

THE BIRTH OF THE CHINA PROVINCE AND THE EXPANSION OF THE SALESIAN WORK IN EAST ASIA (1926-1927)

Carlo Socol SDB*

Introduction

The China Mission, which started in 1906, was established as an autonomous entity on 1 January 1923, when the *Visitatoria della China* was erected, comprising 32 confreres and houses and works in Macao, Heung Shan and Shiu Chow. As new missions in Japan and Siam were being accepted or considered, the *Sino-Japanese Province* was erected on 28 May 1926. In December of that same year Fr. Pietro Ricaldone set out on a year-long extraordinary visitation of the Asian Missions. By the time the visitation ended in late 1927, there was a Salesian regional presence and a well established juridical structure in East Asia: the China Province, with houses in China, Hong Kong, Macao, Shanghai, Timor, and a mission in Heung Shan; the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiu Chow; and the two missions of Miyazaki in Japan and Ratburi in Siam, soon to be erected as both Prefectures Apostolic and Salesian Visitatore. This brief paper intends to outline the juridical configuration and development strategies of the Salesian work in China and study the internal and external conditions that influenced its first expansion, in the years 1926-1927, in East Asia.¹

1. The juridical configuration of the Salesian work in China 1906-1926

The protracted negotiations to start a Salesian presence in China began in January 1890 and ended in December 1905, practically at the vigil of the departure of the 1st group of Salesians, and went through three distinct phases. The initial approach (January 1890 - June 1892) consisted in an exchange of letters between former Macao missionary

* Fr. Carlo Socol is professor of Church History at the Holy Spirit Seminary of the Diocese of Hong Kong.

¹ Chief archival sources are from Archivio Salesiano Centrale in Rome (ASC) and the Archives of the China Province in Hong Kong (AIC).

Francesco Saverio Rondina SJ and Fr. Arturo Conelli, approved by Fr. Michele Rua, and designed to solicit an invitation from local authorities. The initiative in phase two (April 1899 - November 1900) was taken by the Bishop of Macao through the Nuncio in Portugal. A 3rd and final phase (November 1902 - December 1905) initiated by the Provincial of the Portuguese Province, Fr. Pietro Cogliolo, successfully concluded the negotiations.² The first group of six missionaries, led by Don Luigi Versiglia, left Genoa on 17 January 1906 and arrived in Macao on 13 February to direct a small orphanage, the *Orfanato da Imaculada Conceição*, owned by the Bishop.

The Macao house was first attached to the Portuguese Province, as were new missions in India (Tanjore 1906, Meliapore 1908) and Mozambique (1907). Fr. Cogliolo had barely time to visit its most far-flung house (January - March 1910) when the Portuguese Revolution closed all houses in Portugal and forced the Salesians to leave Macao and take refuge in Hong Kong (November 1910). When activity resumed in May 1911 in the *Heung Shan mission*, under the Portuguese Padroado but in Chinese territory, and again in Macao in September 1912, this "China Mission" came under the Turin base, recently established Subalpina Province. It stayed with the Subalpina even when the newly entrusted mission of *Leng Nam Tou* (North Kwangtung) became the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiu Chow in 1920. All along the China Mission had but one Superior, Don (later Msgr.) Luigi Versiglia.

The anomalous "canonical situation of the confreres in China and other missions", seemingly that of having a Vicariate Apostolic 'belonging' to a Province, was discussed at length in the Superior Chapter on 30 December 1921 at the approaching of the 12th General Chapter: it was decided to seek the opinion of other religious Congregations that were in a similar situation.³ In October 1922 the Superior Chapter approved a *modus vivendi* between the Religious Superior (Provincial) and the Ecclesiastical Superior (Vicar Apostolic) and decided that where there was no Province, a Visitor would be appointed, with powers delegated by the Rector Major, according to art. 83 of the Constitutions. It was under this arrangement that a Visitatoria of China, comprising Macao and the Heung Shan Mission, was set up in 1923 under a reli-

² C. SOCOL, *The first twenty years of the Orfanato of Macao between ideal and reality (1906-1926)*, in F. MOTTO (Ed.), *Insedimenti e iniziative salesiane dopo Don Bosco*. Rome 1996, pp. 275-325.

