

# THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS OF THE *ORFANATO* OF MACAO BETWEEN IDEAL AND REALITY (1906-1926)

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The present study aims at sketching the history of the first 20 years of the Salesian Orphanage of Macao (the «*Orfanato*»),<sup>1</sup> focusing mainly on three problem areas of the first Salesian settlement in China: 1. the charismatic urge that brought the Salesians to Macao; 2. the first painful impact with reality; 3. the role played by the *Orfanato* in the overall strategy of Salesian expansion.

## 1. A charismatic urge

What Don Bosco exactly thought about China is an issue which has yet to be explored in all its facets, aims, and even – dare we say – manipulations. Is there a link, for instance, between the repeated references to negotiations Don Bosco was conducting to set up a house in Hong Kong and his attempts in 1874 to have the Society recognized by the Holy See?<sup>2</sup> Don Bosco was fascinated by China, he saw it in dreams that have become classics of the Salesian tradition. Yet how much did he know or understand about China, of which he wrote in his spiritual testament words that have the ring of prophecy?

«A suo tempo si porteranno le nostre missioni nella Cina e precisamente a Pechino. Ma non si dimentichi che noi andiamo pei fanciulli poveri ed abbandonati. Là fra popoli sconosciuti e ignoranti del vero Dio si vedranno le maraviglie finora non credute, ma che Iddio potente farà palesi al mondo».<sup>3</sup>

These words are a spur and inspiration for the Salesian Society even at the present day. But did every word that the all-observant first generation of Sale-

<sup>1</sup> Or *Orphanato*. Macao in the Portuguese language is spelled *Macau*.

<sup>2</sup> To strengthen the case for the Society's approval Don Bosco mentioned, among other things, his negotiations with the Vicar Apostolic of Hong Kong, Mgr. T. Raimondi, to open a house in the British colony. In March 1874 he described the negotiations variedly as «almost concluded» or «concluded». He was about to «open houses in Hong Kong [...] as soon as the Society was granted approval». Having later decided, however, to go to Patagonia instead, he made a remark about the negotiations which made them appear merely incidental, granted the words quoted were actually his: «...per un istante mi lasciai andare a trattative con [Mons. Raimondi]». MB X, pp. 739, 741, 767, 773, 784, 947, 954, 1268.

<sup>3</sup> Cf F. MOTTO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 dal Sac. Gio. Bosco a' suoi figliuoli salesiani*. Roma, LAS 1985, p. 59.

sians recorded from the lips of Don Bosco carry the same prophetic significance?

Don Arturo Conelli (1864-1924), «l'esimio Don Arturo Conelli», as he has been referred to, undoubtedly a capable man,<sup>4</sup> was the only confidant of some announcements of Don Bosco regarding the future work of the Salesians in China. He played a major role in the negotiations for the Salesians to join the China mission, particularly in the first phase, having been 'designated' by Don Bosco as the future leader of the first missionary expedition to China. This was a conviction shared by both Superiors and confreres. However, how this conviction was formed is unclear, since to date no document has surfaced attesting to a positive act of designation by Don Bosco. Two things, however, are certain: that Conelli never went to China, and that the role he played to open a route for the Salesians to enter that country was soon forgotten. Neither the necrology written by Don Filippo Rinaldi, nor the funeral eulogy pronounced by Don Egenio Ceria mention the fact.<sup>5</sup>

Sifting through the scattered information that is available in an attempt to shed light on what may have happened does bring home some truths.

### 1.1. *The negotiations: the role of fr. Francesco Saverio Rondina SJ*

Fr. Francesco Saverio Rondina SJ (1827-1897), who was headmaster at the S. José Seminary in Macao from 1861 until his expulsion in 1871 for his role in denouncing the infamous «coolie trade»,<sup>6</sup> is generally credited with being the person who first attempted to pave the way for the Salesians to enter the China mission.<sup>7</sup> Existing narratives give special importance to a letter that Rondina wrote to Don Conelli from the office of the *Civiltà Cattolica* in Rome on 14th January 1890:

«...Se mai avverrà che V.R. sia destinata, come con ardore desidera, alla missione cinese, vorrei esserne informato, perché ho colà non pochi amici e antichi scolari, che avrebbero caro di fare la sua conoscenza; e le potrebbero eziandio essere utili in qualche cosa. Il divisamento di D. Bosco fu ispirazione del cielo. Se i Salesiani andranno ad aprire una casa a Pekino o in altra città della Cina, ben presto avranno intorno a sé un'accolta di giovani cinesi desiderosi di apprendere le scienze e le arti d'Europa; e questo sarà il principio di una fiorente missione. Fo voti adunque perché il pio disegno

<sup>4</sup> P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, III. *La canonizzazione (1888-1934)*, Roma 1988, p. 148. E. CERIA, *Annali della Società Salesiana*, II, Torino s.d., p. 384.

<sup>5</sup> Cf ASC B528 Conelli.

<sup>6</sup> M. TEIXEIRA, *Macao e a sua Diocese*, 8, *Padres da Diocese de Macau*, Macau 1972, pp. 262-8.

<sup>7</sup> G. MELLINATO, *Le prime missioni dei Salesiani e la «Civiltà Cattolica»*, in «Civiltà Cattolica» 1992, IV, pp. 60-65. Rondina's obituary in «Civ.Catt.» 1897, XVI/IX, pp. 46-47. Cf also *Annali*, III, 598. C.A. KIRSCHNER, *Dom Bosco e a China*, Macau 1970, pp. 86ff. M. RASSIGA, *Breve cenno storico sull'Opera Salesiana in Cina*, mimeogr., Aberdeen (Hong Kong) 1971, pp. 11ff.



venga quanto prima attuato; e mi ricordo di averne, molti anni sono, parlato col car.mo D.Bosco; il quale fé buon viso alla proposta, e mi disse solamente che aveva bisogno di un maggior numero di evangelici operai, e agguisse che indi a pochi anni sperava di poter mandare missionarii anche alla Cina».<sup>8</sup>

This represents the first documentary evidence available. It was written in answer to a letter dated January 8, which Conelli had attached to a copy of a drama he had written, destined to be published in the *Civiltà Cattolica*. While this was ostensibly the object of his letter, Conelli had taken the opportunity of illustrating D. Bosco's vision of China and his desire to send Salesians to work for the young in Peking, without omitting a reference to his great desire and to the likelihood of his being sent to that mission. This letter has not been found,<sup>9</sup> yet it represents the first shrewd move aimed at bringing the Salesians to China. The timing and the actors involved fit into the scenario of a Salesian Congregation at the height of its charismatic phase, all intent on making Don Bosco's prophecies come true.

Don Bosco had passed away two years earlier and the Salesians were left with a fond remembrance of him and of his words. The Congregation was taking steps to introduce his cause of canonization. The 'miracle' of Don Bosco was being hailed in the Church and in society at large. The 1889 General Chapter was convened to coordinate the Congregation's worldwide initiatives under the leadership of the new Superior General.<sup>10</sup> The prevailing atmosphere called for every member of the Society to faithfully continue the work and enhance the spirit of Don Bosco: if he were here, what would he do?<sup>11</sup>

In the wake of what Don Bosco had written in his spiritual testament it is not surprising that Don Michele Rua, Don Luigi Versiglia and presumably most Salesians shared the conviction that to go to China was to make Don Bosco's dreams come true. They considered it merely a matter of time.<sup>12</sup> But this was above all the conviction of Conelli, the leader designate. The little evidence available suggests that he went one step further to make this dream become a reality: he started to actively pave the way, and it was for this that he had written to Rondina.

<sup>8</sup> Rondina to Conelli 14.01.1890. The letters of Rondina to Conelli were originally in the possession of the Archives of the China Province. Since 1977 they have been in ASC F478 Macau.

<sup>9</sup> The archives of «Civiltà Cattolica» are presently being reorganized and a search among Rondina's papers has proved fruitless.

<sup>10</sup> STELLA, *ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>11</sup> F. DESRAMAUT, *Les Mémoires I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne*, Lyon 1962(5), pp. 80-81.

<sup>12</sup> China was on the priority list of the first generation of Salesians as evidenced by a 1910 note of Don Pietro Cogliolo about Salesian involvement in S. Africa: «Io credo sia caso unico nella storia dello sviluppo dell'opera salesiana. Dopo aver pensato tanto alle missioni di America e della Cina, non pare ai superiori arrivato il tempo di volgere il loro sguardo a quest'immenso Sud Africa, ove è tutto da farsi». Cogliolo to Barberis, 16.07.1910, in ASC 10650 Cogliolo Pietro. On Pietro Cogliolo (1866-1932) cf *Dizionario Biografico dei Salesiani*, Torino 1969, p. 89.

On February 2 Rondina wrote another letter to Conelli to explain the strategy he intended to use to have the Salesians invited:

«Ogni sua lettera è per me un regalo; né so veramente come corrispondere a tanta sua bontà. Quel poco ch'io posso presso gli amici miei nella Cina, l'impiegherò di buon grado allo scopo che le dissi nell'ultima mia. Ho già scritto a uno de' miei antichi discepoli colà...perché metta tosto mano a preparare per mezzo del giornale di Macao, di cui egli è collaboratore, la pubblica opinione a favore della Congregazione Salesiana; e a tal uopo gli ho promesso d'inviargli programmi e notizie intorno alle fondazioni e alle opere intraprese dai Salesiani, e delle quali conviene che V.R. mi fornisca un sunto. Una tal pubblicazione troverà eco ne' giornali di Hong-Kong e di Shang-hae, dove ho parimente antichi discepoli e amici. All'istesso tempo ho fatto sapere il mio divisamento ad altre persone di colà molto zelanti del pubblico bene, animandole a prendere a cuor questo affare...».<sup>13</sup>

Things were moving at a fast pace. Having received Conelli's reply to his first letter Rondina had already set in motion his plan to sensitize a wide range of public opinion in China and thus pave the way for the Salesians to join that mission. Conelli replied on Feb. 11 sending the literature requested.

But prior to acknowledging Rondina's first letter he had sought the advice of Don Rua. This we gather from a letter which Conelli wrote to his Superior on Feb. 16 to inform him of the pace at which things were evolving and to seek assurances that he was not overstepping the guidelines received, which must have been rather general. Without waiting for a reply, Conelli wrote again on 22 February. Don Rua, who was in France, instructed his secretary Don Celestino Durando to open a file on China and to advise Conelli to continue with the negotiations, but for the time being to avoid any commitment and to keep him informed of everything. Don Rua approved of the exchanges but regarded them as «polite correspondence».<sup>14</sup> Conelli had replied to the Jesuit illustrating the tactics which the Salesians had tested in other missions, namely of starting with a popular work for poor children and then applying for a mission proper. Rondina, who anticipated some opposition from non-Christians or possibly the jealousy of other Religious Orders, considered the strategy a viable one<sup>15</sup>. And since Conelli had remarked that Don Bosco had dreamt of Peking as the first

<sup>13</sup> Rondina to Conelli, 02.02.1890. ASC F478 Macau.

<sup>14</sup> Rua to Conelli, 01.03.1890 from Marseilles, ASC, A893 Missioni Cina - Heung Shan. From the correspondence between Rua and Conelli one gathers the impression that the latter gave to his dealings with Rondina far more importance than his Superior did. Whereas Conelli speaks of «consiglio ed incarico da Lei avuto», and elsewhere of «mandato avutone»; Don Rua never mentions any *mandate*, and at this early stage calls the dealings «dignitosa corrispondenza». Again, while Conelli mentioned an «incarico» which Rondina had presumably received from Don Rua (Conelli to Rua 22.02.1890), Don Rua himself merely advised Conelli to accede to Rondina's requests and to thank him on his behalf for what he was trying to do for the Salesian Society.

<sup>15</sup> Rondina to Conelli 18.02.1890 in ASC F478 Macau.



station for his Salesians and that hence he ought to look further afield than Macao or Shanghai, he wrote:

«... Anch'io son d'avviso che conviene prender di mira Pechino; ma per giungere fin là, sarà bene fermar prima il piede in qualche porto dell'impero, ove in caso di persecuzione (cosa facilissima ad avvenire) si possa trovare un rifugio all'ombra delle potenze europee, e donde si possa, calmata la tempesta, rientrare agevolmente nell'interno della Cina».<sup>16</sup>

By early April Rondina had received replies from his friends in China and was enquiring whether the Salesians would be able to provide teachers in engineering. He also asked for «syllabuses» in English and Portuguese and asked for the Superior General to take a hand in the proceedings. He felt, in fact, that the negotiations with his friends in Macao would produce results.<sup>17</sup> Conelli wrote on May 3 to inform his superior. Don Rua was still touring France and was only able to answer on Sep. 14 to give Conelli a few pragmatic hints as to what were the basic conditions the Salesians were seeking.<sup>18</sup> In the meantime Rondina's friends in Macao had contacted the bishop<sup>19</sup> who had shown an interest in having the Salesians to work under his direction for his diocese, first of all to lend a hand in Timor and then open a house in Macao. The government was agreeable. Solicited for an answer, Don Rua finally wrote to the bishop accepting the offer in general, insisting that the Salesians were keen to settle in Macao first and promising to do something in future about Timor. The bishop had indicated he would finance two missionaries. Don Rua asked in return how many missionaries could be supported by a joint effort of the bishop, the government and the Catholic community. Declaring himself keen to satisfy the desire of those parties, he added:

«...siamo certi appagare in pari tempo uno dei sospiri più ardenti del nostro venerato fondatore Don Bosco, il quale, nei suoi ultimi anni specialmente, parlava della Cina con grande affetto e con parole che ci parevano ispirate».

