

Archbishop Costantini and The First Plenary Council of Shanghai (1924)

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The origin of the First Plenary Council

At the beginning of 1924, His Holiness Pope Pius XI, entrusted to the Rt. Rev. Celso Costantini, Apostolic Delegate to China, the duty of gathering together in the city of Shanghai all the Vicars and Prefects Apostolic of China, and of presiding in His name over the Council. The opening ceremony took place on May 15th of the same year in the Church of St. Ignatius, Xujiahui, Shanghai, one of the largest churches in China. Some 115 members of the Council, belonging to different nationalities and Religious Orders, coming from all parts of China, met for the first time in a General Assembly since the Gospel was introduced into China many centuries previously.

Chinese, both Catholic and non-Catholic, could see with their own eyes the catholicity of the Church, and understand that she is a supernational organization transcending racial interests and national boundaries. (D'Elia, 1927, p.71-72)

Seven regional meetings of vicars and prefects apostolic were held in 1923 to prepare for the Plenary Council, which lasted from May 15 to June 12, 1924. The attending bishops were French (17), Italian (10), Belgian (5), Spanish (4), Dutch (4) and German (2). Odoric Cheng (成和德) and Melchior Sun (孫德楨), the only two Chinese prefects apostolic in the entire country, attended along with five other prefects apostolic (監牧), plus representatives of eight absent

bishops. Twenty-seven male religious superiors in China also participated in the meetings. (Camps and McCloskey, 1995, p.37)

Odoric Cheng (成和德) of Puchi (蒲圻), Hubei (湖北省), and Melchior Sun (孫德楨) of Lixian (禮縣), Zhili (直隸省, 今河北省) were made prefects apostolic in 1924. (D'Elia, 1927, p.71) Although the two Chinese prelates were an absolute minority among the dozens of foreign missionary church leaders, their presence carried the strong symbolic meaning that this was a Plenary Council "for" the Chinese and, to some extent, "by" the Chinese. A simple biography of these two Chinese prefects follows.

Odoric Cheng (成和德) of Puqi, Hubei,

The Franciscan Order has abundant material on the life of Odoric Cheng. Fathers Camps and McCloskey in their book, *The Friars Minor in China: 1294-1955* have this to say about him:

On March 2, 1924, Odoric Cheng Hede of the Stigmata Province (Firenze) was named prefect apostolic of Puqi (Hubei), (湖北 蒲圻), the first Chinese prefect apostolic in the country.

Born in Laohekow (老河口) (Hubei) in 1873, Odoric made his first studies at Chayuangou (茶園溝), and at the age of 10 he and another possible candidate for the Order went to Italy. Having entered the Order at LaVerna in 1894, he was ordained six years later. After returning to China in 1903 and working as a missionary for four years, he served as vice rector of the Chayuangou seminary for 14 years. He wrote devotional and historical works, translated the Rule of St. Francis into Chinese, and composed an Italian grammar for Chinese people. He had been teaching philosophy at Hubei and Hunan's central seminary for two years when he was appointed prefect apostolic. Two months later, he joined the other prefects and vicars apostolic at the Plenary Council

of China in Shanghai. On October 28, 1926, he and five other Chinese priests were ordained bishops by Pope Pius XI in Rome. In 1926 the prefecture apostolic of Puqi, entrusted to the Chinese diocesan clergy, had 1,281 Catholics and 3,915 catechumens in a population of 1,200,000 people. Nine priests served 36 churches and chapels; and the prefecture had 18 seminarians. (Camps and McCloskey, 1995, p.34)

According to Father Jos Jennes, CICM, Odoric Cheng translated and rewrote a book about the missionaries Clet and Perboyre. The Chinese name of the book is *Liu Dong Erwei Zhiming Shenfu Hechuan*. (《劉董二位致命神父合傳》) It is a short biography of Blessed Francis Regis Clet (+ 1820) and John Gabriel Perboyre (+1840), who were martyred in China. (Jennes, 1976, p.186) Unfortunately, after being bishop for only two years, Odoric Cheng died in Hengyang (Hunan) on November 14, 1928. He was buried in Puqi. (Camps and McCloskey, 1995, p.34)

Melchior Sun (孫德楨) of Lixian, Zhili.

