

Editor's Word

In late May 2018, the Centre for Catholic Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong held an academic roundtable conference with the theme “Historiography of the Chinese Catholic Church: Historical Resources and Methodology.” During the preparation period, scholars at home and abroad actively responded to the call for papers. The conference was held successfully. The collection of papers now presented to you is the academic fruition of the participants.

The focus of the roundtable conference centered mainly on two dimensions—historical resources and methodology, so it is necessary to explain the related concepts briefly:

In terms of “historical resources (information),” the history of the Chinese Catholic Church is complex, involving a wide range of issues, and the kinds of literature are complicated. But its “resources” can be roughly divided into three aspects. First: official documents, such as various memorials, imperial edicts, and relevant laws and regulations of the governments. Second: documents of Western missionaries (or mission agencies), such as work reports, diaries, meeting records and documents, charters and constitutions of religious orders. The majority of such documents were in foreign languages. Third: folk literature, such as genealogy, couplets, ballads and folk songs. The “factual descriptions” presented in these three types of literature differ due to differences in social roles, political stances and living conditions, thus creating different opinions and conclusions.

For “methodology,” the study of Chinese Catholic history involves many fields, such as the history of Chinese and foreign transportation, history of cultural exchange between China and the

West, and history of Chinese society. The methodologies adopted by scholars with different backgrounds in different periods vary greatly. The past studies often were limited to “a Western-centered theory,” “theory of imperialist invasion of China,” “geographical concept,” “stimulus-response theory” and so on. The papers collected at this roundtable conference covered the two dimensions of “historical resources and methodologies.” The “resources” extracted in the papers were rich, and the research paradigms also broke through the old framework. Through the reference and citation of informative literature, scientific and rational conclusions were derived based on the facts. They were also the commonality of these papers. The differences in the academic background, academic direction and research interests of each scholar also show his or her academic personality. Here follows a brief review of these papers.

Devotion to the Blessed Mother is a crucial element of the Catholic faith. Catholicism entered China as a foreign culture. The missionaries had made great efforts in translating and interpreting pieces of Church literature to introduce the reverence of the Blessed Mother to the Chinese people and to let them understand the significance of the miracles related to the Blessed Mother. Professor Chen Hui-hong’s article on “Religious Accommodation and Cultural Encounters of Chinese Catholicism during the Ming and Qing: Insights from the Case of the Virgin Mary” summarizes the hard work of the missionaries from the inculturation perspective of the Blessed Mother. Her analysis and discussion have opened up a new field in deepening the study on inculturation of the Chinese Catholic Church.

The Belgian Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM) entered China in a later stage. Its history and scale of activities cannot be compared to those traditional missionary societies. However, its activities in Mongolia and Northwest China after coming to China

still left a deep impression in the history of Chinese Catholicism. “The Rise of a Local Catholic Church Through Cross-Cultural Encounters in the Ordos Region (Inner Mongolia)” of Fr. Patrick Taveirne and “The Historical Archives of Propaganda Fide in Rome as a Necessary Historical Resource for the Historiography of the Catholic Church in China” of Fr. Louis Ke-loon Ha are the “Gemini” in the collection. Similar content is presented in two dimensions, showing the authors’ academic skills. Through the use of informative archives, Fr. Taveirne’s article reviews the difficult process of setting up several CICM mission stations. It analyzes the conflict between the Church and society that took place in northern China beyond the Great Wall, thus showing the distinctive characteristics of the CICM’s activities in China. In contrast, Fr. Ha’s article focuses on the archival collection of the Roman Catholic Church, the organization of the archives, and evaluates the value of these archives. This set of essays not only contributes to Catholic studies but also provides essential clues for scholars to utilize the archives.

Compared to scholars from higher educational institutions, Fr. Hu Shibin is a unique figure among the roundtable participants. Fr. Hu, a priest of Xi’an Diocese, has been evangelizing for many years. Meanwhile, he also studied the history of the diocese ceaselessly after work. He has written the *Catholic History of Shaanxi* by the use of abundant archives. The article he submitted to the roundtable conference – “Understanding the Importance of Archives for the History of the Chinese Catholic Church and Some Suggestions” was a result of his many years of research of the history of the diocese. In the article, Fr. Hu emphasizes that archives are of great significance to the study of Church history and mission. He urges local dioceses, if conditions permit, to establish their respective archive office to show

the Chinese priests' dedication and sentiments to the study of Church history.

There are various types of Catholic literature. Besides Chinese and Western texts, there are also pieces of documents that are hidden deep among the common people. In the past, research in Catholic history had been inclined towards metaphysics, with texts as the mainstay, and the use of folk documents was rare for in-depth interpretation of Chinese Catholic history. The paper submitted by Professor Kang Zhijie uses folk documents, contracts, tax bills, folk songs etc. as the entry point to study the history of Catholic economic life and then explore specific characteristics in the historical development of the Chinese Catholic Church.