Don Rua sounded extremely cautious about the possibility of a solution in the short term, since the Salesians were committed to both old and new missions at the request of the Holy Father and of heads of governments, who had promised substantial help. He was giving a hint to the bishop that the Salesians were looking forward to a more comprehensive financial proposal. He then concluded by asking the bishop whether it would be alright with him if in «a few years time» a Salesian went to Macao to negotiate directly.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Rondina to Conelli 26.02.1890 in ASC *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Rondina to Conelli as quoted in Conelli to Rua 03.05.95. The letter is not listed.

<sup>18</sup> Rua to Conelli from Amiers 14.09.1890. ASC A450 Rua.

<sup>19</sup> D. António Joaquim Medeiros, 1884-1897.

<sup>20</sup> Rua to Medeiros, 03.10.1890. Reproduced in KIRSCHNER, p. 100b.

Given these sentiments, it is not surprising that Don Rua did not get an immediate answer from Macao. A hiatus occurs at this point broken only by a letter from Rondina to Conelli dated June 6, 1892 announcing that the Macao party was having difficulty in coming up with a financial package, and suggesting that the Salesians go via Lisbon to qualify as Portuguese missionaries sent by and at the expense of that government. Six months later Rondina announced that, for the time being, the Macao option was to be considered closed, since on the one hand Macao was in a recession and no money could be found to support the institution, and on the other hand the Salesians had refused to consider the offer to go to Timor.<sup>21</sup> The first phase in the negotiations was effectively over.

### 1.2. *Don Arturo Conelli*

The idea that Don Arturo Conelli had been designated by Don Bosco to lead the first Salesian missionary expedition to China is rooted in the particular environment of the two houses of formation, San Benigno (Turin) and Foglizzo (Turin), where episodes that took place beginning from October 1886 were handed down through a Salesian oral tradition which at times seems to have grown with its telling. Some key episodes began with private colloquies between Don Bosco and Conelli. It was the year of the missionary dream of Barcellona and speculation was bound to be high given not only the aura which surrounded Don Bosco but also the genre he chose when speaking of the development of Salesian missions – that of the prophetic dream. What further complicated matters was Don Bosco's by no means rare penchant for trying to minimize the impact of his words, only to end at times with a baffling counter-twist:

«...Oh, non badare, Don Bosco fabbrica sempre al suo solito castelli in aria... Del resto, anche quando voleva andare in Patagonia, i Cardinali dicevano che Don Bosco era pazzo. Invece si è visto. Ma in Cina, quanto maggior bene faranno i Salesiani!»

And of course there was the readiness in so many among Don Bosco's audience to interpret every word of his as supernaturally inspired. A firm believer in the supernatural was Conelli, at least in what personally affected him.

«[Don Bosco] aveva lo sguardo fisso in alto e il volto ispirato. Don Conelli sentiva di essere vicino al soprannaturale. Il Santo parlò a lungo in tono vibrato, ansioso, e quando tacque, parve tornare in sé da una mistica contemplazione».<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Rondina to Conelli 10.06.1892; 03.12.1892. ASC F478 Macau.

<sup>22</sup> *Annali*, III, p. 558-9. G. BOSIO, *Martiri in Cina*, Torino 1977, pp. 3-7. Bosio quotes numerous memoirs of early Salesians.



With these expressions he described a private colloquy in which Don Bosco spoke to him of Salesians and Sisters working along China's Yellow River. Conelli narrated the contents of the disclosure to the clerics, who enthusiastically gave their names to a list of volunteers which Don Giulio Barberis drew up and presented to Don Bosco. Among them was the name of Eugenio Ceria<sup>23</sup>. Top of the list was Conelli. Don Bosco showed delight but did not express any opinion. Years later Ceria was to admit that Don Bosco was probably «joking».<sup>24</sup>

The first written statement of Conelli's wishing to go to China can be dated Foglizzo, March 1888. Don Bosco had already passed away. Conelli had been ordained for one year and was experiencing in his heart and manifesting to Barberis that mixture of enthusiasm and frustration not unusual in idealistic young priests.

«...Se ella fosse qui a Foglizzo gliene direi tante tante... Forse ho un vulcanetto nel cuore in questi giorni, quantunque fuori non appaia nulla. *Poveri fanciulli cinesi, se potessi riversare su di essi la lava del mio vulcanetto*».<sup>25</sup>

He mentioned some conflicts and asked for prayers to help him achieve some equilibrium between his personal desires and the duties assigned to him. He had difficulties both with the novices and Don Eugenio Bianchi, the rector of the house, difficulties which he repeatedly mentioned in some ten letters he wrote to Barberis in those years. In one such letter, again undated but probably written in 1888, he was asking to be assigned to a new job:

«...farò domanda, anzi faccio con questa mia domanda per le missioni d'America, per poter partire con D. Lasagna o Monsignore purché né coi chierici né con Don Bianchi io mi abbia a trovare».<sup>26</sup>

He felt he was esteemed but not loved. In a letter dated 24 November 1892, when hopes of going soon to China had all but faded, he wrote:

«...Oh come sarei contento di non aver più a fare coi chierici!... Ah Cina birbona, quanto ti fai aspettare! Se fosse venuta a togliermi d'impiccio come ne sarei stato contento! Certo che sento molto questo isolamento

<sup>23</sup> Memorie di Don Eugenio Ceria, quoted in BOSIO, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Annali*, III, p. 597. The role of Barberis in this non-event raises an intriguing question. Barberis is the chief source of the missionary dream of 1871 or 1872, which Don Bosco narrated to Pius IX in April 1876 and to Don Francesco Bodrato in the following July. Bodrato immediately retold the dream to Barberis. Then only a few months after having heard the dream from Don Bosco Bodrato left at the head of the second missionary expedition. Cf MB X, pp. 53ff. and A.S. FERREIRA, *Sogno di Don Bosco sulle missioni in Patagonia (1871-1872)*, unpublished computer printout. Now, when Conelli confided to Barberis what he had heard from Don Bosco about China, did Barberis conclude that Conelli would likewise head the missionary expedition to China?

<sup>25</sup> Conelli to Barberis, undated. ASC B528 Conelli. Conelli was ordained priest on 26.03.1887.

<sup>26</sup> Conelli to Barberis, undated, from Foglizzo. From the letter we gather that Don Bosco was already dead.

(per così chiamarlo) in cui mi trovo; amerei meglio girare di qua e di là, per prediche, per faticare anche di corpo, che non sia questa vita di quasi esilio...».<sup>27</sup>

Finally on 13 Sep. 1893 he learnt of his new assignment as rector of Orvieto (Terni) after 13 years spent with the clerics, of which 12 as a teacher of philosophy. He would have preferred to substitute Don Francesco Varvello, the then prefect of studies at the seminary for foreign missions in Valsalice, before leaving Europe. But if in his new office in Orvieto he was unable to rely on any past experience, at least he was ready to take it up with a keen desire to gain some experience for when he would be able to work in China.<sup>28</sup>

Conelli's missionary vocation underwent an evolution. In 1883 he admitted having given some thought to going to the missions, but refused to be cast in the role that Don Barberis had suggested when he was trying to fit his clerics in a dream on Cartagena (South America) which Don Bosco had narrated.<sup>29</sup> As we have seen, in 1888 he was ready to go to the Americas, provided he could escape from his worries. In January 1890 he approached Rondina informing him he had been destined for China and enlisting his good offices to find a way for the Salesians to take up that mission. He did it with notable singlemindedness and with an unfaltering consciousness that he had been predestined to lead the first expedition. Many shared this conviction as also did Don Rua. Yet, as we have pointed out, one notices differences in their appraisals. While Don Rua held a detached and open attitude as to the role Conelli was to play, the latter felt he was acting on the strength of what he called «mandates» from his Superior and further, in some rather irrelevant occurrences, actually saw a confirmation of his conviction that Don Bosco had spoken to him prophetically about China. When in mid 1890 bishop Medeiros responded to Rondina's overtures by manifesting interest in the work of the Salesians, Conelli wrote to Don Rua in the following terms:

«...Da quanto ho potuto capire il Signore ha disposto quanto all'affare di Macao e Timor in modo conforme ai miei (!) desiderii. E poiché, salvo circostanze al momento non prevedibili, la cosa si condurrà a buon termine, desidero farle noto, ora che l'avvenimento è compiuto, *una parola che chiamo profetica* di Don Bosco circa questa cosa. Tre mesi innanzi ch'egli andasse in Paradiso, venuto a Foglizzo per la vestizione degli ascritti, venne richiesto da me per più di un'ora circa molte cose dell'andata dei salesiani nella Cina. Trovavami solo a solo con lui nella biblioteca di Foglizzo, la quale, come Ella sa, serviva da camera per D. Bosco per queste circostanze, e lo richiesi se, quanto all'andata nostra nella Cina, avremmo dovuto far noi domanda, oppure attendere d'essere chiamati, e in questo secondo caso chi ci doveva chiamare. Egli mi rispose che il modo doveva essere questo: 'es-

<sup>27</sup> Conelli to Barberis 24.11.1892. *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Conelli to Barberis 13.09.1893. *Ibid.* A month later Conelli was in Orvieto.

<sup>29</sup> Conelli to Barberis from San Benigno, 06.11.1883. *Ibid.*



serne chiamati ed esserne chiamati non già da persone private ma da pezzi grossi, da persone altolocate, magistrali'. Credo siano quasi testuali queste parole sue, e, secondo me, confermano molto bene la risoluzione presa di accettare questa proposta, poiché ci vien fatta appunto dal Vescovo d'intesa col Governo».<sup>30</sup>

Trying to make Don Bosco's desires become a reality was a drive that inspired many a Salesian. In 1892 the *Civiltà Cattolica* had published a favourable review of a small manual of Logic that Conelli had authored. He felt quite comforted by his achievement, especially because he had realized a desire expressed to him by Don Bosco in 1886, when he was teaching philosophy in San Benigno and when for the first time the possibility was put forward of sending students to Rome:

«D. Bosco, con una tranquillità che, stante la mia poca conoscenza di filosofia, mi fece arrossire e ridere ad un tempo, mi disse: datti attorno a preparare un testo di filosofia, bene adatto ai bisogni nostri... Quel desiderio io ho in parte soddisfatto...né mancherò di soddisfarlo pienamente...».<sup>31</sup>

Apart from his little manual of Logic, Conelli never got around to write any other textbook.

### 1.3. The negotiations: phase II and III

From Orvieto Conelli went on to Frascati (Rome) as director of the local seminary. He had not forgotten China, and occasionally mentioned the subject to Don Rua. On 3 Nov. 1898 Don Rua wrote:

«...Quanto alla Cina che vuoi? Pare si allontani sempre più. In questi mesi abbiám veduto missionari della Cina, chierici chinesi, ieri un vescovo della Cina; ma non si vede ancora in nessun punto squarciarsi la nube che ricopre ai Salesiani quella regione».<sup>32</sup>

Things began to move again in the spring of the following year. On 25 May 1899 the Apostolic Nuntio to Lisbon wrote to Don Rua on behalf of the bishop of Macao requesting two or three 'brothers' to run an orphanage and help boost conversions. D. José Manuel de Carvalho had been appointed bishop in 1897 and had taken possession of his see on 1st March 1898. On 2 April 1899 he wrote to the nuntio to put forward his request, hoping to be in time for the missionary expedition which he knew was being prepared for the month of November. Don Rua replied from Milan on June 6 explaining that the rules of the Salesians did not allow for communities made up of only brothers, yet on the other hand agreeing to start negotiations and formalities. In his second letter

<sup>31</sup> Conelli to Barberis (undated), yet certainly of 1892. ASC B528 Conelli.

<sup>32</sup> Rua to Conelli 03.11.1898. ASC A450 Rua.

the nuntio showed appreciation of the difficulty raised by Don Rua and asked for a project to be forwarded to the bishop and to be transmitted by the bishop to the Portuguese government in the hope of having the Salesians recognized as missionaries and thus obtain a monthly salary and a total or at least partial subsidy for their travel to the missions.<sup>33</sup> In a Chapter meeting held on 27 June Don Durando was charged with preparing a draft of the project, which was read at the meeting of 13 July.<sup>34</sup> The nuntio kept pressing both Don Rua and the bishop of Macao for rapid action. Don Rua requested the services of Don Pietro Cogliolo, Provincial of Portugal, from whom the house of Macao would depend and who was in a position to assist in speeding up the negotiations in Lisbon. With a note dated Aug. 8 he sent the China correspondence to Conelli, who immediately started drawing up plans to travel to England and Portugal to learn English and Portuguese. Don Rua approved the idea and suggested that if he hurried up he could join Cogliolo in his trip to Lisbon. Yet faced with the difficulty of finding a substitute for the direction of the Frascati seminary and probably foreseeing lengthy preparations for the expedition, Don Rua recommended he turn the delay to advantage by earning a degree in Literature, adding: «I Chinesi ci tengono aver da fare con persona fornita di titoli accademici».<sup>35</sup>

The bishop of Macao wrote to Don Rua on 19 Oct. returning a copy of the draft agreement which he accepted and asking for the names of two priests and four brothers so that he could apply for grants from the Portuguese government. A few days later, in fact, he began to approach the ministry of Maritime Affairs and to enlist the help of influential friends in Lisbon to lobby the government.<sup>36</sup> The greatest difficulty turned out to be the finding of a substitute for Conelli in Frascati. Don Rua did not have anyone with the required academic qualifications. In a meeting held on 24 Nov. the Chapter decided to answer the bishop in the following terms: «...il Direttore già fissato da D. Bosco non può per ora lasciare il suo posto». They hoped they would be able to send him in a few months. Don Rua effectively answered the bishop that the personnel would be ready to sail in October 1900. Earlier he had written to Conelli to remain in Frascati until Divine Providence would open a way and again suggesting that he took the opportunity to obtain a degree.<sup>37</sup> On Nov. 21 he wrote again to Conelli touching on several points and insisting for the third time – with no apparent result – that he study for a degree:

«Se puoi in qualche modo conseguire la laurea in belle lettere prima di partire, non solo acquisterai maggior prestigio presso i Chinesi, ma farai piacere allo scrivente ed agli altri superiori».<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Nuntio Andrea Aiuti to Rua 20.06.1899. ASC F478 Macau.