³ *Verbali delle Riunioni Capitolari*, ASC D 872, p. 80.

gious superior or Visitatore, as distinguished from the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiu Chow, under the responsibility of a Vicar Apostolic.⁴ As we shall see, the move created a *duality* in authority, which was to cause a lot of friction between the two.⁵ In the Vicariate, in whatever concerned pastoral work missionaries obeyed the Vicar Apostolic, while for religious discipline they obeyed the Religious Superior.

Having accepted the Japan mission in 1923, on 15 December 1925 the Superior Chapter discussed and unanimously approved the motion to apply from the Holy See for the erection of the Chinese Province, which would also comprise Japan.⁶ On 28 May 1926, in the wake of a general reorganization of the Provinces worldwide, the Sino-Japanese Province was erected, with Fr. Ignazio Canazei, who since 1923 had been Visitor, appointed as its first Provincial. On paper the province comprised 14 "houses": besides Macao, Shanghai (1924) and the three houses erected in Japan (1925), also the Heung Shan (3) and Shiu Chow (6) 'houses' were counted, even though they had not been canonically erected, being mere mission stations often with only one or two resident missionaries.⁷ Fittingly, yet problematically in view of the distance, the rectors of Shanghai and Miyazaki were appointed Provincial Councillors alongside the existing ones, i.e. the rectors of Macao and Shiu Chow. In early 1927, the house in East Timor would be added and, later in the year, that of Hong Kong. By 1927, the number of confreres and novices had reached 107.⁸ On 1 August 1927, Fr. Pietro Ricaldone, Extraordinary Visitor, hived off to Japan and established the Japan and Siam (Thai) Missions, both of

⁴ The Chronicle of the China Province gives 1 January 1923 as the birthday of the Visitatoria. No document (Minutes of General Chapter, or Letter of Appointment, or Decree) has been found so far attesting the required juridical act or erection. The news was announced by Msgr. L. Versiglia, returning from the 1922 General Chapter, as he reached Macao on 10 March 1923. *Cronaca. Orfanato da Imaculada Conceição*, p. 156. The letter of appointment reached Fr. I. Canazei included in a letter of Fr. C. Gusmano, secretary of the Superior Council, dated 30 July 1923. AIC, *Nomine I*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150. Also *Atti del Capitolo Superiore* 1923, n. 22, pp. 158 and 170.

⁶ *Verballi*, ASC D 872, pp. 207-208, 337 and 363.

⁷ Copy of erection document in ASC D518 and AIC, *Ispettorica Cinese I*, 1925-1929. On the question of canonical erection of single houses see *Atti* 1928, n. 43, pp. 668-669; Canazei to Gusmano 7.7.1928 and P. Cossu's reply 16.8.1928, ASC F 156.

⁸ On 1 January 1923 the number of confreres in the Visitatoria was 32. Between 1923 and 1926 a total of 92 confreres and novices were added, 87 from abroad (20 priests, 13 *coadjutors*, 14 clerics and 34 novices and six pre-novices) and five locals (all novice *coadjutors*), with a net increase of 75. Data from *General Progressive Catalogue of Salesians of China and of China Province from 1906 to 1955*.

which became Visitatore. The China Province became known as "Ispettorìa della China di Maria Ausiliatrice". On this occasion Fr. Canazei asked the confreres to help him come up with a typically Chinese name for the Society, which as from 1 January 1928 shed its old name.⁹

2. Development strategies of Salesian work in China 1906-1926

When deciding to go to Macao, the Salesians took as good the advice that starting in a foreign dependent territory was a prudent strategy in view of the frequent revolutions that rocked China. The enormous bloodshed and destruction caused by the Boxers uprising in 1900 was on everyone's mind. The Diocese of Macao did not come under Propaganda Fide, but was under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the *Portuguese Padroado*, as were the Heung Shan and Timor missions. This had certain financial advantages, as missionaries received a salary, but posed many constraints and did not allow for free development "Salesian style".¹⁰