Msgr Sun was born in Peking/Beijing (北京) on November 19, 1869. (Zhengkun, 1986)

He made his seminary studies in his home town, and was ordained a priest on January 24, 1897. Two years later, on January 24, 1899, he became a Lazarist. One of his brothers was also a priest. For twelve years he was Professor of Latin at the preparatory seminary of Peking, and for about twelve more years he did missionary work in Niufang (牛房), sixty *li* from Peking. While there, he was elected Prefect Apostolic of Lixian (蠡縣) (Zhili) on April 15, 1924. He was present at the Plenary Council of Shanghai in 1924. He was appointed to the episcopacy on June 1st, 1926. He chose as his motto: "Pay attention to the experience of the fathers". (Job 8:8, D'Elia, 1927, p.81)

According to Josef Chao, Bishop Sun resigned as bishop of Lixian in 1936. (Chao, 1980, p.103). Bishop Sun then stayed at the House of the Congregation of St. John the Baptist in Qinghe Town (清河鎮), Beijing City. (《Hebei Provincial Gazette, Vol. 68 the Religious Gazette》, 1995, p.234-235) He moved into Beijing City in 1948. (Zhengkun, 1986), and passed away on August 23, 1951. (Chao, 1980, p.140)

Were There Any Other Chinese Participants?

Most people have the impression that there were only two Chinese participants at the Plenary Council of Shanghai. However, in reality, many more Chinese priests participated in the Plenary Council.

Actually the book of Camps and McCloskey also mentions another participant. On pages 44 and 45, there is a photo and a name list of the OFM participants in the 1924 Plenary Council. No. 14 is Prefect Apostolic Odoric Cheng (Puqi) and No. 25 Aloysius Chen (陳國砥), a staff member of the Plenary Council. (Camps and McCloskey, 1995, p.45)

Camps and McCloskey's remark raised the question for me: How many Chinese staff members were there altogether at the Plenary Council? Interestingly enough, when I researched the history of the Council, the number turned out to be very surprising. THERE WERE NINE OTHERS!

Reading the *Primum Concilium Sinense Anno 1924*, one finds that quite a number of Chinese priests participated in the Plenary Council. More importantly, some of these priests became Church leaders in China later. The following is a name list of the Chinese priests who served on the staff of the Council:

Petrus Cheng, Vicar Forane,	成玉堂 (山西 洪洞)
Aloysius Chen, OFM	陳國砥 (山西 汾陽)
Philippus Zhao	趙懷義 (河北 宣化)

Jacobus Zhang	張雅各 (察哈爾 西灣子)
Josephus Hu, CM	胡若山 (浙江 台州)
Simon Ni	倪 (江蘇 上海)
Lucas Yang, S.J.	楊維時 (江蘇 上海)
Firminus Shen, S.J.	沈錦標 (江蘇 上海)
Josephus Zhou	周濟世 (河北 保定)

The staff members of the Plenary Council

The Official Catalogue of the The “*Primum Concilium Sinense Anno 1924*” gives a full account of the duties of these participants. They are as follows:

Promotores et iudices querelarum (Promoters and Judges of Questions)

Leo Robert, MEP	Petrus Cheng Vicar Forane.
J.B. Debeauvais, S.J.	Aloysius Chen, OFM

Secretarii (Secretaries)

Georgius Payen, S.J.	Philippus Zhao
Joannes Popoli, M.E.P.	

Theologi consultores pro praeside (Theological Consultants for the President)

Renatus Flament, CM	Jacobus Zhang
Georgius Payen, SJ	Petrus Cheng.
Mathias Vlaminc, OFM	Josephus Hu, CM

Notarii, testes ad acta (Notaries and Witnesses to the Acts)

C. Hernandez, O.P.	Jacobus Zhang
L. De Smedt, CICM	Aloysius Chen, OFM
Henricus Valtorta, MEM	Petrus Cheng,

Lectores actorum (Readers of the Acts)

Georgius Weig, SVD	Petrus Cheng,
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Joannes Popoli, MEP

Josephus Hu, CM

Magistri caeremoniarum (Masters of ceremonies)

Franciscus Desrumaus, CM.,

Simon Ni

Josephus Zhou

Cantores (Singers of Chants)

Morin, MEP

Lucas Yang, S.J.