<sup>34</sup> *Verbalì delle Riunioni Capitolari*, I, p. 172v, in ASC D869.

<sup>35</sup> Rua to Conelli, 08.10.1899. ASC A450 Rua.

<sup>36</sup> Carvalho to Rua 19.10.1899. KIRSCHNER, pp. 110-113.

<sup>37</sup> Rua to Conelli 27.10.1899. ASC *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Rua to Conelli 21.11.1899. *Ibid.*



Voices were rife that the Cardinal of Frascati, Serafino Vannutelli, would probably be assigned to a new office and perhaps transferred to a new see. Would it be possible to have Conelli moved to a new office during the vacancy? asked Don Rua requesting a confidential answer on this particular point.<sup>39</sup> Conelli had written several letters to his Superior advising against seeking his replacement for the current year and suggesting that fresh negotiations be opened with the bishop of Macao, and that the possibility be studied to send someone there to deal with the matter, while at the same time considering alternative proposals. Don Rua accepted his advice on the first point, yet he added:

«Tuttavia se tu credi tra il serio e lo scherzevole far sentire a S. Em. il Card. Vannutelli la designazione fatta da D. Bosco di te per la prima casa Salesiana in Cina e le attuali trattative per Macau dove si dovrebbe mandarti, credo non sarebbe fuor di proposito».

Don Rua believed it useful to let the Cardinal know that the Congregation had other plans for Conelli in order to have him released from his incumbent duties, and naming Don Bosco would have added strength to the move. But he chose his words carefully, in the apparent effort not to give the impression that he was giving too much weight to the Founder's designation of Conelli as rector of the first Salesian house in China.

Don Rua said he would enlist the help of the bishop of Macao and join in Conelli's efforts by asking him to write to the Cardinal. However he did find impractical the idea of sending someone to Macao to negotiate and, since the bishop had already accepted the conditions proposed by the Salesians, he dismissed as inopportune the suggestion to reopen the negotiations.<sup>40</sup>

Seven months of silence ensued. On 6 Aug. 1900 Don Rua received a letter from the bishop reminding him that the list of missionaries had not yet reached Lisbon. Don Rua immediately called Conelli to Turin to help draw up a list and notify Lisbon and then all together leave for Portugal. In view of the practical steps that the bishop was taking, he felt the expedition should not be deferred to the following year. On 18 Sep. the Chapter fixed the personnel destined for the house of Macao. Cogliolo was present. On 7 Oct. the Chapter convened in Ivrea (Turin). This time Conelli was – presumably – also present, since on the same day he wrote to the bishop of Macao quoting instructions from the Chapter, even though the minutes of the day do not mention China. He informed the bishop that the personnel was ready, but he preferred not to disclose names until he received assurances that the agreement would bind not only the present bishop but also his successors. The same instance had been put forward by Cogliolo but no reply had been received. While Cogliolo was in favour of taking the bishop at his word and getting on with the project, Conelli was seeking

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* Vannutelli was indeed assigned to the post of Major Penitentiary on 27 Nov. 1899 but was transferred to the see of Porto and S. Ruffina only in 1903. *Hier. Cath.*, VIII, p. 33.

<sup>40</sup> Rua to Conelli 04.12.1899. *ASC ibid.*



tighter assurances. On his part Don Rua found that a degree of uncertainty in sending six Salesians to such a distant place on the strength of an agreement reached by letter was acceptable under the circumstances and that they had no choice but to trust Divine Providence and the discretion of the bishop. On 28 Nov. he sent a note to Conelli asking him to come immediately to Turin and ready the expedition. Cogliolo would send the money for six to travel from Turin to Lisbon.<sup>41</sup>

The bishop replied to Conelli's letter with the news that the government had backtracked on its promises and that nothing could be done for the current year. The following April he would be in Lisbon and a contract on firmer bases would then be drawn up, one that would bind not only him but also his successors for a period of seven years. The bishop was in a rather poor state of health and was playing for time.<sup>42</sup>

On 8 Jan 1901 Conelli referred to Don Rua the content of the bishop's letter. The agreement had to be retained null and void, since it was opposed by the government. The way matters had turned out vindicated his stand in the face of Cogliolo's accusation of «narrowmindedness» and insistence that the members of the expedition depart immediately for Lisbon and Macao. In similar terms he wrote to Durando, concluding:

«...Come vede non erano fuori di luogo le mie precauzioni, che parevano esagerate, e, salve sempre le intenzioni, era inopportuna la smania di Cogliolo di farci partire sulle sue assicurazioni».

If the bishop wanted to obtain anything from the government it would take two years before the expedition could set sail.<sup>43</sup> In any case also the second phase of the negotiations was over.

Negotiations were revived in late 1902 at the initiative of Cogliolo. On 26 Nov. he wrote a postcard to Durando asking for a copy of the old agreement for Macao. The new governor – a friend of his – favoured the establishment. Macao's new bishop, D. João Paulino de Azevedo e Castro, would soon arrive in Lisbon from the Azores and he intended to seek an audience with him also on behalf of the governor.<sup>44</sup> On March 19th the bishop elect visited the Salesian *oficinas* in Lisbon and, liking what he saw, left determined to have the Salesians in Macao<sup>45</sup>. It took the bishop six months to reach his diocese. On 17 Apr. 1904 he wrote to Cogliolo how he had been inspired to do something for the 50th an-

<sup>41</sup> Rua to Conelli 28.11.1900. ASC A450 Rua.

<sup>42</sup> Carvalho to Conelli 30.11.1900 in KIRSCHNER, p. 122.

<sup>43</sup> Conelli to Rua 08.01.1901, Conelli to Durando 08.01.1901. ASC F478 Macau.

<sup>44</sup> Cogliolo to Durando 26.01.1902. *Ibid.* D. João Paulino was nominated on 09.06.1902 and consecrated the following 21.12. He made his entry in Macao on 04.06.1903.

<sup>45</sup> «Marzo 19 [1903]...presenza di due vescovi. Al mattino alle 7.30 il vescovo di Macao, ricevuto dalla banda, celebra la Messa della comunità con comunione generale. Uscendo verso le 9 manifestò la sua piena soddisfazione, ed il suo desiderio di vedere presto i Salesiani stabiliti nella sua diocesi...». Cronaca «Oficinas de S. José». Anno 1903. Arquivo Provincial, Lisboa.

niversary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. He accepted the old agreement. The Salesians were to set up a workshop for Chinese orphans, 8-10 year olds that had graduated from the *Asilo da S. Infância*, together with a hostel to provide primary schooling to Portuguese orphans, 40 of whom were already in the care of the *Santa Casa da Misericórdia*. He presented the same project to the government, and to speed things up he sent Cogliolo a letter of petition addressed to the government with blank spaces to be filled in with the names of the Salesians to be immediately submitted to the relevant ministries. But if the government refused to help, the bishop gave the assurance that he would pay from his own pocket. Things were moving fast. Cogliolo had apparently promised to send six Salesians by November 1904 to set up not just a workshop, but a trade school modelled on the *Oficinas de S. José* in Lisbon. He wanted to make sure that the Salesians were considered 'missionaries' in order to qualify for government subsidies. In late 1904 the *Boletim do Governo Eclesiástico da Diocese de Macau* announced the imminent arrival of the Salesians to take care of orphans, «especially Chinese ones».<sup>46</sup> Negotiations with the *Santa Casa da Misericórdia* to include Portuguese orphans in the project had broken down.<sup>47</sup> In the *Bollettino Salesiano* of January 1905, in a letter addressed to Salesian Cooperators, Don Rua announced among the projects for the year the opening of a house in Macao.<sup>48</sup>

The selection of adequate personnel proved an extremely laborious task. On 5 Oct. the Chapter summoned Cogliolo to help in drawing up a list. The minutes record the designation of those destined to open the new house in Macao without giving their names. On 8 Nov. a search began for a rector. The name of P. Léon Beissière, then in Oran (Algeria) was mentioned. The house had been caught up in the cross-fire of the battle for secularization in France and the Salesians would probably have to move out. It was suggested that he could select some confreres to go with him. Beissière declared himself ready to go but suggested he had better remain at the helm of his community until the house was forcibly closed. The suggestion was accepted. Hence a resolution was passed to inform Cogliolo of the situation and to ask him to convince Don Agostino Colussi, then master of novices in Portugal, to accept the rectorship for at least one year. Conelli was ill and was not being considered at this stage. In late 1904, referring to an allusion contained in a previous letter, Don Rua wrote to him:

«... La tentazione ed ispirazione mia a tuo riguardo si riferisce alla China, per la quale non possiamo ancora trovare la testa. Cercheremo tuttavia. Prega la Vergine Immacolata che ci faccia riuscire a conoscere chi vi destina il suo Divin Figlio».<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Correspondence and other documents quoted in KIRSCHNER, pp. 140ff.

<sup>47</sup> Cf p. 224, footnote n. 79 below.

<sup>48</sup> *Il Sac. Michele Rua ai Cooperatori ed alle Cooperatrici di Don Bosco*, in BS 29 (1905) 6.

<sup>49</sup> Rua to Conelli 01.12.1904. On 19 Dec. Rua again wrote to Conelli asking him to suggest the



Don Rua had accepted that Don Bosco's imputed appointment might not become a reality after all. The Chapter minutes for 16 Jan. 1905 record the following:

«Don Cogliolo, Ispettore delle case del Portogallo, premesso che da molto si promette l'apertura della casa di Macao e che ultimamente se ne prese formale impegno – fa notare che i vescovi delle colonie portoghesi non vi rimangono a lungo – che l'attuale è assai benevolo ai Salesiani ed ha preparato tutto quanto occorre per la casa ed ha financo incaricato l'ex governatore di Macao di domandare i passaggi al governo. Il Capitolo capisce tutto. Fa vedere ch'ebbe la miglior volontà per allestire la spedizione, ma che la malattia del capo D. Conelli mandò a monte tutto. È forza maggiore. D. Cogliolo resta incaricato di scrivere in questo senso al vescovo ed al Governo: si andrà in ottobre p.v. Il Sig. D. Rua aggiunge 'ed anche prima se D. Beissière sarà costretto ad esular durante l'anno da Oran'».<sup>50</sup>

On Feb. 2 Cogliolo wrote to the bishop on the instructions of the Chapter explaining that the delay had been caused by the illness of Conelli. It was obvious, however, that the problem was a wider one – one of lack of personnel. In the Chapter meeting Don Rua made it abundantly clear that Conelli's participation was no longer a precondition. The bishop replied on March 15 expressing his understanding for the difficulty encountered. Since he was leaving for Timor he wanted to assure the Salesians that everything was ready.<sup>51</sup>

On 26 and 27 June the Chapter met to settle the list of personnel for Macao. A substitute had been found for Conelli, now a Provincial, to head the Roman Province, and thus he was put in charge of the expedition. Five other confreres were named, a priest, a cleric and three brothers, but their availability was far from certain.<sup>52</sup> In the session of 10-11 July two substitutions were made.<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile Conelli was pursuing entirely different paths, trying to steer the Salesians away from Macao, ostensibly on the advice of Prof. Ernesto Schiapparelli, secretary general of the *Associazione Nazionale nell'Oriente*, a semi-governmental institute that promoted Italian missions in Asia.<sup>54</sup> One is not sure what the rationale behind this action might have been: perhaps doubts about the choice of Macao as too far removed from what Don Bosco had indicated or

name of a successor for the post of Provincial. Rua to Conelli 19.12.1904. ASC A450 Rua. On Don Agostino Colussi (1869-1940) cf A. ANJOS, *Centenário da Obra Salesiana em Portugal 1894-1995*, Lisboa 1995, p. 50.

<sup>50</sup> *Verbalii II*, p. 3. ASC D870.

<sup>51</sup> Cogliolo to D. João Paulino 02.02.1905; D. João Paulino to Cogliolo 15.03.1906 in KIRSCHNER, pp. 147-48.

<sup>52</sup> Fr. Conelli Arturo, Fr. Cattaneo Giacomo, Cl. Balestra Giuseppe, and Bros. Carmagnola Luigi, shoemaker, Dani Eugenio, carpenter, and Fantino Settimio, factotum. *Verbalii II*, p. 21. ASC D870.

<sup>53</sup> Barilari Giovanni and Fergnani Giovanni to replace Cattaneo and Balestra. *Ibid.* p. 23.