The *Shiu Chow Vicariate Apostolic*, erected in 1920, was under the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, to which a request for an independent Vicariate had been formally submitted in 1916.¹¹

The *St. Joseph Institute* in Shanghai (1924), instead, was owned by a Committee of laymen under the leadership of a prominent Catholic, Mr. Lo Pa Hong. The relationship between Mr. Lo and the Salesians was regulated by a convention, which, mainly due to Lo's tendency to interfere in day-to-day affairs, was insufficient to safeguard the autonomy the Salesians had been guaranteed, thus causing considerable strain and bringing the relationship to breaking point. The contract was rescinded in October 1929. In September 1931, the Salesians again started providing spiritual assistance in the Institute. New arrangements were reached in 1940, after Mr. Lo's tragic death on 30 December 1937, giving the Salesians a free hand in the school.¹²

⁹ *Verbali*, ASC D 873, p. 55; ASC F 160, Circolari 18.6.1926; AIC, *Ispettorìa Cinese I*, 1925-1939.

¹⁰ *Relazione Visita Ricaldone*, p. 20, ASC F 158.

¹¹ Decree of erection of the Shiu Chow Vicariate in *Atti*, n. 1, 1920, pp. 19-21.

¹² Copy of the 1922 contract in AIC, *Shanghai 1919-1930*. Contract of 1940 in ASC F 726, b. 6; Haouisee to Braga and Braga to Ricaldone, 29.9.1940 in AIC, *Shanghai 1940-1941*.

St. Louis Industrial School in Hong Kong was set up on more secure bases: while the land on which the school stood remained property of the Hong Kong Catholic Mission, the Salesians had a free hand in running it and in developing strategies. The only conditions were that the Salesians maintain 20 orphans introduced by the Vicar Apostolic and - this being a condition imposed by the government upon granting a larger piece of land on lease - that they invest HKD50,000 within the first three years. The arrangement suited both the Salesians, who sought a pied-à-terre in the colony to start a formation house, and the Catholic Mission, which lacked qualified personnel to run and develop the school.¹³

Fr. Pietro Ricaldone, on his visit to the region, took a dim view of working under the *Padroado* and resolutely steered Salesian work away from its jurisdiction: Tanjore, Miliapore, Timor and the Heung Shan houses were closed one after the other.¹⁴ The Macao Orphanage, however, was retained. The Salesians had since 1912 renegotiated the contract with the Bishop and, while they were still "salaried administrators" - the institute and the property still belonging to the diocese - they had won sufficient independence to develop autonomously: the institute turned out to be a useful showcase and an effective "base" for Salesian work in the region.¹⁵

One can perhaps see a lack of planning in all this: actually, it was the old strategy of getting a firm foothold, and then gradually develop according to circumstances.

3. Regional expansion of Salesian work in East Asia

In late 1917, the Missions Etrangères de Paris (MEP) were ready to cede the *Leng Nam Tou* territory in Northern Kwangtung to the Salesian Congregation. Shortly thereafter, Propaganda Fide asked the Salesians to take over part of the Vicariate Apostolic of Nagasaki (the

¹³ Copy of "Convenzione" of 8 September 1927 and correspondence in AIC, *S. Luigi (St. Louis School) Hong Kong*.

¹⁴ For India see Ricaldone to Rinaldi 22.02.1927 in ASC F 177; for Timor see *Verbali*, ASC D 873, p. 131 and Ricaldone to Canazei 29.12.1920 in ASC F 156; for Heung Shan see Canazei to Ricaldone 19.12.1927 and Ricaldone to Canazei 26.1.1928 in ASC F 156; Ricaldone's views on *Padroado Missions* in *Visita Ricaldone*, pp. 17-20.

¹⁵ SOCOL, *First twenty years...*, pp. 311, 325.