Samson, MEP

Ostiarum (Gatekeepers)

Paschalis Le Biboul, S.J.

Firminus Sen, S.J.

Were the Nine Chinese Priests staff members only?

The answer is a resounding NO. Far more than staff members, some of them were *de facto* representatives. During the Plenary Council, five commissions of Bishops and priests were appointed to deal with all the matters submitted to the Council. Among the important questions to be discussed were Catholic life and practice, the recruitment and training of native Clergy, the Catholic Press, and a general Catechism for the whole country. (D'Elia, 1927, p.74)

Who were members of these five Commissions? The "*Primum Concilium Sinense Anno 1924*" has the answer.

Pro Prima Commissione (Libri I et IV)

The First Commission (for Treatises One and Four)

Bishops J. Tacconi, Emmanuel Prat, Henricus Lecroart, Franciscus Schraven, Ermenegildus Ricci, Aloysius Janssens, Antoine Fourquet, along with Fathers G. Payen, SJ and J. Zhang (張雅各伯) as consultants.

Pro Secunda Commissione (Libri II et V)

The Second Commission (for Treatises One and Five)

Bishops Franciscus Aguirre, Evrardus Ter Laak, Joannes de Vienne, Flaminius Bellotti, Joannes Blois, Vincentius Huarte, Trudo Jans, along with Fathers G. Flament et Petrus Cheng (成玉堂) as consultors.

Pro Tertia Commissione (Libri III)

The Third Commission (for Treatise Three)

Bishops and Prefects Joseph Fabregues, A. Celestine. Ybanez, E. Peter Gaspais, Joseph Hoogers, Spada, Hernandez, Debeauvais, along with Fathers M. Vlamincx et Joseph Hu (胡若山) as consultors.

Pro Quarta Commissione (Ad recognoscendos et in ordinem redigendos Canones a Commissionibus iam conditos)

The Fourth Commission (to examine and put in order the Canons already composed by the Commissions)

Bishops and Prefects Franciscus Geurts, Augustinus Henninghaus, Eugenius Massi, Aloysius Calza, Aloysius Van Dyck, Adolphus Rayssac, Aloysius Versiglia, Odoricus Cheng (成和德), Melchior Sun (孫德楨), with Fathers Alvarus De La Iglesia, OP, Joseph Verdier, SJ, Francis Ford, MM et Sylvester Espelage, OFM as consultors.

Pro Quinta Commissione (Pro Processibus Canonizationis et actibus extra-synodalibus)

The Fifth Commission (for processing the Canons and acts after the Plenary Council)

Bishops E. L. Fatiguet, Joannes Mondaini, J. V. Rouchouse, Agapitus Fiorentini, with Fathers Rossi, Casuscelli, Desrumaux et Buddenbrock as consultors.

The achievements of the Chinese priests after the Plenary Council

Most of the Chinese participants became Church leaders in

China after the Synod. In fact, five of the nine Chinese priests became bishops. One of them even became an Archbishop when the Chinese Catholic Hierarchy was established in 1946. The following paragraphs contain a brief personal history of the nine priests.

Petrus Cheng, 成玉堂 (山西 洪洞)

There is not much information about Msgr. Petrus Cheng. Even the catholic.com internet does not have much news about him. Sources are not even sure about the exact year of his birth. The *Revue Catholique*, however, has a brief report about the newly established Apostolic Prefecture of Hongdong (洪洞), in which Msgr Cheng is mentioned.

On June 29, the Apostolic Delegate Archbishop Costantini relayed a message from the Propaganda Fide according to which Pope Pius XI, has ordered the creation of the new diocese (rather, prefecture) of Hongdong, separated from the Lu'an (潞安) Diocese. The first Apostolic Prefect is the headmaster of St. Peter's School, Fr. Petrus Cheng. The new diocese administers 13 counties, namely Hongdong, Zhaocheng (趙城), Fenxi (汾西), Huoxian (霍縣), Lingshi (靈石), Yonghe (永和), Xixian (隰縣), Da'ning (大寧), Puxian (蒲縣), Linfen (臨汾), Xiangling (襄陵), Fushan (浮山), Anze (安澤) and so on.