<sup>54</sup> On this Association cf F. DESRAMAUT, *L'orphelinat Jésus-Adolescent de Nazareth en Galilée au temps des Turcs, puis des Anglais (1896-1948)*, Roma, 1986, p. 55.



a playing for time through fear that his health might exclude him from the expedition or simply an attempt to win back the initiative from Cogliolo in the belief that *he* was the one who had been designated by Don Bosco to lead the Salesians into China. The minutes for the 24-26 July session of the Chapter have this to say:

«D. Conelli comunica che è disposto ad andare a Macao. Fa notare però che Schiaparelli gli scrive che colà non potranno avere case dell'Associazione, la quale non s'intromette mai in territorio sotto la giurisdizione di Propaganda; che a Macao non si potrà avere espansione; che non conviene andare in territorio d'altri vicariati e che piuttosto bisognerebbe iniziare le pratiche per ottenerne uno per noi come sarebbe quello di Formosa o altro, ove potessimo utilmente espanderci; che vuol sapere con precisione quali sono le condizioni di accettazione ed infine che al posto del coadiutore Fantino, semplice provveditore, vada un capo-sarto. Don Cerruti è incaricato di scrivere a D. Cogliolo domandando spiegazioni sul contratto [di] Macao e specialmente se il nuovo vescovo ha firmato la convenzione del 1899; a D. Conelli che stiamo assicurandoci delle condizioni per l'apertura della casa di Macao e che gli si permette intanto d'iniziare le pratiche per avere un vicariato [nella Cina]».<sup>55</sup>

Sometime during the first half of August Cogliolo received a letter from the bishop of Macao complaining that he had received no answer to his previous one. He was anxious about the arrival of the new missionaries and wanted to make sure he would be home to welcome them. He sounded upbeat about the possibilities available to the Salesians for work in his diocese, which he described as a «vast» one. They could open workshops and their printing press would publish the *Boletim Eclesiástico*. If one of them was skilled in photography a lot of work would be open to him. And naturally, in his *Orphanato da Imaculada Conceição* he looked forward to having plenty of instrumental and vocal music.<sup>56</sup>

This letter and the health of Conelli prompted the Chapter to take a firm decision. Conelli could not bring himself to accept that the missionary expedition might possibly leave without him. Don Francesco Tomasetti, rector of S. Cuore in Rome, helped him to make up his mind when he wrote to the Superiors clearly hinting that Conelli was in no fit state to go to China. On Aug. 19, in a letter to the Economist General, Conelli finally disclosed his true condition. Doctors had diagnosed «inflammatory intestinal colic with enlargement of the liver» and had recommended a daily therapy to last ten months. Even so he was ready, however, to go to Macao, ready to accept whatever decision the Superiors might take.<sup>57</sup> The decision of the Superiors finally gave Conelli much needed peace of mind. If we are to believe the testimony of Don Lodovico Costa, the

<sup>55</sup> «nella Cina» is added in pencil. *Verballi II*, p. 27. ASC D870.

<sup>56</sup> D. João Paulino to Cogliolo 29.06.1905. Full text in KIRSCHNER, pp. 148-150.

choice of Versiglia was made by Conelli himself, to whom the Superiors had entrusted the task of finding a substitute.<sup>58</sup> The Chapter voted and passed a formal proposal on 21 August. On that same day Don Francesco Cerruti, Councillor General for Studies, notified Versiglia of the decision and invited him to begin learning the Portuguese and English languages and to be ready to depart by November or December. Versiglia's official nomination as rector of Macao was made the following 4 September and was read out in the Chapter meeting of 6-7 November 1905.<sup>59</sup>

Two difficulties remained. The bishop had not signed the agreement: he had merely indicated, in a letter to Cogliolo, that he was ready to abide by the conditions accepted by his predecessors. The Superiors wanted a more formal undertaking. Cerruti passed the request on to Cogliolo.<sup>60</sup>

There was then the problem of personnel. A final list was not drawn up till quite late. On 16 September Don Rua had enlisted the help of Conelli to solve some of the difficulties.<sup>61</sup> The problem did not exclusively regard the China expedition, but was a general one. The subject was brought up at a Chapter meeting on 6-7 November. Don Cerruti painted a dramatic picture. The Provinces were facing many urgent necessities, and to provide personnel the Superiors were forced to impoverish houses of studies, keep unworthy or unsuitable subjects, load rectors with class periods, etc. It was decided to impose a veritable freeze on all new developments and the Provinces were asked to suggest which houses it would be possible to close.<sup>62</sup>

By mid November all preparations were practically finalized. On the 17th Don Rua issued a circular inviting all Cooperators to join in the solemn send-off for the missionaries due to take place on the 27th.<sup>63</sup> The Superiors were still awaiting a formal reply from the bishop of Macao and thus on 9 Nov. an answer was solicited via telegraph: «Evêque Macao Salésiens attendent réponse partir».

<sup>57</sup> *Annali III*, 602. Original in ASC B528 Conelli.

<sup>58</sup> BOSIO, *Martiri in Cina*, p. 76.

<sup>59</sup> *Verbali II*, p. 32. ASC D870.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> «Giacché la tua salute non ti permette di capitanare la nuova spedizione che deve andare a iniziare le opere salesiane in China sono persuaso che ti adopererai almeno per quanto da te dipende per farla riuscire bene. Ora tra coloro che erano destinati a quella importante impresa vi era anche il giovane Dani. Egli però dopo aver chiesto di farne parte ora accampa difficoltà da parte della madre. Ma spero che consegnandogli questa lettera che ti unisco, dopo averla letta tu stesso ed aggiungendo quelle parole ed esortazioni che il Signore ti ispirerà si potrà riuscire a fargli sormontare ogni difficoltà. Raccomando a te l'affare». Rua to Conelli 16.09.1905. ASC A450 Rua. Cf note 52 above.

<sup>62</sup> *Verbali II*, p. 50. ASC D870. See also *Lettere Circolari di Don Michele Rua ai Salesiani*, Torino 1910, Circ. 31 of 02.07.1906, pp. 338-342.

<sup>63</sup> «Benemeriti Cooperatori e Benemerite Cooperatrici» of 17.11.1905. Some last minute adjustments were introduced as late as 26 Dec. Versiglia wrote to Don Rua's secretary, D. Calogero Gusmano: «...Per quell'affare del cambio di De Pascal(e) con Rota. Non movete nulla prima di avermi dato la risposta del Sig. D. Rua... Qui vi è anche Carmagnola che fa un pò lo strano... Pazienza.» Versiglia to Gusmano 26.12.1905 in ASC A352 Versiglia.



On the 25th Cogliolo wrote again from Turin stating that the group was ready to set sail on Jan. 18 and asking for a cabled answer. D. João Paulino, who had been four months in Timor and had returned on Dec. 5,<sup>64</sup> formally signed the agreement on 29 Dec.: «Aceitamos todos os artigos do convénio supra». The following day he sent the signed copy to Turin accompanied by a letter<sup>65</sup>. The December edition of the *Boletim Eclesiástico* announced that the arrival of the Salesians was imminent. The group left the port of Genoa on board a German ship at 10 am on 17 January. They reached Hong Kong in the early hours of Feb. 13, five days ahead of schedule. That same evening they set foot on Macao. They were Fr. Luigi Versiglia, 32, rector, Fr. Ludovico Olive, 39, Fr. Giovanni Fergnani, 32, Bro. Luigi Carmagnola, 49, shoemaker, and two novices, Bros. Gaudenzio Rota, 22, a tailor by profession, and Felice Borasio, 19, a blacksmith.<sup>66</sup>

## 2. The first impact with reality: the *Orfanato* 1906-1910

### 2.1. *The arrival and the first years*

The Macao where the Salesians landed in 1906 was proud of the self given title of «Pearl of the Orient», but it was a far cry from the old days when it was the only foreign trading outpost with China. The advent of Hong Kong with its superb harbour further deprived Macao and its silted port of any commercial significance. Its sluggish economy relied heavily on gambling and the opium monopoly. Hopes to shake off the depression and relaunch international trade in competition with its British-led neighbour and beyond the exchanges with the immediate Chinese hinterland were pinned on the construction of a new deep water harbour and a rail link with Canton, neither of which actually materialized. Out of 70-80 thousand inhabitants some 1500 were Portuguese colonists, the rest being Chinese, of whom 4000 were Catholics. They were tended to spiritually by two Chinese priests in the only Chinese parish. Some thirty priests and 'canons' – missionaries salaried under the royal *Padroado* system – worked almost exclusively for the Portuguese. The diocese held jurisdiction over the adjacent mainland territory of Heung Shan and, since 1903, the territory of Shiu Hing. In 1857 it was given jurisdiction over Timor and the parishes in Malacca and Singapore.

The Salesians received a warm and sincere welcome. The bishop and his immediate collaborators had been looking forward to receive the new mission-

<sup>64</sup> *Boletim do Governo Eclesiástico da Diocese de Macau* - BGEDM - 30 (Dec. 1905) p. 131.

<sup>65</sup> ASC F478 Macau. *Convenzioni*. The missionaries left before the arrival of this letter. Either the bishop had somehow indicated his acceptance of the agreement, possibly via cable, or else the Salesians had decided they would not further delay their departure. Archival sources offer no answer.

<sup>66</sup> On L. Olive (1867-1919) and G. Fergnani (1874-1932) cf *Diz. Biogr. Sal.*, pp. 124, 205. On F. Borasio, G. Rota and L. Carmagnola cf further on this article footnotes n. 74, 127 and 165.



aries to whom they wished to entrust the care of poor and abandoned Chinese children. The house was not quite ready at the arrival and while, in the meantime, they were able to move in and begin to accept orphans on an individual basis, it was not till April 2 that they actually started their work. «*Abbiamo finalmente cominciato!*» With this title the *Bollettino Salesiano* published a letter of Fergnani to Don Rua which narrated the events of those days.

The orphanage was housed in cramped and – by Salesian standards – insufficient and unsuitable quarters. The educative programme comprised evening primary courses in Chinese, Portuguese, catechism, drawing, plus music and gymnastics and day training in tailoring and shoemaking. A printing press functioned partially. In December a tiny bookbinding section was opened. The *Boletim Eclesiástico* reported on the progress and announced plans – or was it just raising hopes? – to set up a smithshop with equipment imported from Europe. Going through the reports one is left with the impression that matching ownership and management was not an easy task. Neither side stated their position in clear terms, and while the bishop expected to be able to dictate policy, the Salesians felt they should be given a free hand in running the orphanage.<sup>67</sup> The local authorities had high expectations of what the Salesians could offer, expectations which the first group somehow failed to meet, at least professionally. The bishop expected at least some Portuguese nationals, since according to the contract teaching was to be imparted in the Portuguese language. In fact he had attempted to introduce an amendment to the agreement he had signed in Dec. 1905, asking that, since the house of Macao was to come under the Portuguese Province, for the sake of convenience the confreres possibly be of Portuguese nationality.<sup>68</sup> Tailoring and shoemaking was not what the bishop had been suggesting all along, but had finally accepted, with the understanding that other trades would be added to match market demand. Some of his remarks betrayed dissatisfaction with the professional level of some of the instructors, a point on which Versiglia concurred.<sup>69</sup>

The Salesians did actually excel in those fields where they had a free hand and possessed an unmatched expertise to offer, i.e. in creating a religious and moral culture, with the set of rules of life and daily practices that constitute Don Bosco's educative system: daily mass, devotion to Mary Help of Christians, daily catechism, the goodnight talk, friendly advice, a cheerful spirit, sacred songs and ceremonies, the long outdoor walks and the total dedication and continuous loving presence of the educators. And a noisy but charming 'western' brass band, the like of which had never before been seen nor heard

<sup>67</sup> The contract was basically ambiguous, in that it placed the *Orfanato* under the «absolute authority of the bishop», while leaving the Salesians freedom of direction and management. ASC F478 Macao, *Convenzioni* 4.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Versiglia to Manassero, 03.04.1912. ASC A352 Versiglia. D. João Paulino to Cogliolo 26.01.1911, *ibid.* F478 Macao.

in the region!<sup>70</sup> «So much so that we can truly state that from the very beginning of the orphanage Don Bosco's system triumphed also among Chinese youths».<sup>71</sup> The Salesians built a family, where the bishop was treated like a father and was a frequent guest of honour. Letters and reports published regularly in the *Bollettino Salesiano* and the reports of the *Boletim Eclesiástico* are witness to this.<sup>72</sup> On inauguration day the students were 27 – this being the number shown in the inauguration photograph – and their numbers gradually increased over the next few months till they reached the number of fifty, as many as the house could accommodate. Requests reportedly exceeded one hundred. As soon as they were able to master the language the Salesians took up extra ministry: they ran for a short while an oratory for Portuguese children, assisted the Chinese parish, while Olive was called to help in the missions in Chinese territory across the border.

Soon, however, problems arose, the sort of problems bound to be encountered by a small group made up mostly of Italians, and which included two young novices and a fifty year old brother, catapulted, on the strength of a two page contract negotiated over the mail, onto a small, multiracial, Portuguese colony on the China coast 14,997 kilometers from their home country,<sup>73</sup> with little or no hope of substitutions or reinforcements, called to run a small institution that they could not claim as their own and over whose development they had no control.

Soon they discovered how delicate the presence of foreign missionaries in Macao was and how open to manipulation by interested parties. On 23 March 1906 an article appeared in a newspaper in Porto welcoming the arrival of the Salesians and their work among Chinese youths, published to expose the anti-Chinese bias of the colonial government that barred local youth from obtaining an education for fear that the Portuguese might lose out in the competition. The article was bound to make authorities wary.<sup>74</sup> Again something happened serious enough to call for the sudden repatriation of the young smith Felice Borasio in late July, less than six months after his arrival. There was no work for him at the *Orfanato*. The bishop paid for his return passage as stipulated in the

<sup>70</sup> The brass band gave its first performance on the occasion of the bishop's birthday on 4 Feb 1907. On 3 Dec., feast of St. Francis Xavier, it performed publicly for the first time. Since then it became an almost constant feature of all religious and civil manifestations in Macao, and was often invited to perform on the mainland. On 2-15 Aug. 1908 it was invited to liven a charity bazaar in Canton held in favour of flood victims. KIRSCHNER, 241-2; G. FERGNANI, *Una visita a Canton*, in BS 35 (1911) 52-55, 80-83. The visit turned out to be a highly successful public relations exercise in the city, which in 1910 extended an invitation to the Salesians to open an orphanage there. Cf pp. 233ff. further on in this article.