Oita and Miyazaki Prefectures, July 1923) in Japan and part of the Vicariate Apostolic of Bangkok (the Thai Peninsula, later Ratburi Prefecture Apostolic, March 1924 and June 1925), both MEP Missions. As Fr. Ricaldone pointed out, the two missions had been “imposed” on the Salesians by the Holy See.¹⁶ Earlier, in July 1922, Msgr. JB De Guebriant MEP, the former Vicar Apostolic of Canton turned Superior General, had approached the Superiors in Turin, offering the Salesians Hainan Island on condition that it be assigned to the French Salesian Province. The offer was declined, ostensibly for lack of personnel, but also because Salesian missions were never assigned to one single nation.¹⁷

3.1. *The Devolution of the MEPs, between internal crisis and strategic revision*

The reason given by the MEPs for the cession of Hainan Island to the Salesians was that the new Vicar Apostolic of West Kwangtung & Hainan, Msgr. Auguste Gauthier MEP, lacked personnel to evangelize this island the size of Switzerland. The Hainan mission, they said, would easily create “a whole” with the other Salesian presences of Macao and Shiu Chow. Lack of personnel, or the size of the territory were often cited as reasons for hiving off new missions to the Salesians and, indeed, to other congregations as well. The MEPs had started planning the division of the Vicariate Apostolic of Canton at least from as early as 1914.¹⁸ Fr. Joseph A. Pinaffo, in his *Cenni storici sulla Missione del Siam in generale e del Vicariato Apostolico di Tajaburi in particolare (1500-1943)*, a study based on reliable sources, including MEP reports, writes of a “critical period of the [MEP] Bangkok mission in the years 1916-18”. Already in the reports for the years 1900-1916, one can see a regress in the number of adult baptisms, especially when compared with the constant growth experienced in the previous 40-50 years, a situation “common to all territories evangelized by the French missionaries”, which Fr. Pinaffo attributes to the fact that the mission was entrusted to the exclusive care of one Institute or Religious Order, and made worse by the drafting into the army and return to France of the Vicar Apostolic and 14 other missionaries.

¹⁶ *Visita Ricaldone, ibid.*

¹⁷ *Verbali*, ASC D 872, p. 119.

¹⁸ M. TEIXEIRA, *A Igreja em Cantão*. Macau 1996, p. 90.

The French missionaries could no longer effectively work on the double front of seeking conversions and guaranteeing the necessary instruction to the neophytes, as they faced fierce competition by Buddhists, especially in the education field.¹⁹ These were doubtlessly true reasons. Similar reasons were cited for the cession of the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiu Chow. But there were other important motives, too. A new era of conversions was dawning, especially in China. True to their constitutional mandate of relinquishing local churches once implanted and in response to the appeals of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* (1919) to favour the local clergy, the MEPs had decided that it was time to open up their traditional missions to new forces, i.e. other Religious Orders and the local clergy. In 1926, Msgr. De Guebriant, former Vicar Apostolic of Canton, Apostolic Visitor of the China missions (1919-1920), and Superior General of the MEPs since March 1921, published a step-by-step plan for the hand over of MEP mission lands to the indigenous clergy.²⁰

3.2. The Chinese political crisis and its weight on the options of the Congregation

The expansion of the Salesian congregation in the region was, therefore, fired by new developments in China, the needs and strategies of older missionary institutes, the will of the Holy See and, of course, by her own charismatic urge of making Don Bosco's dreams come true. However, practical choices were very much dictated or influenced by the contingent situations in China, especially the internal wars and their consequences on civilian life and missionary enterprise, the revolutionary fervour to change the old mentality and inefficient ways, and the desire to get free from the fetters of the unequal treaties imposed on it in the course of the 19th century. Fr. Domingos Leong told us what consequences civil war, factional struggle and new school legislation brought to the various Salesian presences in China.²¹ Perhaps we should

¹⁹ ASC A 9060101.

²⁰ Circular letter of Msgr. De Guebriant dated 15.03.1926 in "Bulletin des missions", LX (1926), pp. 392-397.

²¹ Domingos LEONG., *The political situation in China in 1920-30 & its effects on Salesians*, paper delivered at the Hong Kong Seminar, 4-6 December 2004.

also be reminded of another endemic threat, that of inland piracy and banditry, with which the missions had to contend all the time.

