to refer the matter at once to the Holy See, so that it may make provision; if there is no Metropolitan, or if he is the one affected by the penalty, it is the suffragan senior by promotion who is to refer the matter.

Canon Law 421 states that the Metropolitan should be responsible for the election of the Administrator of the vacant see:

Can 421 §1 Within eight days of receiving notification of the vacancy of an episcopal see, a diocesan administrator is to be elected by the college of consultors, to govern the diocese for the time being, without prejudice to the provisions of can. 502 §3.

§2 If, for any reason, the diocesan Administrator is not lawfully elected within the prescribed time, his appointment devolves upon the Metropolitan. If the metropolitan see is itself vacant, or if both the metropolitan see and a suffragan see are vacant, the appointment devolves on the suffragan who is senior by promotion.

Besides these, the Metropolitan has certain privileges in the province:

An ecclesiastical province is presided over by a Metropolitan, who is Archbishop in his own diocese. The office of Metropolitan is linked to an episcopal see, determined or approved by the Roman Pontiff." (Can. 435)

In Can. 436, part I, the Metropolitan has the authority of visitation in the province:

Can. 436 §1 Within the suffragan dioceses, the Metropolitan is competent:

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 if the suffragan Bishop has neglected it;
3. to appoint a diocesan Administrator in accordance with cann. 421 §2 and 425 §3.

§2 Where circumstances require it, the apostolic see can give the Metropolitan special functions and power, to be determined in particular law.

§3 The Metropolitan has no other power 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.

Another important duty of the Metropolitan is to call for a provincial council. Can. 442 §1 states that:

It is the responsibility of the Metropolitan, with the consent of the majority of the suffragan Bishops:

1. to convene a provincial council;
2. to choose a place within the territory of the province for the celebration of the provincial council;
3. to determine the order of business and the matters to be considered, to announce when the provincial council is to begin and how long it is to last, and to transfer, prolong and dissolve it.

Today, there are at least ten metropolitans functioning in China, e.g., Archbishop John Wang Xixian in Hohhot. Archbishop Wang succeeded to the Archbishopric in 1997, after the former Archbishop Franciscus Wang Xueming passed away in 1993. (*Tripod*, August 1997, p. 93)

About the year 1999, there was a dispute between two senior priests in an apostolic prefecture in Inner Mongolia. They were arguing whether or not they should run an election for an episcopal candidate for the prefecture. Since the two priests could not agree, Archbishop Wang Xixian of Hohhot got involved and reported the case to the Holy See. The Holy See decided that the status of the prefecture remained unchanged. The archbishop circulated the reply from the Holy See to all the bishops and administrators in the province of Inner Mongolia. All of them were happy with the decision of the Holy See. This case shows that Metropolitans can work well in certain situations.

During the last few years the late Archbishop Anthony Li Du'an of Xi'an took up the responsibility of looking after his suffragan dioceses in Shaanxi Province. He was a great model of a Chinese Catholic Archbishop in modern China.

Conclusion

Although the presence of the Chinese Catholic hierarchy can, at times, be considered an inconvenience, it does provide badly needed protection for the Church in China. The Chinese Catholic hierarchy should be treated as a treasure for the Church in China. We thank God for granting the Catholics in China such a big gift in 1946.

Since the local governments as well as the central government never recognized the office of archbishop, it brings added burdens for the archbishops in carrying out their pastoral responsibilities.

Despite the difficult situation, quite a number of brilliant church leaders worked well to maintain the Church hierarchy. They deserve our praise. Although the Chinese hierarchy has encountered

a number of problems during the last six decades, the phenomenon of the recovery and the development of the Catholic Church in China during the last quarter century has proved that it was a wise move of the Holy See to establish the Chinese Catholic hierarchy in 1946, and it was done none too soon. On behalf of the Church in China, we must thank Pope Pius XII for his effort in the establishment of the hierarchy in China.

I agree with some scholars and Church leaders that the normalization of diplomatic relationship between the Vatican and the Chinese Government would be very helpful in solving the problem of diocesan demarcation. The Chinese Catholic hierarchy can function fully only when there exists a healthy relationship between the Church and the Government. Let's pray and work for this to be accomplished.

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