<sup>71</sup> [CANAZEI I.], *Missioni Salesiane. L'Orfanotrofio di Macau e la Missione dell'Heung-shan in China*, Torino 1925, p. 4.

<sup>72</sup> *Bibliografia Generale delle Missioni Salesiane*, I, Roma 1975, pp. 363ff; BGEDM news items reported in KIRSCHNER, *passim*.

<sup>73</sup> The distance was meticulously recorded by Fergnani in his diary. Cf Archivio Ispettorica Cinese (AIC) Cronache e storia: quaderno di documenti copiati a mano, p. 70.

<sup>74</sup> KIRSCHNER, p. 172-4.



contract and was kind enough to recommend him to the Portuguese consul in Hong Kong.<sup>75</sup> Two years later Versiglia felt compelled to write to the Superiors asking them to recall laybrother Carmagnola, «to keep the good name and ensure the good running of the house». The brother apparently felt unbearable the pressure of not being able to express himself well in Cantonese.<sup>76</sup>

On 16 Nov. the bishop sent a letter to Don Rua through Cogliolo to express his satisfaction at the arrival and the work of the Salesians, yet at the same time manifesting his opposition to a plan Versiglia was considering, that of opening a house in nearby Hong Kong, and offering arguments against such a move, the main being that it would damage financially the recently established and as yet not fully consolidated *Orfanato* of Macao. The invitation had come from the missionaries of St. Calogero, the Milan Fathers. But there is no denying that the Salesians were eagerly eyeing the neighbouring vibrant colony, and all the possibilities of work it offered, free from the limitations and stifling atmosphere of the tiny *Padroado*-led enclave.<sup>77</sup> Versiglia had written a letter favouring the move. That notwithstanding, the Superiors – having discussed the matter in the Chapter convened on 31 December – reassured the bishop that the Salesians would not seek alternative sites, not only because they had no personnel but also out of consideration for His Excellency.<sup>78</sup>

Between June 1906 and May 1907 the Salesians negotiated with the board of trustees of the *Santa Casa da Misericórdia* to take over the care of its Portuguese and Macanese orphans. The *Santa Casa* was a venerable institution notoriously difficult to deal with. The bishop knew it very well as he had unsuccessfully tried to get it involved in the arrival of the Salesians.<sup>79</sup> Versiglia overhauled the rather conservative and tightly controlled proposal of the *Santa Casa* with counterproposals for a boarding school with playground, chapel, hall and a portico, which the Salesians would run free from controls, not only for the benefit of the 50 orphans the *Santa Casa* would assign but also of paying students. There would be annexed an oratory for Portuguese boys. He asked for a

<sup>75</sup> KIRSCHNER, p. 197. As to what actually happened the documents are silent. Once in Turin Borasio wrote a letter to Don Rua begging forgiveness for what he had done. He did not profess as a Salesian. ASC B224 Borasio.

<sup>76</sup> Cf p. 252 further on.

<sup>77</sup> G. FERGNANI, *Hong Kong*, in BS 31 (1907) 146-7.

<sup>78</sup> «...Don Versiglia a parte espone i motivi per cui il vescovo di Macao è contrario e propugna l'apertura della casa di Hong Kong. I Superiori nondimeno, stante la scarsità di personale ed anche per non disgustare l'attuale vescovo e renderlo sempre più benevolo all'opera salesiana, non credono opportuno iniziare pratiche con Hong Kong». *Verballi* II, p. 119. ASC D870. The same arguments were repeated in a letter written by Cogliolo to the bishop some time later. Cogliolo to D. João Paulino, 03.02.1907, in KIRSCHNER, pp. 225-6.

<sup>79</sup> The orphanage the bishop originally had in mind was destined for both Chinese and Portuguese orphans. For this reason he tried to negotiate with the *Santa Casa* on several occasions in order to re-organize the orphanage they were running for Portuguese children and combine it with his own. Having failed, he went it alone and set up an orphanage for Chinese children, which he entrusted to the Salesians. BGEDM 77 (1909) pp. 113, 115, quoted in KIRSCHNER, p. 283.

generous remuneration, double what he had been offered, to give the school a source of income, obviously to support the future development of the Salesian mission. The deal did not go through because the board felt that Versiglia was asking too much and offering too little.<sup>80</sup>

In the summer of 1907, on July 28 and 29, the bishop paid a visit to the Superiors in Turin on the occasion of a trip to Rome. A report of the visit, which was published in the French edition of the Salesian Bulletin, described it as a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady Help of Christians. From the report not much may be inferred, except perhaps that the subject of future developments at the *Orfanato* was probably discussed or touched upon. Nothing is known, however, about the contents of the discussion. What we know is that later, viewing facts in retrospective, Versiglia saw the visit as a turning point – for the worse – in the bishop's attitude towards the Salesians.<sup>81</sup>

In September 1908 both the *Boletim Oficial do Governo da Província de Macau* and the *Boletim Eclesiástico* published a *Regulamento*, i.e. a set of regulations in 20 articles for the *Orfanato*, signed by the secretary general of the Macao government with the approval of the ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>82</sup> Having stressed – if that was necessary – that the aim of the orphanage was to assist the diocese in its evangelizing and civilizing effort (art. 2), the *Regulamento* went on to spell out the areas (intellectual, moral, physical and professional) which the «educative work» had to comprise. By intellectual education it meant primary schooling, vocal and instrumental music, technical and artistic drawing (art. 3). Art. 4 stated that «The general and higher direction and administration of the *Orfanato* both in the scholastic and economic field shall be exercised by a commission called *Comissão Directora* under the supervision of the Government». Art. 5 and 6 determined the composition (the bishop as president, aided by four councillors named by the government on the bishop's proposal) and the competence of the said commission. This included: the organization of the syllabus of subjects and trades to be taught, the appointing of the management and in the case of termination of contract the provision of alternative personnel chosen from a Religious Institute dedicated to education and approved by the government; decisions on the admission of students; authorization of all expenses; care of the entire correspondence, both scholastic and administrative; modification of the conditions of acceptance, etc. The immediate administration, control and direction belonged to the Director, i.e. the Superior of the religious community contracted to run the orphanage. Every decision of the community had to conform to the directives of the commission (art. 7-9). It then went on to detail the conditions of acceptance, and to set standards of hygiene, nutrition and work. In listing rewards and punishments, the regulations expressly stated that the

<sup>80</sup> Various documents are published in KIRSCHNER, pp. 198-213.

<sup>81</sup> BGEDM 52 (Oct 1907), pp. 95-97. Also in KIRSCHNER, pp. 230-232.

<sup>82</sup> 'Portaria' of 22.09.1908. *Boletim Oficial do Governo da Província de Macau*, 39 (1908) 376-77; BGEDM 63-64 (Sep-Oct 1908) 86-91.



preventive system was adopted in the *Orfanato*, and that hence all forms of corporal punishment were banned. The rewards included the setting aside on behalf of the pupils of a portion of the profit generated by their work (art. 19).

The *Regulamento*, which required government approval for any alteration (art. 20), aimed at rationalizing the organization of the *Orfanato* and at bringing it within the framework of the colonial bureaucratic management, in keeping with the *Padroado* system, which called for close cooperation between Church and State. Especially where State subsidies were concerned the government – quite understandably – required certain guarantees. The bishop had explained to Versiglia that the control of the commission had been imposed on him precisely because he had applied for subsidies.

The matter was not well received by Versiglia, who saw in the imposition of a commission and the heavy involvement of the government a breach of the original contract which gave the Salesians a free hand in the direction, administration and discipline of the Institute under the sole supervision of the bishop. Versiglia rejected the explanations of the bishop, pointing out that at least two other institutes enjoyed government subsidies without the requirement of a supervising commission. What further irked Versiglia was the fact that when the bishop had informed him of his intention to draw up the regulations, no mention was made of said commission. In a brief confrontation between the two, in the presence of Fr. Olive, the bishop allegedly disclosed that he needed to have his institute approved independently of the Salesians, and that if they did not like the provision, they were free to withdraw at the expiry of the 7 year contract.<sup>83</sup>

A very embittered Don Versiglia wrote a detailed report to Don Rua, marked «private» and dated 22 Nov. 1908, aimed at showing that Macao was not a suitable field for Salesian work. In it the question of the *Regulamento* featured prominently. Under five headings he dwelt on (1) the virtual impossibility for a foreign group to work meaningfully either with the Chinese Catholic community or with «pagans» without either arousing the jealousy of the local clergy or being misunderstood as accusing the Portuguese missionaries of dereliction of duty; (2) the bleak prospects of developing the work with the orphans, given the bishop's idea that any such development should pay for itself; (3) the bishop, whom Versiglia accused of being politically minded and driven by nationalistic ideals, of having schemed with the government to obtain the *Regulamento*, and of seeking to rewrite the original contract. Amazingly, he accused the bishop that only at that late stage and for the very first time he had insisted that they sign the agreement:

<sup>83</sup> Relazione (privata) 22.11.1908. Original to Cerruti in ASC A352 Versiglia; copy *ibid.* F478 Macau, Convenzioni. A similar commission oversaw the Colégio de S. Rosa de Lima (Cf M. TEIXEIRA, *A Educação em Macau*, Macau 1981, p. 281) and the Salesian College in Braga, Portugal. ANJOS, *Centenário...*, p. 29.

«Un terzo fatto molto significativo è che mentre fin qui non aveva mai neppur pensato all'importanza di firmare la nostra convenzione, né io gliene avevo mai parlato, tutto ad un tratto mi manda a chiamare dicendomi che bisognava firmarla, ma che prima bisognava aggiustarla perché alcune cose necessitavano di modificazioni e mi fece capire che sarebbe forse stato bene farla redigere davanti ad un notaio. Io risposi semplicemente che se voleva firmare doveva essere tale quale la mandarono i Superiori senza mutazione di sorta; quanto al notaio non esser necessario. Noi ci fidavamo della sua firma come speravamo egli si fiderebbe della nostra. Allora rimase un po', poi disse di tramandare la cosa ad altro giorno, che non è ancora venuto, nonostante siano già passati tre mesi. Che volesse farmi un colpo? Ad ogni modo starò all'erta. Noto ancora che dopo queste cose vediamo chiaramente che la sua confidenza con noi è diminuita sensibilissimamente».

Had Versiglia forgotten that one of his first official acts upon arrival in Macao was to go to the bishop's palace, where the bishop and he himself, on behalf of the Rector Major, Don Michele Rua, proceeded to sign the contract, a copy of which was then sent to Turin?<sup>84</sup>

In point (4) Versiglia asked the advice of the Superior on what his conduct should have been under the circumstances, and in point (5) he put forward a proposal. He portrayed the bishop as financially strapped, at the end of his wits and incapable of guaranteeing the future development of the *Orfanato* and expressed the conviction that the future of the Salesians lay no longer in Macao but in training for and seeking an independent mission. The plan, with which Olive and Fernani agreed, proposed to «keep quiet»<sup>85</sup> with the bishop, withdraw from Macao laybrother Carmagnola and send – via Lisbon, to qualify for subsidies granted to Portuguese missionaries – three capable clerics already near their ordination to learn the language and adapt to the mission. At the expiry of the contract the Salesians would have six trained and capable priests, enough to apply for an independent mission from Propaganda Fide, a mission to be financed partly with the help of Propaganda itself and partly by the National Association for the Missions. Part of the plan was to allow Olive and Fernani to lend their services to the Shiu Hing mission in China, which in 1903 had come under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Macao, thus leaving enough vacancies for the newcomers without raising suspicions and at the same time gaining badly needed experience in direct mission work.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Cf KIRSCHNER, p. 175. It was the 1899 contract, which the bishop had already signed on 29.12.1905. Versiglia signed as: «P. Luís Versiglia, representante do Rev. Snr. P. Miguel Rua Superior da P. Sociedade Salesiana». In ASC F478 Macau.

<sup>85</sup> Ital. «dissimulare».

<sup>86</sup> ASC A352 Versiglia. The papal decree sanctioning the passage of the Shiu Hing mission to the Macau diocese was signed on 03.02.1903. In Sep. 1908 the bishop sent a diocesan missionary together with Fr. Ludovic Olive to take possession of the new mission. Olive's correspondence with the bishop in KIRSCHNER, pp. 250-254.



The Chapter in Turin discussed the report on 27 Jan. 1909 and asked Don Cerruti to brief them on the terms of the contract while at the same time seeing whether it was possible to find the three clerics Versiglia had requested. The topic came up again on 10 Feb. Having observed that it was too early to announce a withdrawal, since the end of the contract was three years away, and finding it difficult to justify the presence of three uncalled for clerics, it was decided to suggest to Versiglia to speak to the bishop. The answer, a summary of which has been kept, was couched in the following terms:

«Noi siamo con te nell'idea che la condizione nostra, qual'è presentemente, sia assai precaria e di ambigua durata e sulla convenienza quindi di assicurare meglio la nostra posizione, chiunque abbiano ad essere gli uomini e qualunque le cose. Ma crediamo ancora che ciò debba farsi con molta ponderatezza. La convenzione fu fatta (qui si crede firmata) il 29 dicembre 1905 ed ha la durata di 7 anni. Dunque per tutto questo tempo il vescovo e noi dobbiamo osservarla integralmente. Ciò però non toglie che, pure stando ai patti, tu parli al vescovo e lo inviti a pronunciarsi, affinché per qualunque eventualità noi non abbiamo a trovarci negli imbarazzi.