Fr. Ricaldone found the situation very frustrating: it was not easy to plan ahead. This explains the decision to secure footholds in safe places like Macao, Shanghai and Hong Kong, and develop works there such as schools, the house of formation and a house to recruit and train local vocations, always with an eye to serving the Chinese people, both those seeking refuge in those territories and those who lived in the interior. The shifting of personnel and the opening of new works, such as in the case of the Shanghai, Timor and Hong Kong houses, was very much subject to the changing circumstances of a country struggling to find internal equilibrium and cohesion.

3.3. *Development choices in tension between central strategies and local needs*

In his learned talk, Fr. Francesco Motto highlighted certain differences of perception regarding mission work between the Superiors in Turin and the Salesians working in the field. In the 1920s and '30s the China missions had become a veritable workshop in evolution where new ideas, strategies and priorities were discussed and implemented. The Holy See, represented by the Apostolic Delegate Archbishop Celso Costantini, played a significant role in this.²² Fr. Canazei was a particularly keen observer and gradually grew into a convinced supporter of this evolution: unsurprisingly, his convictions about such issues as the indigenization of the church were not and could not be perceived with equal clarity or felt with the same degree of urgency by the Superiors, the natural keepers of Don Bosco's genuine spirit and method, back home.

The culture and language barriers a missionary met in China meant that his inculturation process had to be long and strenuous: young clerics, for instance, who had barely learnt the rudiments of the spoken language, and even veteran missionaries, could not be employed as

²² Francesco MOTTO, *Salesian missionary activity while Blessed Philip Rinaldi (1921-1931) was Rector Major with particular reference to East Asia*, paper delivered at the Hong Kong Seminar, 4-6 December 2004; G. BUTTURINI G., *Le Missioni Cattoliche in Cina tra le due Guerre Mondiali*. Bologna 1998, pp. 35ff.

teachers in the classroom in a country where teachers were held in high esteem and had to undergo long and rigorous language training.

When in 1923, Turin began implementing the new strategy of sending young postulants to the missions, Fr. Canazei willingly accepted. But when Fr. Rinaldi began explaining the need of implementing Don Bosco's methodology in full ("*impiantare nella Cina il sistema di D. Bosco: facendo colà quello che facciamo qua!*"), the same Canazei, taught by experience, explained how this plan could not be applied in China. He reminded the Superiors that it was a mistake to expect of "pagan China" what had been achieved in Europe or America, and kept insisting that, given China's peculiar situation, alternative ways had to be adopted: he declined to receive any more novices and asked that clerics be sent as practical trainees, instead.²³

4. The visit of Fr. Ricaldone in China (1927)

The Asian Missions were new ventures for the Congregation, were expanding rapidly and, while other parts of the world had been visited by Extraordinary Visitors sent by the Rector Major, no Superior from Turin had ever visited Asia. Visitors were sent: (1) to insure unity of direction and intent, (2) strengthen the bonds of fraternal love and solidarity to make all Salesians one family, and (3) to get a better idea of the specific problems of each region.²⁴ An extraordinary visit had been announced by Fr. Rinaldi as early as in mid 1924.²⁵ The Rector Major especially assigned Fr. Pietro Ricaldone, the Prefect General, who was also the Councillor in charge of missions, as Extraordinary Visitor to Asia, precisely to respond to the specific needs of the Asian missions, which "on account of the variety of races and for other reasons [were] very different from the Missions in the West".²⁶ The Superiors, in fact, had been made aware of a number of specific issues that needed better understanding and more informed handling.

²³ Correspondence in ASC F 156 and especially Canazei to Rinaldi 18.11.1925; echoes of the challenges foreign missionaries met in teaching in Callisto CARAVARIO, *Lettere*, ed. Ferreira A. da Silva. Roma 1998, p. 83.

²⁴ *Atti* 1926, n. 37, p. 526.

²⁵ Canazei to Rinaldi 12.12.1924 in ASC F 156.