Msgr. Cheng, with Chinese name Jiesan (捷三) and literal name Yutang (玉堂), is now 57 years old. He is a native of Daji Village (大箕村), Jincheng County (晉城). He was ordained in 1903. In 1911 he was appointed principal of the Jiangcheng School in Lu'an County. In 1924 he attended the Plenary Council in Shanghai. In 1928 he was reassigned to Hongdong School. Msgr. Cheng is enthusiastic and brave. He always pays special attention to the formation of the new generation. (*Revue Catholique*, 1932, p.507-508).

According to the website (<http://www.ywsl.com/bbs/bbsshow>

[aspx?Id=2305](#) (2007-7-10), we know that Msgr. Cheng compiled a book entitled “The History of the Development of Chinese Catholic Action” (《中华公教进行会演进史》).

“*A Brief History of Catholic Changzhi Diocese*” reported that Msgr. Cheng passed away in 1940, but no further details are given.

Aloysius Chen, OFM 陳國砥 (山西 汾陽)

Aloysius Chen Guozhi was born in 1875 at Anyang (安陽) near Lu'an (潞安) (Shanxi 山西). He entered the Franciscan Order in 1896 at Dongergou (洞兒溝). Ordained in 1903, he worked as a missionary for nine years and then served as the Chinese secretary to two Italian bishops. Besides teaching Latin and apologetics at the Taiyuan (太原) seminary, he directed the Catholic college in that city. (Camps and McCloskey, 1995, p.34). Bishop Cheng Shiguang tells us that that Catholic college was called Mingyuan College (明原學校), and it was the only Catholic middle school in Shanxi at that time. (成世光, 1986) Elected vicar apostolic of Fenyang (汾陽) on May 10, 1926, he received episcopal consecration from Pope Pius XI in Rome later that year. Bishop Chen's vicariate, assigned to the Chinese diocesan clergy, counted 10,460 Catholics and 3,000 catechumens in a population of 1,600,000. Fifteen priests ministered at 88 churches and chapels. Fifteen seminarians gave hope for further growth among the clergy. (Camps and McCloskey, 1995, p.34) Bishop Chen died in Fenyang on March 10, 1930, having been bishop for less than four years. (KKP, 1930-4-1, p.4)

Philippus Zhao 趙懷義 (河北 宣化)

Rt. Rev. Philip Zhao 趙懷義 was born in Zhengfushi (正福寺), a little village about fifteen *li* west of Peking, on October 4th 1880. His father died a martyr during the Boxer rebellion. Two of his brothers were priests, one of whom died a few months after his ordination at the Yangjiaping Trappist Abbey (楊家坪聖母神樂院), while the other was a teacher at the preparatory seminary of Peking. His mother was a very pious woman. Although blind, she attended

Mass every day with her daughter in-law. Young Philip Zhao entered the seminary of Peking on November 7th, 1893, and was ordained a priest on February 27th 1904. He served for four years as a teacher at the Peking preparatory seminary; then two and a half years as a curate in Xuanhua, ten years as a missionary in Xinan, and four years Director of the Xitang Normal School. When in 1922 Mgr. Costantini came to China as Apostolic Delegate, he selected Father Zhao to be his secretary. He assumed this office on January 8th, 1923. He was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Xuanhwa 宣化 (Zhili) on May 10th 1926. His Episcopal motto was: "I will sacrifice myself to the last breath." (D'Elia, 1927, p.81)

It was not long before he put his episcopal motto into practice. In 1929, a civil war broke out in the area around Hebei and Inner Mongolia. The refugees had nowhere to go but to the Catholic cathedral. One night, Bishop Chao walked around the cathedral to see the refugees. He found them in such a miserable condition that he gave them his big robe. He caught a chill instantly. Unfortunately the resulting cold reactivated a long illness. He failed to recover and passed away. He had been a bishop for only eight months. (Hua Yi, 1986)

Jacobus Zhang (Chagar) 張維祺 (察哈爾 西灣子)

Jacobus Zhang was born on March 21 1856, into a Catholic family in Lanyingzi Village (爛營子). His Chinese name was Wei Qi (維祺). (Rondelez, 1939, p.2)

In 1872 Jacobus entered the Xiwanzi Minor Seminary, and in 1882 continued his studies at the Xianxian Seminary. (Rondelez, 1939, p.3 and p.8) In 1886, after completing his studies in Xianxian, he returned to Xiwanzi to teach. (Rondelez, 1939, p.9) He was ordained a priest in 1887. (Rondelez, 1939, p.15)

He was one of the pioneers in elaborating the Catholic faith in very simple and in easily understandable vernacular Chinese.