V.E., potrai dirgli, potrebbe avere una promozione... un cardinalato, un'andata in paradiso...che sarà di noi? Il successore di Lei ratificherà i patti dell'antecessore? Insomma bisognerebbe che l'invito alla modificazione della convenzione, o l'idea di stabilire noi casa nostra partisse da lui o almeno fosse con lui concordata. Qualunque sia l'ordinario noi dobbiamo essere con lui in buoni rapporti. Vedete dunque, meditate e poi scrivi; penseremo allora al resto».<sup>87</sup>

Seeing that no answer was forthcoming and sensing that probably it had been lost in the mail, on 12 May Versiglia wrote to Cerruti asking for a copy. In his letter he added:

«...Qui ormai stiamo senza ideale alcuno: 30 alunni e nulla più, non un po' di ministero, non un po' di lavoro. Nulla. S.Ecc.za mi ha fatto già sapere che gli mancano i mezzi per sviluppare l'opera e mi ha fatto altresì intendere che al presente per lo meno non può neppure servirsi di noi nelle missioni, né vicine né lontane. Si direbbe che dei religiosi ha paura, teme che invadano, perciò si cerca legarli con regolamenti e commissioni. Ciò che è avvenuto a noi è pur avvenuto non sono ancor due mesi ai PP. della Compagnia che dirigono il seminario. A loro insaputa approvò un regolamento proposto dal governo in cui lo stesso rettore del seminario viene minacciato di multe, sospensioni e carceri se non ottempera a certe formalità. I PP. erano già sul punto di andarsene, solo si fermarono dopo che S. Ecc.za si fu umiliato in tutti i modi ed a condizione che ottenesse dal governo l'abolizione di certi articoli.

Noi procuriamo di andare avanti colla massima prudenza. Siamo in perfetta ed intima relazione coi PP. Gesuiti. Tra di noi vicendevolmente ci con-

<sup>87</sup> *Verbali II*, p. 213, 214. ASC D870; «Sunto della risposta fatta a D. Versiglia in data 5-2-909», *ibid.* A352 Versiglia.

sultiamo per agire sempre di comune accordo ed aiutarci. Vediamo però in conclusione che qui non vi è grande missione per noi. Credo Rev. Sig. Don Cerruti ed andiamo sempre persuadendoci essere importante che Propaganda ci conceda una missione a nostro conto. Spero che i Superiori lavoreranno a questo scopo.<sup>88</sup>

On June 25 Cerruti sent a copy of the lost letter to Versiglia, adding that the Chapter had again examined the question and had approved in principle the idea of an independent mission but did not wish to come to a hasty decision. The Chapter therefore asked Versiglia to study the answer and eventually present a clear and definite proposal to avoid being encumbered with an unsuitable mission. Only then would the Chapter approach Propaganda.<sup>89</sup>

The events that followed up to January 1912 were either not discussed or not reported in the minutes of the Chapter. The correspondence for the next 18 months up to the departure of the Salesians from Macao, on 30 Nov. 1910, is equally patchy. None of the projects planned came to fruition. Some sort of truce set in, the bishop having declared he could not employ more Salesians and expressed his wish to let certain controversial matters rest. As for Versiglia it was not easy to prepare at short notice the type of concrete proposal that Turin demanded. Fergnani, a key member of the team, was soon to face a series of health problems that were to drag on well into the year 1911. His inability to cope under such stress eventually prompted Versiglia to ask Turin to withdraw him. And so the life of the *Orfanato* continued in its usual rhythm. The *Bollettino Salesiano* and the *Boletim Eclesiástico* printed reports of its activities and chronicled events as in the past, practically on a monthly basis: religious feasts, outings, a memorable pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Francis Xavier on the island of Sancian, the participation of the entire student body at a variety of religious gatherings, awards to top students, together with performances by the band at all sorts of events there including the anniversary of the bishop's consecration and his birthday.<sup>90</sup>

In the second half of 1909 the Provincial Don Cogliolo embarked on a Canonical Visitation of the houses which the Province held in Mozambique, South Africa, India and China. On 27 Jan. 1910 he reached Macao. Versiglia's 1908 report as such played no part in prompting the visit. Certainly, however, the matter was very much on the mind of the Superiors, who decided to brief the Visitor half way through his trip. On 20 Oct. 1909 Pro-Secretary Don Calogero Gusmano wrote to Cogliolo:

«Nel timore che non la raggiunga a Mozambico mando questa mia raccomandata al Capo. La lettera di D. Versiglia è personale. V.S. se ne servirà, ma senza far vedere che ha avuto copia. In questo foglio troverà il sunto delle risposte fatte dai Superiori».<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Versiglia to Cerruti 12.05.1909. *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> 22.06.1909. *Verballi II*, p. 234. ASC D870.

<sup>90</sup> KIRSCHNER, pp. 257ff., 278ff., 289ff.

<sup>91</sup> Gusmano to Cogliolo 02.10.1909, ASC A893 Missioni Cina - Heung Shan. The answers men-



In his report of the Visitation Cogliolo touched on the main points raised by Versiglia. He agreed that the house could not develop substantially given the size of the colony. Yet he believed that it could become the centre of the future Salesian Missions in China, particularly in relation to the mission territory which the bishop wished to entrust to the Salesians just across the border from Macao. For this the house needed better qualified personnel and larger premises. The bishop had already rented temporarily a much more spacious house and was looking for a permanent solution. As for the difficulties that had arisen, he had the following to note:

«Se in quest'ultimi tempi erano sorte alcune difficoltà, questo si deve a malintesi, a poca conoscenza delle leggi, usi e lingua portoghese da parte dei nostri, particolarmente del direttore, a qualche passo poco prudente, e ad una certa tenacità e troppo manifestata freddezza ed indisposizione dello stesso direttore verso l'attuale vescovo; il quale, se ha difetti e torti, questi s'è principalmente d'essere lento nel decidere e troppo pronto nel promettere e far progetti. Verso di noi, però, ha usato sempre bontà e non ha diminuito il suo affetto...».<sup>92</sup>

The Visitor left on March 10th. In April Versiglia wrote to inform him that the bishop had decided to provide the *Orfanato* with a spacious house, a playground and a large garden. On 14 May he wrote again on the same subject advising the Provincial Superior that due to certain circumstances he had decided to suspend his assent and submit the matter to him for a decision. The bishop had decided that the *Colégio da Perseverança*, run by the Canossian Sisters, should vacate the house situated in front of the church of *S. Lourenço* which they had occupied since 1904 and move to other premises. The *Colégio* catered for Chinese and Portuguese orphan girls who, having reached the age of 18, had graduated from other orphanages run by the sisters and were being prepared to make a choice of life. Most opted for marriage, some embraced the religious state. The number of girls taken care of, however, was small and the bishop, having no money to buy suitable premises for the *Orfanato*, thought that the house could be put to better use if given to the Salesians. But the rather tactless way in which the bishop had handled the matter and the strong psychological pressure he had put on the sisters, combined with the fear of being held responsible for their eviction by having unduly pressured the bishop to provide new premises, induced Versiglia to refer the matter to his Superior. Accordingly, he gathered all the information available, including a copy of the letter the bishop had written to the sisters, and sent it to his Superior, leaving the decision to him.<sup>93</sup> In a letter dated 16 June 1910 Cogliolo gave an affirmative answer, ad-

tioned in the letter are those of 05.02 and 25.06.1909. For Cogliolo's visit cf P. COGLIOLO, *Cina e Giappone*, in BS 34 (1910) 186-189; also *ibid.* pp. 112-113 and BS 33 (1909) 367-368.

<sup>92</sup> ASC F007, fasc. 13, Casa di Macao (Cina).

<sup>93</sup> Versiglia to Cogliolo, 14.05.1910. ASC F478 Macau. Convenzioni. The ASC possesses copies of

ducing lack of acceptable alternatives, which were either to return to the first house granted by the bishop at n. 3 *Rua da Prata*, which they had left for rented premises, or to leave Macao altogether. While Versiglia inclined towards refusing the offer, Cogliolo considered that the worst alternative. Besides the bishop had made it clear that the decision to transfer the *Colégio da Perseverança* had been taken independently of the offer being made to the Salesians.<sup>54</sup> As a matter of fact the Canossians moved out on 4 June and on 1 September the Salesians entered the premises which were known as *Casa das Dezasseis Colunas* because of the sixteen pillars that once adorned the front porch.

## 2.2. Exit from Macao in 1910: looking beyond the Portuguese enclave

They did not enjoy their new abode for long, however. On 8 Oct. the revolutionary government in Lisbon decreed the dissolution of all Religious Orders and the expulsion of foreign religious from the national territories.<sup>55</sup> Subsequent clarifications made it plain that in the colonies only the Jesuits would be affected. The decree was published in Macao on Nov. 19th. Public opinion there was generally in favour of retaining Religious Orders engaged in education, but the revolt of the naval troops triggered off an uprising by the armed forces and endangered the lives of the religious, whose expulsion – among other things – they had demanded. On 29 November tension reached its peak. At the advice of the bishop and after having sent home the majority of the orphans and transferred the few remaining ones to the seminary where the bishop had taken up residence, the following day the Salesians also left and sought refuge in Hong Kong, where they were fraternally received by the Milan Fathers. One week later Versiglia wrote to Don Albera:

«Eccoici usciti da Macao nonostante la concessione fattaci dal Governo repubblicano di rimanere al nostro posto. Ciò avvenne in forza della rivolta dei soldati eccitata dalla massoneria del luogo. Noi non ebbero nulla a soffrire perché avendo già da molto tempo le nostre cose pronte abbiamo potuto partire immediatamente portando con noi ciò che ci apparteneva».<sup>56</sup>

Given the sketchy and rather confusing accounts of the events of those final days, it is by no means easy to pinpoint what actually determined the exit of the Salesians from Macao. Comparing the various versions one can conclude that it was not an expulsion.<sup>57</sup> Versiglia himself also denied that it was. Nor was

the bishop's letter to Mother Luigia Marelli, the Canossian Superior, and of Mo. Marelli to Versiglia. On the *Colégio da Perseverança* cf. M. TEIXEIRA, *As Canossianas na Diocese de Macau: I Centenário (1874-1974)*, Macau 1974 p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> Cogliolo to Albera 16.06.1910 in ASC F478 Macau.

<sup>55</sup> Text of the decree in A.H. DE OLIVEIRA MARQUES, *Afonso Costa*, Editora Arcadia 1972, p. 302-303.

<sup>56</sup> Versiglia to Albera, 06.12.1910. ASC A351 Versiglia.

<sup>57</sup> *Il Corriere della Sera* of Milan on Dec. 3 described the departure as a definite «expulsion». Copy of article in ASC F478 Macau. Other accounts use the word «expulsion» but in a looser sense.



it the result of an «explicit order» of the bishop who deemed it more prudent that they withdraw to Hong Kong since, as Versiglia wrote to the Superiors, the authorities had declared that they were powerless to defend them.<sup>98</sup> The bishop ascribed the exit to a choice of the Salesians themselves dictated by safety considerations.<sup>99</sup> Piecing together bits of scattered evidence we may conclude that it was Versiglia himself who actually chose to leave the enclave. The departure was by no means sudden: the Salesians were prepared. On 29 November the bishop did actually order that they should depart, but then had a last minute change of heart and reportedly «twice told the Salesians not to go, and not to worry». Miffed by the close succession of orders and counter-orders, and having everything ready, Versiglia decided to leave. What matters most is that he had no intention of returning to Macao. In fact he already had two proposals to open an orphanage in Canton.<sup>100</sup> He broke the news gradually. Six days later he wrote:

«Ora potremo ritornare a Macao? Ne temo assai. Le cose si mettono molto male per questa povera colonia Portoghese, sia dal lato materiale come dal lato religioso; perciò noi, i cui desiderii battono completamente all'unissono con quelli della Sig. V. RR. pur non distaccandoci intanto da Macao, cerchiamo di trovar posto altrove».<sup>101</sup>

He then went on to inform Turin that he was already evaluating two initial proposals to set up an orphanage in Canton, one coming from the bishop of that city, the other from a committee of prominent citizens. He inclined toward accepting the latter proposal even though not one hundred per cent water-tight. But he promised to negotiate diligently and suggested seeking the financial support of the 'National Association for the support of Italian Missionaries'. He was anticipating the need of quality personnel.<sup>102</sup>

During the next several months Versiglia kept up a busy correspondence with Don Albera, Don Emanuele Manassero, Provincial of the Subalpine Province to which the Macao work had been attached after the closure of all the houses in Portugal, and finally with Don Calogero Gusmano, the Secretary General. He worked mainly in three directions: (1) to secure a territory where

<sup>98</sup> Versiglia to Manassero 03.04.1912 in ASC A352 Versiglia.