²⁶ *Atti* 1926, n. 37, p. 527.

4.1. Reality

The Visitor was impressed above all by the *excessive size* of the province, which made it “impossible to take care of regions so distant, with so diverse interests and conditions”, and hence proposed to hive off Japan and Siam, appointing Don V. Cimatti and Don G. Pasotti, respectively, to head the two missions. It was not just a proposal: it was a decision, which he announced and implemented right away.²⁷

The *political situation*, too, could not but impress him. Had Fr. Ricaldone visited China during a more peaceful period, he might have been able to fully appreciate her millenarian culture. Instead he happened to be there right in the middle of a chaotic civil war.

“China is in utter chaos... The [obvious] painful consideration is that in the present situation missionary work is very difficult and unfortunately nobody knows when this state of affairs will end. Together with banditry and bolshevism the wind of nationalism has entered the country. China is an enormous giant waking up, stirring herself, wishing to equip herself in order to occupy a place it believes it belongs to her in the field of progress and civilization”.²⁸

None of the places where the Salesians were working, except perhaps Macao, remained unshaken by the revolution. Southern China was the cradle of revolutionary ideas and even Shiu Chow had been sucked in by the tornado: as a matter of fact, the Visitor observed, it was “one of the centres of the Bolshevik and revolutionary movement”. This state of affairs not only made missionary work all the more complicated. It also demanded that missionaries “exercise greater prudence, refrain from meddling in political issues, always show the host land in good light and seek souls alone”.²⁹

Emergencies were the order of the day, and that of Shanghai, as we shall see, was particularly dramatic. Unsurprisingly, the Visitor had to use considerable time and effort to solve them. Notwithstanding the “dreadful crisis”, he found dedicated and self-sacrificing confreres everywhere. The Shiu Chow missionaries, men and women alike, had all remained at their posts unlike protestant missionaries, thus winning the

²⁷ *Visita Ricaldone*, p. 60.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

respect of the population. He found the Salesian spirit good and the Vicariate better developed than might have appeared from the regular reports, or the occasional complaints, received in Turin. Many buildings had been put up, but Salesian work as such had been neglected: the Don Bosco and St. Joseph Institutes belonged to the Vicariate. They could, and should, one day be transferred to the Congregation.³⁰

This last issue was but one of a host of problems that could be lumped under the heading of relationship between the Ecclesiastical Authority, invested in the Vicar Apostolic, and the Religious Authority, exercised by the Salesian Provincial, and that is too ample to deal with in this short report: coordination of the two roles, concerted strategies, handling of personnel, division of goods, finances, even the spiritual care of the sisters, etc. all were sources of friction and misunderstandings, which were made worse by an “uncommunicative” Bishop Versiglia and an “unyielding” Fr. Canazei, and which the Visitor was unable to dissipate entirely.

In the Shiu Chow Vicariate, where mission stations could typically be 50kms apart, Versiglia had multiplied missionary residences for a more capillary pastoral action, assuming that Turin would continue to send mature personnel. The Superiors, instead, favoured fewer, better-manned centres; they had also begun to send novices instead of priests to the missions, leaving several confreres isolated. Fr. Ricaldone’s promise to send 12 priests in the next five-six years left Versiglia “relieved, yet skeptical”.³¹

4.2. *Goals achieved*

Division and restructuring of the Province: Fr. Ricaldone got a clear picture of the staggering difficulties caused by distances and of the challenges China alone posed. Hence, he decided that it was better to set the two other missions on their own path at this stage. He equally became convinced that it was not in the Congregation’s best interests to continue working in Heung Shan and East Timor under the *Padroado*, and thus set the stage for withdrawing from these two missions. The Macao Orphanage got a boost: “Much remains to be done to give the

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-36.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-34.