(Taveirne, 2004, p.307) Fr. Jennes also pointed out Zhang's contribution in his history of the catechumenate in China.

Now more than in earlier times, the Chinese priests themselves took up their brushes, and many have done very meritorious work in this field. Among them are Frs. Lawrence Li, SJ, Joseph Xiao, SJ, P. Wang CM, Peter Huang (of Nanjing) and Jacques Zhang (of Xiwanzi). (Jennes, 1976, p.175-176)

Fr. Jennes had in mind Fr. Zhang's catechisms when he wrote: "We do think that the following smaller books are very useful as a means of propaganda among the ordinary people". The two book are *Zhen Jiao Da Yi* (《真教大益》) and *Zhen Jiao Zui Yao* (《真教撮要》). (Jennes, 1976, p.177)

Jennes also mentioned Fr. Zhang's first book, *Xie Zheng Li Kao*, (1907)(《邪正理考》). Jennes wrote:

This book is the result of a very long labour and a ripe experience. In five parts it deals with the questions: 1. the veneration of the true God and of false gods; 2. genuine filial piety; 3. the true religion; 4. superstitions; 5. the preaching of the Faith. In general use and equally generally praised, some people find, though, that its tone is too polemical and too sharp. It is frequently given as a manual to the students of the catechist schools, and, for that matter, the last part contains very good practical hints for catechists. Written in easily intelligible language, pagans and Christians alike enjoy reading it. (Jennes, 1976, p, 178-179)

In 1929 when the Jining (集寧) Diocese was established, and assigned to Chinese bishop, Fr. Jacobus Zhang chose to stay in Xiwanzi. (Rondelez, 1939, p.70) Fr. Jacobus Zhang passed away peacefully on January 31, 1935. (Rondelez, 1939, p.112-113)

Josephus Hu, CM 胡若山 (浙江 台州)

Rt. Rev. Joseph Hu 胡若山 was born in Dinghai (定海) (Zhejiang 浙江), on February 2nd, 1881. At the age of five he became an orphan, and was brought up by the Catholic Missionaries. He studied at schools in Dinghai, Ningbo and Jiashing. He entered the Lazarists on November 6th, 1906, and was ordained a priest on June 5, 1909. He did pastoral work for six years. Then he taught philosophy and dogmatic theology at the Theological Seminary of Ningbo. He assisted at the Plenary Council of Shanghai in 1924, as a consulting theologian. He was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Taizhou (台州) (Zhejiang) on July 30th, 1926. He took as his Episcopal motto: "Who is like God?" (D'Elia, 1927, p.83)

In 1949 when the Communist Party took over China, he still stayed in Taizhou. The government imprisoned him in Hangzhou (杭州), and he passed away in 1962. (Qian, 1986)

Simon Ni 倪

Not much information can be found about Fr. Simon Ni. He did not appear in the group photo of the participants of the Plenary Council.

In his book on the history of Jiangnan and Nanjing Missions, Fr. Hermand mentioned that Ni was a secular priest in Shanghai. Ni passed away in 1929 at the age of 89. (Hermand, 1933, p.63) That means Ni was born in 1840. Hermand also wrote that Ni had been a priest for 52 years. (Hermand, 1933, p.63), which means that Ni was ordained in 1877, at the age of 37.

Thus Ni would have been 82 years old when he attended the Plenary Council. His age would have discounted him from accepting a new job after the Plenary Council.

Lucas Yang, S.J. 楊維時 (上海)

Compared with Simon Ni, we get a much clearer picture of Lucas Yang. His Chinese name was Wei Shi (維時). He was quite famous in Catholic circles for his publications. However, it is

difficult to find much material on the life of Fr. Lucas Yang.