<sup>99</sup> «Os Salesianos apesar d'eu lhes ter dito que ficassem, depois de reflectir que contra a eles não havia nenhuma animosidade, entenderam que o mais seguro era sahirem da colónia». D. João Paulino to Cogliolo (?) 26.01.1911 in ASC F478 Macau.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Fagnani's correspondence with Turin, in particular his letter to Gusmano of 23.04.1913 and his report of 17.09.1912 to the Superior Chapter, in ASC B253 Fagnani. Fagnani was a sick man and some times he contradicted himself. Versiglia resolutely prevented his return. But his testimony that Versiglia «had put too much trust in his friends in Canton and Hong Kong, only to be left in the lurch when [the Salesians] had left Macao» is both consistent and credible. Versiglia's version of the events published in BS 38 (1914) pp. 366-8 is factually selective.

<sup>101</sup> Versiglia to Albera, 06.12.1910. ACS A351 Versiglia.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

the Salesians could do mission work; (2) to set up in a strategic location a trade school for adolescents in need, which would be of sufficiently high standard to become a centre of propaganda for Don Bosco's work and a model to be exported to other regions in China; (3) to promote the setting up of the first Salesian presence in the Philippines.

Being in Hong Kong and having previously entertained the idea of moving there from the very first year of his stay in Macao, Versiglia certainly had given some thought to the possibility of setting up a trade school or a youth centre there, or even of taking over the entire Hong Kong mission. To Gusmano, who had enquired about such a possibility, he wrote on 21 January 1911 that indeed there had been some openings and even negotiations. In fact in 1910 the Vicar Apostolic of Hong Kong had written to Rome. The answer from Rome, however, had been that they should try to manage the best they could, without calling in other Congregations and be satisfied with what they already had. And this had put the negotiations to rest.<sup>103</sup> One place Versiglia was determined to stay away from, however, was the *Orfanato* of Macao.

Shortly after having informed Don Albera of the two offers in Canton Versiglia announced:

«...abbiamo già quasi concluso, sempre condizionatamente all'approvazione dei Superiori, col vescovo di Canton per un orfanotrofio, con buone condizioni. Appena avremo ultimate le trattative nei suoi più minuti particolari scriverò. Già arrivò monsignore al sussidio di \$4000 dollari annuali oltre la casa, mobigli, impianti ecc. Non è difficile che arrivi a 5000, col che noi avremmo il mantenimento assicurato per 100 alunni almeno oltre a 6 (personale). Canton per le nostre opere sarà una posizione strategica, sarebbe come il Milano per l'Italia. Da Canton parte il movimento riformatore per la Cina.

Noto però che in caso di accettazione ci vuole assolutamente del personale, buono ed *abile*. Dico *abile* perché non possiamo e non si deve supporre la Cina una terra barbara. Vogliono cose belle e ben fatte.

... E con Mons. di Macao? Con lui, di comune accordo *abbiamo smessa l'idea dell'orfanotrofio* ed invece ci siamo attaccati all'altra della missione». <sup>104</sup>

The negotiations to obtain a mission were concluded in a relatively short time. On Dec. 4, i.e. shortly after the departure of the Salesians from Macao, D. João Paulino visited Hong Kong. The issue of the *Boletim Eclesiástico* that carried this information, while regretting the departure of the Salesians, does not mention any encounter with them in Hong Kong. But an understanding was certainly reached on that occasion to entrust the Heung Shan territory in China,

<sup>103</sup> Versiglia to Gusmano 21.01.1911. ASC A352 Versiglia.

<sup>104</sup> Versiglia to Albera 27.12.1910. ASC A351 Versiglia. Throughout his correspondence Versiglia uses «Kanton» instead of «Canton», the more accepted spelling.



across the border from Macao, to the Salesians. In the same letter to Don Albera, dated 27 Dec., Versiglia was in fact able to provide some details:

«Mons. di Macao conta già su noi due (io e D. Olive) per detta missione e mi incaricò di chiamare altri due sacerdoti in più. Vorrebbe insomma quattro missionari, noi due inclusi... Spero che quanto prima Mons. di Macao darà il denaro pel viaggio».<sup>100</sup>

As a matter of fact the bishop had implored the two missionaries, whom he had called to Macao and in a certain sense had formed, to remain at his disposal at such a critical moment for his mission.<sup>101</sup> What could appear surprising was the motivation that induced Versiglia to recommend that the Superiors accept the Heung Shan mission territory, even though he felt it was the second choice, having asked the bishop to be given the neighbouring district of Shiu Hing, a mission of some standing and with a long history, only to be told by the bishop that he preferred to assign it to the Jesuits, since they were Portuguese.

«Per me trovo prudente accettare in tutti i modi di entrare nella Missione appartenente a Macao perché i Portoghesi umanamente parlando non potranno più continuare questa missione, per conseguenza il giorno in cui la S. Sede sia libera la dovrà assegnare a qualche altro istituto, e di certo sarà a quello che vi ha già i piedi dentro. Questa era già la mia idea. Ma Mons. di Macao stesso, senza che io neppure gli parlassi, mi esprime lo stesso pensiero; e Mons. di Hong Kong, nostro intimo quasi fosse dei nostri, mi disse la stessa cosa aggiungendo: io sono sicuro come  $2+2=4$  che la missione di Macao ha da passare ai Salesiani».<sup>102</sup>

Versiglia returned to the subject in his next letter, providing further details on what both bishops had confided to him. Both expressed the conviction that the next bishop would not be a Portuguese. The scenario envisaged, and one which Versiglia considered likely, was the collapse of the *Padroado*, the expropriation of the assets of the missions by the republican government and the consequent takeover and redistribution of Portuguese missions by the Holy See. Out of the large territory over which Macao held jurisdiction a portion would be assigned to the Salesians as an independent Vicariate Apostolic. Hence he was advising Turin not to approach Rome yet, but to be on the alert for any sign of definite breaking down between Portugal and the Holy See.

With the intention of hastening the outcome of the negotiations Versiglia kept in close epistolary contact with the bishop – who, in the meantime, as Versiglia opined, had left to visit Singapore «to secure the future of the possessions of his mission».<sup>103</sup> In April he offered to visit Heung Shan and to rent a house

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Versiglia to Albera, 21.01.1911. *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Versiglia to Albera, 27.12.1910. *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Cf letters of Versiglia to the bishop published in KIRSCHNER, pp. 334ff.

on a temporary basis, which he did on 1 May. A few days later he sent a draft contract to Don Albera, stressing that the deal was sketchy and that each party chose to rely on mutual trust. The Salesians bid farewell to their hosts in Hong Kong and entered Heung Shan on 8 May. A seven year contract was prepared and signed by the bishop on 25 July 1911. This was subsequently retouched.<sup>109</sup> In the meantime the hope of obtaining an independent mission had all but vanished:

«...Sua Ecc. [...] il vescovo di Macao è riuscito a prendere precauzioni in tempo di fronte al governo, sicché il futuro delle missioni pare assicurato, almeno per ciò che spetta il lato finanziario; ciò posto egli non intende certo per ora consentire nello stralcio di qualsiasi dei distretti della sua missione; solo cederebbe di fronte ad un'imposizione della S. Sede e ciò credo non senza opporre, almeno per ora, gravi e serie difficoltà. Ora conviene a noi proporre alla S. Sede una tal cosa? Mi pare di no, almeno per adesso».<sup>110</sup>

Towards the end of the year he was writing to Gusmano that the bishop had full confidence of being able to retain the royal *Padroado*, and hence had reneged on the word given and on the hope raised of entrusting an independent territory to the Salesians. The only chance now left open to them was to build up the territory with enough personnel. The strength of that presence would be enough to force the hand of the bishop.<sup>111</sup>

In the meantime Versiglia kept Don Albera informed of developments in Canton. On 21 Jan. 1911 he informed the Superior General that negotiations were proceeding smoothly and that the only difficulty was that of finding a suitable house. But both the bishop and his council were determined to realize the project within the year. Hence it was necessary to assign six suitable confreres, viz. a shoemaker, a typographer, a bookbinder, a young priest skilled in music and drawing, and possibly a clockmaker.<sup>112</sup> On May 4, as he was preparing to take possession of Heung Shan, Versiglia informed Don Albera that some prominent citizens in Canton were to hold a meeting to pool their efforts and provide new premises, purpose built. Everything would hopefully be ready by the end of the school year.<sup>113</sup> However on June 23 he wrote:

«A Canton per quest'anno non si può ancora far nulla per la mancanza del locale, d'altra parte anche su questo punto ancora non ho avuto una risposta un po' assicurante se i superiori sarebbero disposti a fornire il personale».

<sup>109</sup> Versiglia to Albera, 04.05.1911 in ASC *ibid.* Copy of the contract, in its retouched version, in KIRSCHNER 339-341. Cf Also [L. CANAZZI], *Missioni Salesiane. L'Orfanotrofio di Macao e la Missione dell'Heung-shan in China*, Torino 1925. The mission was eventually returned to the bishop in 1928.

<sup>110</sup> Versiglia to Gusmano, 29.07.1911, ASC A352 Versiglia.

<sup>111</sup> Versiglia to Gusmano, 10.12.1911, *ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Versiglia to Albera, 21.01.1911, to be read in conjunction with that of 27.12.1910, both in ASC A351 Versiglia.

<sup>113</sup> Versiglia to Albera, 04.05.1911, *ibid.*



The Superiors had sent a lengthy reply just a few days earlier, as we gather from a handwritten note jotted on the letter Versiglia had written to them. The reply seems to have been lost. However we know that the idea of Canton had been accepted, as evidenced by the *Elenco* for 1911, which mentions a house (casa succursale) in Canton, listed under the Portuguese Province, purportedly founded in 1910. The address is tentative and given in Italian: Orfanotrofio Cattolico (Asia-Cina) Kuang-tong. It lists the following confreres: Versiglia, Fergnani, Olive, Rota.<sup>134</sup>

During their stay in Hong Kong Versiglia and Olive were offered a free passage to visit the Philippines. They left on Jan. 28 on an exploratory mission and returned a month later with a contract which they had entered into with the archbishop, Mgr. Jeremiah J. Harty, to run a reformatory for 150 youngsters in Lalongboi, outside Manila, and provide much needed pastoral assistance to the numerous Chinese of the capital. The Superiors approved the plan later in the year and assigned Don Luigi Costamagna and Fergnani to the new house. The project was a big fiasco and by April of the following year the Salesians had left the Philippines.<sup>135</sup>

### 3. Return to Macao: a new role for the *Orfanato*

Versiglia considered the delay in the Canton project only as a temporary setback and refused to entertain the idea of returning to Macao. Having a redundant confrere with him, tailor Gaudenzio Rota, he felt helpless at being unable to find him a job. In Macao there was none, «not any more», he wrote; nor was Rota suitable to be a catechist in the mission, since this delicate job required a local.<sup>136</sup> On 29 July he wrote to Gusmano:

«Riguardo a Canton: volessimo accontentarci di una casa ben più disgraziata di quella che ebbimo in principio a Macao potremmo andarci domani,

<sup>134</sup> *Elenco Generale Società di S. Francesco di Sales - Dà lo stato della Pia Società al 1 Gennaio 1911*, [Torino 1911], p. 79.

<sup>135</sup> Shortly after his arrival in Manila Fergnani wrote to Versiglia giving a negative assessment of the possibilities of working under the contract he had signed. In Lalongboi a civil servant appointed as director by the government could not be dislodged; the Chinese mission was tightly controlled by the Dominicans, while the Christians spoke Fukienese, a language Fergnani did not know. Fergnani to Versiglia 29.12.1911 in ASC B253 Fergnani. The contract seemed inapplicable: Fergnani blamed Versiglia for being led by «troppo buon desiderio»; Versiglia blamed it on the archbishop's failure to keep his word. Mgr. Harty was actually having problems in coming to grips with reality. Cf. Harty, *Jeremiah J.* in *Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 6, New York 1967, pp. 938-9. In March 1912 Versiglia rushed to Manila and negotiated a new contract. This one, too, collapsed shortly after. Cf. Versiglia to Albera 21.01, 09.02, 23.02, 04.03, 23.06, 27.12.1911 in ASC F478 Macao, Versiglia to Gusmano 29.07, 02.10, 10.12.1911, 21.03, 18.04.1912 in ASC A352 Versiglia. Versiglia to Manassero, 10.01, 07.08.1912. *Ibid.* On Luigi Costamagna (1866-1941), cf. *Diz. Biogr. Sales.*, p. 99.

<sup>136</sup> Versiglia to Albera, 23.06.1911, ASC F478 Macao.

ma non ci conviene in nessun modo. Vi è tutta la buona volontà per un caso nuova e si lavora, ma non so quando si avrà capo, quindi per ora non è ancora il caso di determinare personale per Canton». <sup>117</sup>

On Oct. 2, having finally received replies from Turin, he returned to the subject:

«Quanto alla fondazione desiderata in Canton le cose vanno sempre più a rilento causa lo sconvolgimento in cui si trova ora quella città; da un giorno all'altro vi si temono gravi rivolte pel che i notabili e persone influenti che avrebbero aiutato l'opera si ritirarono altrove e chissà quando ritorneranno. Prima di un paio d'anni, credo, non si potrà venire ad una conclusione...». <sup>118</sup>

The October 10th Revolution that would decree the end of the Ching dynasty was in the air. Versiglia suggested it was better to concentrate on the Manila project. When also this fell through, Versiglia wrote to Gusmano to announce the imminent arrival of Costamagna first and Fergnani later, both of whom were already on their way to Italy. <sup>119</sup> In the same letter, written of 18 April 1912, he stated – not without embarrassment – that the bishop of Macao wanted the Salesians back at the helm of the *Orfanato*:

«Ora si dà la felice circostanza che Mons. di Macao vuole a tutti i costi riaprire l'Orfanotrofio dell'Immacolata Concezione e mi pregò scrivere ai Superiori chiedendo insistentemente il personale compromettendosi egli a condizioni non solo uguali alle primitive, ma ad altre ben più favorevoli. Consegnai quindi a D. Costamagna una relazione da trasmettere ai Superiori per tramite dell'Ispettore ed unitamente il compromesso firmato dal Vescovo.