[Macao] workshops the standard organization we require, both regarding general culture [the academic part], and professional training and [technical] drawing".³²

He envisioned *Shanghai as a second hub* of Salesian expansion in China, notwithstanding the turmoil it was caught in. As the nationalist troops entered the city in late March 1927, the Salesians and the boys had made a dramatic escape, taking refuge in the foreign concessions with the help of Italian diplomats and marines. The school building was turned into a military hospital, leaving only part of the third floor for the students who returned there. It was a situation fraught with physical and moral danger:

"It is impossible to tell how long this state of affairs will last. However, we are convinced, and with us quite a few among the most authoritative Jesuits, that we should remain in Shanghai, notwithstanding the adverse situation... We have to remain in Shanghai and wait for things to settle, because a bright future lies ahead for us here".³³

He decided to leave Fr. S. Garelli, and Fr. E. Fontana, with 40 boys to weather the storm. Fr. Fontana eventually managed to secure permission from the Bishop to open a school in the International Concession, on condition that the Salesians ditch Lo Pa Hong, who was on the verge of bankruptcy, thus paving the way for the establishment of the Don Bosco Institute (1932). Talks were held with Bishop Simon Tsu of Haimen, one of six Chinese bishops consecrated by Pius XI in 1926, to open at least two schools in his newly established Vicariate.³⁴

A Hong Kong Presence. The withdrawal of all except two confreres from Shanghai made it possible to finally accept the St. Lewis Industrial School in Hong Kong and to reinforce Macao and the Shiu Chow Vicariate. Personnel, machinery and even some pupils were redistributed: Fr. V. Bernardini and three others moved to St. Lewis and cleric Callisto Caravario, returning from Timor, was assigned to Shiu Chow.

The Novitiate. Canazei had asked for a moratorium on the sending of novices from Europe. The province lacked a house for them, teachers and money. Several found to be deficient or in poor health, had to be sent home at considerable cost. Besides, instructing the novices in

³² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

³⁴ Ricaldone to Rinaldi 13.7.1927 ASC F 158.

Italian meant foregoing the chance of giving locals a truly “Chinese” formation. The Visitor admitted that certain aspects of the plan needed improvement: more careful selection in Turin, better personnel in China, a proper house, teaching aids, adequate programmes, timetable and diet. Yet he insisted on the soundness of Turin’s strategy.³⁵

He reported to Rinaldi that having properly explained the mind and strategy of the Superiors, in the end, “all convened” on the necessity of sending young novices from Europe to form, in conjunction with the still sparse local candidates, a congruous group of young trainees that would mature together and help each other in a mutually conducive atmosphere: the Europeans in learning the language and the culture, the locals in gradually absorbing the “genuine spirit of Don Bosco” from their peers formed near the Centre of the Congregation. The Provincial Councillors were convinced of this and, in the last meeting before the Visitor’s departure, they discussed ways and means of establishing the house of formation. Unfortunately, these views were shared neither by the Provincial nor by the Vicar Apostolic. Having reached a consensus on the necessity of a house of formation, Canazei entered the following in his Chronicle: “Rev. Fr. Ricaldone intends to speak about a house of formation above all for young novices to be sent from Italy; Fr. Provincial is against such a project, too difficult to implement, and intends to speak of a house of formation mainly for locals”.³⁶

In the end, Fr. Ricaldone, as we know, decided to send not only Fr. Pasotti, the Master of Novices, but all the novices as well and other confreres too (21 in all) to Thailand. The reason he gave in his report to the Rector Major for such a move was that since the novitiate had moved to Macao, it was no longer possible to continue “on account of the [lack of] premises and the impossibility to enforce [the canonically required] separation or to introduce improvements”. And hence, “for the good of “*quei cari figliuoli*”, he decided it would be moved to Bang Nok Khuek, where they would find a house and a suitable environment. Of course Canazei thought the move unnecessary. The novices were admitted to their profession by the Chinese Provincial Council on 12 October, four days before their departure for Thailand.³⁷ Their profession later required a “sanatio”, and caused further argument between Turin and Macao,

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63. *Cronaca Ispettorale* (AIC), p. 46.