Jennes pointed out that Yang translated and rewrote a book *Biographie du Pere Etienne Le Fevre. SJ. (1598-1640)* into Chinese. The new book was called *Fang Dewang Shenfu Xiao Zhuan* (《方德望神父小傳》) (Jennes, 1976, p.186) Zhang Hua, in his book “*Shanghai Zongjiao Tonglan*”, (《上海宗教通覽》) also mentioned that Yang had been the person in charge of *Revue Catholique* 《聖教雜誌》 (*Shenjiao Za Zhi*) (Zhang, 2004, p.436)

In 1936, Fr. Lucas Yang was appointed the Dean of Tangmuqiao Deanery (唐墓橋總本堂區). He was the first Chinese dean there. (Gu, 1992, p.658) According to Huang Zhiwei, Fr. Yang had been in charge of the Jesuit Xujiahui Library until 1923. (Huang, 1992, p.25)

At the time Yang was appointed Dean of the Tangmuqiao Deanery, twelve years had passed since the Plenary Council. He most likely did not take up any other important posts after this.

***Firminus Shen, S.J.* 沈錦標 (上海)**

The Chinese name of Fr. Firminus Shen, SJ. is Shen Jin Biao (沈錦標). This name appeared in a Chinese translation of Costantini's Memoirs. (Costantini, 1992, p.64)

Fr. Hermand, in his book on the history of Jiangnan and Nanjing Missions, wrote that Shen passed away in 1929 at the age of 84. (Hermand, 1933, p.63) That means Shen was born in 1845. According to Fang Hao (方豪), however, Shen was six years younger than the famous Jesuit Ma Xiangbo (馬相伯). (Fang, 1973, p.293-294) Ma was born in 1840. So Shen might have been born in 1846. Hermand also mentioned that Shen had been a Jesuit for 62 years. (Hermand, 1933, p.63) That means Shen joined the Jesuits in 1867 at the age of 23.

Not too much other information about Shen is available. In an article in 1996, Lu Xuedi (陸學迪) mentioned that Shen's original name was Shen Zhaixi (沈宰熙), and that Jin Biao is his literary name (字錦標). He is a native of Shanghai. In 1891, he was assigned to be the parish priest at Houtang Town, Jiangying County

(江陰縣後塋鎮). He returned to Shanghai in 1898. (Lu, 1996, p.5) According to Huang Zhiwei, Fr. Shen had been in charge of the Jesuit Xujiahui Library somewhere between 1912 and 1923. (Huang, 1992, p.25) Based on Hermand's data, Shen was already a 79 year old man when he attended the Plenary Council. In a picture of the participants of the Plenary Council, he was an old man with a long grey beard. Obviously, age was a reason he was not nominated to be a bishop after the Plenary Council.

From the website www.ilgis.cuhk.edu.hk, we know that he had edited a gazette of his family. It was called "A Family Gazette of the Catholic Shens in Wuxing" (《吳興沈氏奉教宗譜》). He finished his great work in 1919. (不分卷) (<http://www.ilgis.cuhk.edu.hk/songjiang/family.htm>, 2007-5-30)

Josephus Zhou 周濟世 (河北 保定)

Joseph Zhou Ji-Shi, C.M. was born on January 23, 1892 and was ordained a priest on June 29, 1919. (gcatholic.com., 2007-6-15) He was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Baoding, Hebei (河北 保定) on April 5, 1931. (Chao, 1980, p.92) He was then a philosophy professor at the Peking Seminary. (*Revue Catholique*, 1931A, p.304) He was consecrated bishop on August 2, 1931. (gcatholic.com. 2007-6-15). Regarding personal details, there is a news report in *Revue Catholique*, in 1931.

Msgr. Zhou, with the Chinese name of Ji-shi (濟世), literary name Enpu (恩普), and Christian name Josephus, was born in Xiaoguangyang Village (小廣揚村) of Gaocheng County (藁城縣) in 1891. He joined the Vincentian Fathers in his childhood, and was ordained a priest in 1919 at the Shi'men Seminary (in Peking)

When the Chinese Catholic Hierarchy was established in 1946, Msgr. Zhou was made Bishop of Baoding. On July 18 of the same year, Bp. Zhou was moved to Nanchang (南昌), Jiangxi Province (江西省), where he was made archbishop. (Chao, 1980, p.