Since the 1980s, there was significant progress in the study of the Chinese Catholic Church. With the release of historical materials in various places, relevant studies in the past decade have reached a new level. Professor Ku Wei-ying's article "Deepening the Study of the Catholic History--Centered on Language" summarizes and analyzes certain representative studies in recent years. Pinpointing on the multilingual and highly professional nature of Catholic literature, the author analyzes and evaluates errors and problems in the translations of Catholic studies in mainland China in recent years. The article not only shows the author's academic vision and foreign language ability but also shows the conscience and responsibility of a senior scholar.

The "Arrangement and Analysis of the Archives of the Manchuria Diocese Held by the Paris Foreign Missions" written by Dr. Li Ji is a masterpiece in the study of Catholic history in terms of perspective, materials, theory and methodology. The article reviews and interprets the archives that she has collected. Based on informative literature, the author analyzes and discusses the history of the Catholic

Church in Manchuria. She then explores the distinctive and common traits in the historical development of the Catholic Church in northeastern China. It is commendable that Dr. Li Ji not only diligently pursued the true meaning of academics but also reviews and reflects on her academic experience. This high-standard and strict academic attitude raised the quality of her paper to a new level. Let me add one more comment: In recent years, there are breakthroughs in the study of the historiography of the Chinese Catholic Church. However, the study of Catholicism in northeastern China still looks too much neglected. The article of Li Ji has lightened up the academic field.

The “Rites Controversy” is a “hot spot” in the study of Catholicism during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The “problems” arose from the different concepts of evangelizations between Matteo Ricci and Longobardi. Academic research on Ricci has been quite sufficient in recent years while studies on his successor Longobardi is slightly lacking. “A Comparison to the ‘Longobardi’s Approach’ and ‘Riccian Methodology’” written by Professor Li Tiangang has given a valuable supplement to the weak links in academic research. The focus of this article is to analyze Longobardi’s “Treatise on Chinese Religions.” The two Catholic pioneers in the late Ming Dynasty demonstrated their missionary strategies in two different ways: “seeking common ground” and “keeping the differences.” They were both parts of the ‘dialogue’ with equal ideological value.” The article is clear in the analysis with sufficient evidence to support, which opens a window for people to understand the Catholic Church history of the late Ming Dynasty.

Shangchuan Island is a famous pilgrimage site in Chinese Catholic Church history. Its historical origins are closely related to the renowned Jesuit Francis Xavier. However, the academic community has not paid due attention to the background, development and

historical influence of the pilgrimage site. The article “Sancian: Landscape and Architecture in the Burial Place of St. Francis Xavier” written by Fr. Matthieu Masson of the Paris Foreign Missions provides a useful exploration of the place.¹ This essay not only combs through Xavier’s missionary career in the East but also discusses the gradual formation, development and improvement of the pilgrimage site after his death on Sancian, or Shangchuan Island. At the same time, precious images are inserted to the text, giving readers a unique visual enjoyment.

Monasticism is an inseparable part of the Church. It bears a special mission of evangelism. Its spiritual style of prayer and meditation has accumulated valuable experience for enriching the lives of the Catholic faithful. Regrettably, researches on the monastery are sporadic. The translated article “The Monastery Will be a Chinese House? The Inculturation of the Church in China from the Perspective of the History of Catholic Monasticism” written by Br. Matteo Nicolini-Zani is a useful supplement to the research in this field. The article has given a clue to the development of Catholic monasteries in China in the 19th and 20th centuries, along with a case study on Xishan Benedictine Monastery in Sichuan, demonstrating the function and role of the monastery in inculturation.

Professor Chen Fang-chung’s article “Classification and Analysis of Historical Materials—Research Methods for History and Chinese Catholic History” draws on his own academic research experience. He has been in the field of Chinese Catholic Church history for many years and is very familiar with different types of

¹ The articles of Father Matthieu Masson and Brother Matteo Nicolini-Zani were not presented in the roundtable conference. They can serve as supplementary to the conference’s theme and thus, they are included in this issue.

literature. This article compares, interprets, and analyzes various “sources of literature.” It also demonstrates how the same event could create disparities through the use of different documents (official archives and records, letters of missionaries, notes from contemporary people and leaflets or posts). It reveals and highlights the complexity and particularity of Chinese Catholic studies. This article tells the readers: use historical materials carefully in academic research, identify and judge the authenticity of archival materials, and reveal truthful facts based on informative literature. These are the principles and bottom lines in historical studies.

Chinese Catholic history is an integral part of Chinese history. It is closely related to the overall history of the world and is an extraordinary field in academia, which requires researchers to have a broader academic horizon. Although this journal cannot cover all the issues in Catholic studies, the scope of discussion here is unique with informative resource materials to support. The original intention of the roundtable conference’s organizer was to deepen the study of the “Historiography of the Chinese Catholic Church” from the perspective of historical resources and methodology. Going through this issue, you will find that the roundtable conference has achieved the expected goals.

There are still many academic blind spots in the study of Chinese Church history. Although the 11 articles included in this journal help supplement previous research, they are only a small part of many scientific research issues. Academic studies and academic exchanges are an endless voyage.

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