³⁷ *Visita Ricaldone*, p. 66; *Cronaca Ispettorale*, pp. 44-45.

since Bang Nok Khuek had not been erected as a novitiate. The decision for this drastic removal and transplant had been taken at a Provincial Council meeting chaired by Fr. Ricaldone on 30 July and announced to the confreres the following day. As of 1 August, the Japan mission *effectively* ceased to belong to the China Province while the Thai mission eventually started as an independent work from day one, with the first batch of personnel transferred from the China Province.³⁸

4.3. *Unsolved questions*

Many of the differences over how the Congregation and the Vicariate would relate to each other remained unsolved. An *Instructio* issued by Propaganda Fide on 8 December 1929, and dealing with the same problems, came out in favour of the Vicariates,³⁹ thus causing further misunderstandings and tensions especially when Canazei succeeded Versiglia as the Shiu Chow Vicar Apostolic in 1930.⁴⁰ Turin stopped sending young novices to China until 1933, thus stunting growth within the province for many years to come. The Congregation was overstretched and a moratorium on new houses remained in place from 1929-1932.⁴¹ The resolution of starting a House of Formation was finally implemented when the Shaukiwan plot was bought on Hong Kong Island in 1931, but the house had to go through difficult years before it could become a well established institution where young Salesians, both local and foreign, could be suitably formed.

³⁸ The birthday of the two Visitatore is 12 Dec 1927, when the Superior Chapter “stabilisce che [...] le case del Giappone formino una visitatoria con Visitatore D. Cimatti Vincenzo; e che le case del Siam formino una visitatoria con Visitatore D. Pasotti Gaetano, il quale fu eletto anche Direttore di Bangnok Khuek”. *Verbali*, p. 55, ASC D 873. A request to hive off the two missions, submitted by Fr. Canazei and his Council on 24 January 1928, can only be seen as a formality. Copy in AIC, *Thailandia*.

³⁹ *Instructio ad Vicarios Praefectosque Apostolicos et ad Superiores Institutorum, quibus a S. Sede Missiones concreditaе sunt*, in AAS 22 (1930) 111-115.

⁴⁰ *Elementi giuridici per determinare i rapporti tra il Vicariato Apostolico o il Prefetto Apostolico e i Religiosi esenti esistenti nel Vicariato Apostolico o nella Prefettura Apostolica*, ASC A 8300158, and Canazei’s observations of July 1930, *Osservazioni intorno al regolamento missionario approvato ad experimentum nel Capitolo Generale XIII, fatte in base della Instructio emanate dalla Congregatio de Propaganda Fide addi 8 Dicembre 1919*, in ASC A 8300157.

⁴¹ *Atti* 1928, n. 46, p. 693.

Conclusions

By the time Fr. Ricaldone left Hong Kong and returned to Turin via Siam and India, one could speak of a Salesian regional presence in East Asia. Japan and Thailand were incipient missions and soon would be turned into Prefectures Apostolic. China had an established Vicariate Apostolic and houses in the main foreign enclaves of Macao, Hong Kong and - a foothold at least - in Shanghai. Fr. Ricaldone envisaged a bright future. He also became aware of the enormous masses of people that inhabited those lands, and on board the ship that took him back to Europe, he conceived the idea of launching a *Crusade for Asia*, much as Don Bosco had done for the Americas.⁴²

He had gained valuable first hand knowledge of the situation and the challenges the Congregation faced in the East. As far as China was concerned, he had sought to speak to a number of experienced Church people on selected topics, but without having the time, or the opportunity, or the mindset to fully grasp the important evolution that evangelization in China was going through, i.e. the gradual turning of missions into local Churches. Priority was fidelity to Don Bosco and hence the need to bring the China Province in line with the thinking in Turin. He therefore recommended that Canazei, even though “a truly exemplary religious” and “a man of non ordinary qualities”, be changed when his six-year term as Provincial expired.⁴³ New strategies, favouring the development of schools, were implemented by Fr. Carlo Braga, Provincial from 1930 to 1952.

⁴² Ricaldone a Rinaldi, 00.11.1927 “Salviamo i nostri fratelli” in ASC A 9050111.

⁴³ *Visita Ricaldone*, pp. 70-71.