120, 130) He was imprisoned for many years after 1949 under the Communist regime. (Motto, 1992, p.153-154) He died in 1972. (gcatholic.com)

Conclusion

People may query whether it was too early to host the Plenary Council. Costantini had just arrived in China in 1922, and he hosted the Plenary Council in 1924. Would it have been better to hold it later, so that there could have been better preparation? However, the later the Council, the later the possibility of the promotion of Chinese bishops. On the contrary, instead of waiting for a better environment, the Plenary Council itself created that better environment. We can say that the Plenary Council sped up the process of the indigenization of the Catholic Church in China.

Actually it was not easy for Costantini to appoint nine Chinese priests as consultors to the Plenary Council. His enthusiasm was not welcomed by the foreign missionaries. Right before his arrival in China, the Vatican had tried to change the situation, but no significant result had been achieved.

On November 30, 1919 the Vatican took the offensive in the question of missionary-Chinese relations. Pope Benedict XV issued the encyclical *Maximum illud*, which deplored the effects of European nationalism on the Catholic Church in China and called for eventual church administration by the Chinese clergy. The missionary clergy in China gave the letter a lukewarm response. (Hanson, 1980, p.22)

It is unfair to Costantini that his efforts were under-credited. Not many historians mention his work on the Plenary Council. Some even tried to deny his attempt to establish Chinese prefectures.

Pius XI in his encyclical 'Rerum Ecclesiae', in which he

reiterated all the principles of the letter of Benedict XV, especially in his insistence upon indigenous clergy, put his own principles into action by creating in China two prefectures which were to be governed entirely by Chinese clergy, that of Puqi in Hubei and of Lixian in Zhili. Meanwhile, Pius XI called Lebbe to Rome. He selected a friend of his, Mgr. Philip Zhao, for a bishopric and in 1926 six Chinese priests were raised to the episcopate. Lebbe himself, in order to give proof of his devotedness to China, had himself naturalized as a Chinese citizen. He returned to China in 1927. (Cary-Elwes, 1957, p.239-240)

Can the reader imagine? Throughout the whole paragraph, there is not a single line about Costantini.

At the opening ceremony on May 15, 1924, Costantini gave a speech in which he said, "Among you there are two Chinese Prelates, recently raised to the Dignity of Prefects Apostolic; these, Venerable Brethren, are the fruit of your past labours, the grain of mustard that will grow into a large tree, and bring forth abundant fruit in the future. We all share the same unity of faith and discipline, and obey the same visible Head on earth, our Holy Father the Pope." (D'Elia, 1927, p.72) Costantini was very clever. He did not mention a single word about the Chinese staff members. Obviously, he was trying to bypass the foreign missionary opposition to his convening of the Plenary Council.

The encouraging act of Pius XI in consecrating six Chinese bishops was, as anticipated, only the beginning of the signification of the Chinese mission. The time was very appropriate, just when Chinese national consciousness had reached its climax in the nineteen-twenties. Gradually the Chinese were put in command of the vicariates and prefectures, and their staffs of priests were in some cases entirely Chinese. In the eight northern ecclesiastical divisions were, at the end of the Second World War, ruled by

Chinese, in Hebei, Mongolia and Manchuria. In the east there were five, in Jiangsu and Zhejiang; in the west four, in Sichuan and Yunnan; in the center six, in Shanxi, Shaanxi and Hubei; in the south four. (Cary-Elwes, 1957, p.240-241)

Among the nine Chinese priests on the staff of the Plenary Council, five of them became bishops afterward. Another four older priests did not later take up any important positions, no doubt due to their advanced age. But their participation itself was a significant move, showing that Costantini had tried his best to give honour to the Chinese clergy. Obviously the participation on the staff of the Council was a good platform for training future Church leaders. Some of the foreign missionaries on the staff team, eg., De Smet and Valtorta, also became bishops later.

The Plenary Council, under the wise supervision of Archbishop Costantini, was a Plenary Council for Chinese DE JURE and DE FACTO.

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