Ti prego di intromettere i tuoi buoni uffici presso i Superiori, tu «qui cuncta scis et vales». Comprendo, la mia autorità presso i Superiori sarà forse molto scossa dopo questo fatto di Manila, ma che potevo fare? Più che legare l'arcivescovo prima con un contratto privato, poi con un altro notarile...? quale sta ancora in mano nostra!

Certo però che qui a Macao non è la stessa cosa. Il passato ben ci può dar garanzia pel futuro e D. Costamagna stesso tiene ormai in mano fatti che comprovano ad evidenza la buona volontà assoluta del vescovo di Macao».

He then embarked on an 'apologia' of the return to the old *Orfanato*:

«Ad ogni modo qui non si tratta di me ma della nostra Congregazione che verrebbe con ciò 1) reintegrata vantaggiosamente della perdita subita ormai da un anno e mezzo, 2) verrebbe a possedere un mezzo potentissimo di *reclam* per la nostra cattolica religione e particolarmente per le nostre opere

<sup>117</sup> Versiglia to Gusmano 29.07.1911. ASC A352 Versiglia.

<sup>118</sup> Versiglia to Gusmano, 02.10.1911, *ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Versiglia to Gusmano, 21.03 and 18.04.1912. *Ibid.*



in questo momento storico in cui la Cina si guarda intorno per scoprire e seguire con una certa ansia ciò che riconosce di più giusto, di più buono, di più pratico nelle industrie, nelle scienze, nelle arti e perfino nelle credenze delle nazioni straniere.<sup>120</sup>

### 3.1. *The orphanato in transition: Nov. 1910 - Sep. 1912*

Though considerably reduced in scale the *Orfanato* had continued to cater for the orphans, who were placed under the care of two diocesan priests, Fr. Horácio Pereira da Silva and Fr. Felipe Lao.<sup>121</sup> After the forced departure of the Salesians, given the heavily 'republican' atmosphere prevailing in Macao, the bishop had promptly agreed with Versiglia not to call the Salesians back. He had worked and lobbied hard to save the mission and its possessions, trying to keep ahead of events to minimize losses. The law of separation decreed on 20 April 1911 interfered with Church property. It was not sure how its application would affect the *Padroado*, whose property in the Far East was administered by the Macao diocese. Beginning with the September issue of the *Boletim Eclesiástico* a series of three articles appeared entitled: «O Padroado Português no Extremo Oriente e a Lei de Separação do Estado das Igrejas» signed by «Um Patriota» (arguably the bishop himself). The articles defended the results achieved under the system and argued that sustaining the missions was in the best interests of Portugal. Since the property of the *Padroado* bonded missions and colonies, the author concluded that it deserved to be protected. The second article contained a description and a defence of the Macao operations, the churches, the clergy and the establishments dedicated to education and welfare.

Speaking of the *Orfanato* it briefly traced the history, the aims, the support it had enjoyed, the achievements of its workshops, the colour its band had been adding to city life and the welcome it had received in nearby Chinese territory as far as Canton. The 17 young men who in just over 4 years had found employment, and the insistent request for trained printers by Hong Kong's newspapers were a goal no other establishment in Macao could match. It therefore concluded:

«Que honra e prestígio, pois, não seria para a colónia, se áquella prestimosa Instituição se desse toda a protecção de que precisa para manter e augmentar os créditos de que há um ano gosava sob a desinteressada direcção dos bons Salesianos e para se desenvolver consoante as necessidades do meio e da época».<sup>122</sup>

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> M. TEIXEIRA, *Macao e a sua Diocese, XII. Bispos, Missionários, Igrejas e Escolas*, Macau 1976, p. 476.

<sup>122</sup> BGEDM, 101-102 (Nov.-Dec. 1911) pp. 110-113. Text quoted as in original.

Versiglia had already negotiated a new draft agreement, which the bishop had signed on 15 April 1912, and which Costamagna hand-carried to Don Albera. The agreement, which was to last 7 years, guaranteed a fresh start based on a new set of conditions that gave the Salesians a free hand in planning and running the *Orfanato*. This was no longer under the absolute authority of the bishop. The contract rather spoke of his «great commitment to re-establishing» the Institute «under the direction of the Salesians». The bishop's commitment translated into providing a house for at least 100 pupils, maintaining 50 gratuitous places by paying \$7 a month each, paying for the purchase of equipment and the maintenance of the premises and a monthly salary of \$40 to each Salesian, equal to that paid to other mission personnel. The Superior of the Institute was to be presented by the Rector Major and nominated by the bishop, and would enjoy complete freedom in all matters of direction, administration and discipline. The Salesians were free to increase the number of students, either at their own expense or by charging fees. Any additional investment made by the Salesians in agreement with the bishop would be reimbursed in the event of departure. Any profits generated by the workshops would belong to the Institute. On their part the Salesians committed themselves to providing moral and religious education, a skill in a trade and scientific and literary instruction, including the Portuguese and English languages.

On 7 July Costamagna was in Turin where he met the Chapter to report on the Manila affairs. He also spoke of the favourable agreement that the bishop had signed and that he had handed to the Provincial. Don Manassero was called and the issue was discussed on 12 August, together with a proposal of the Italian Foreign Ministry to donate a large piece of land for a trade and professional centre in Tien Tsin.<sup>123</sup>

### *3.2. A fresh look for the Orfanato: new ideas for a new China*

The proposals of Versiglia were contained in a lengthy report that he had submitted to the Provincial at the latter's request. In it he analyzed the reasons for the meagre success of the *Orfanato* in its first 5 years of existence, an existence which he described as «stunted» due to the rather confined premises, lack of work in the shops and poor quality personnel. The lack of work was ascribed to the fact that the Chinese did not appreciate western workmanship and the Europeans were too few to generate demand. But now the circumstances had changed radically: the revolution had aroused a veritable «frenzy» among the Chinese to learn European arts and sciences, to obtain which they were ready to make all sorts of sacrifices. This was an element to be kept in mind when planning the new mission of Heung Shan. A consequence of this change was the great appreciation of trade and professional institutes which the Chinese educa-

<sup>123</sup> *Verbali* III, p. 32, 38. ASC D871. Contract *ibid.* F478 Macao. *Convenzioni*.



tion system did not provide. If the Salesians could get a model institute up and running for all to see, the future of their educative work in China was assured. The hour of China had come and the Salesians had to seize their chance. Naturally, this required resources that could be built up only gradually. Where was this to begin from? From Macao!

«Per cominciare ci si presenta un'occasione propizia: Monsignore di Macao vuole a tutti i costi restituirci l'Orfanotrofio già abbandonato; anche le stesse autorità governative lo vedrebbero di buon occhio pel lustro che ciò spanderebbe sulla colonia portoghese di fronte ai Cinesi. D'altra parte oltre al decreto ultimamente emesso dal governo portoghese riguardante la conservazione degli istituti religiosi stranieri, vi è qui un decreto del Ministero degli Affari Ultramarini che stabilisce vengano espulsi i Gesuiti, ma conservati in Macao tutti gli altri istituti. La riapertura quindi di questo istituto in Macao, dal lato del successo per me ora è certo; dal lato giuridico è al sicuro; dal lato finanziario veda le unite proposte di Monsignore. Mi pare non potremmo desiderare di più».

He then went on to suggest ways to solve the problem of the serious dearth of personnel. He would double as Director of the new Institute and as Superior of the Mission. Don Vincenzo Bernardini, who had been sent the previous year to work in the Mission and had turned out to be unfit and psychologically unprepared for that kind of work, would act as his deputy, giving him freedom to move around. What was necessary was a substitute for Bernardini in Heung Shan, to keep the nominal number of missionaries there at four, and a Portuguese national – he suggested José da Silva Lucas, who was about to be ordained in Foglizzo. He also surely needed «good» coadjutors: a tailor, a shoemaker, a printer and a bookbinder. He hoped Gaudenzio Rota would be among them, because he was experienced, was loved by the bishop, knew the language and also possessed the skills of a hand master. Since the Superiors were willing to provide personnel for Canton, a project that had been put on hold, he trusted they would support him for Macao. And concluded:

«Ecco adunque se i Superiori, come sono certo, desiderano di realizzare le previsioni di D. Bosco sulla Cina umanamente parlando bisogna che cominciamo con questi mezzi che per ora mi pare di aver ridotto agli estremi limiti dell'assoluto necessario. ...Quello che avrebbero fatto per Canton lo facciano prima per rialzare un'opera che era già nostra e rialzarla in condizioni tanto favorevoli quanto sono le presenti, tanto più che ciò potrà essere anche la migliore spinta per Canton».<sup>121</sup>

Versiglia had lobbied as hard as he could. He was under the impression that the Superiors, especially after the Manila fiasco were unwilling to listen to him:

<sup>121</sup> Report of Versiglia to Manassero, 03.04.1912. Typed copy with a handwritten note at the top: Da non presentare in Curia, ASC A352 Versiglia. On Vincenzo Bernardini (1887-1962) cf *Diz. Biogr. Sal.*, p. 36.

«Non voglio discutere di chi è o non è la colpa su questo... Posto però che anche la colpa fosse mia, mi pare che se i Superiori volessero usare di questo mezzo per castigarmi, più che castigar me, castigherebbero la Congregazione strozzando un futuro splendido che ora le sta qui preparato».<sup>127</sup>

The Chapter declared itself unable to do anything for Tien Tsin, due to lack of personnel. It did decide, however, to accept the new draft agreement for Macao,<sup>128</sup> upon which they sent a telegram which arrived in the morning of 15 August. In a letter to Gusmano, a much relieved Versiglia immediately discussed the issue of personnel he needed for the new *Orfanato*, insisting that especially the coadjutors be well qualified, in order to meet the challenge of a modern China. It had to be a model institute:

«...Ora che la Cina si sveglia quasi affamata per gli istituti di arti e mestieri, è per noi di tutta necessità por loro sotto occhio un istituto modello. Solo pochi giorni sono, io mi trovavo a Canton per un affare concernente alla missione. Il buon vescovo ed i buoni padri della Missione Etranger che là risiedono mi dicevano: siamo veramente dolenti che le condizioni così turbolente di questa città di Canton non ci abbiano ancor potuto permettere di avere i Salesiani ad installare qui un istituto di arti e mestieri. Noi siamo sicuri, mi ripetevano a coro, che se i Salesiani si presentano presto davanti alla Cina con un istituto modello di tal genere, essi ne avranno per così dire il monopolio. Mi pare valga la pena fare qualche sacrificio in questo senso...».<sup>129</sup>

The moment seemed particularly favourable. In fact the 1911 Revolution had swept away the old education system while the Republic «has been too much (!) occupied and impoverished to deal very effectively with Education so far», as was remarked by a contemporary source.<sup>130</sup>

The insistence of Versiglia to have suitable personnel was understandable, since personnel was prepared in Turin relying as far as possible on the indications given and plans drawn up in the missions. He wanted to make sure there was a good music teacher since the brass band and the choir were to be the main public relations vehicle of the new Institute. On 12 Sept. he solicited the departure of the confreres assigned to Macao: there was a danger that seeing the empty premises the government might decide to convert them into army barracks. Among those sent were Don Ignazio Canazei, 36, P. José Lucas da Silva, 24, Coad. Ottavio Fantini, 20, shoemaker and teacher of music and gymnastics, Coad. Luigi Viola, 28, tailor, and Coad. Josef Sturm, 20. Gaudenzio Rota was

<sup>127</sup> Versiglia to Marassero, 07.08.1912, *ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Verbali* III, 38, ASC D871.

<sup>129</sup> Versiglia to Gusmano, 20.08.1912 in ASC A352 Versiglia. He returned on the topic in another letter to Gusmano dated 12.09.1912. *Ibid.* Gaudenzio Rota declined to return citing family motives and mistrust in the possibility of development of Salesian work in Macao. He left the Society in 1921 after active duty in World War I. ASC A893 Heung Shan; B313 Rota.

<sup>130</sup> Cf Education in S. COULING, *The Encyclopedia Sinica*, Shanghai 1917, p. 155.



not among them: notwithstanding Versiglia's insistence, he had opted out. The group reached Macao on 6 Dec. 1912, almost unannounced.<sup>109</sup> One year later, on 3 Dec. 1913, reinforcements arrived in the persons of Don Giovanni Guarona, 24, Coad. Giuseppe Del Corno, 20, bookbinder, and Coad. Vincenzo Guglielmino, 19, printer.

The Salesians took over their former house on 14 September 1912. The *Boletim Eclesiástico* announced the opening of the *Orfanato* in the following terms:

«Após uns dois mezes de férias reabriu em principios de dezembro este prestimoso instituto. Grande transformação ali se tem operado graças ao zelo intelligente dos seus habéis directores. O pessoal dirigente e ensinante é todo novo. Os mestres d'artes e officios são competentissimos, diplomados para o ensino, tendo um d'elles obtido medalhas de reconhecido merito em algumas exposições. Temos visto já algumas peças de trabalho d'alfaitaria e sapataria que nada deixam a desejar na perfeição e solidez. Alem das officinas d'alfaitaria, sapataria e typographia, funcionan as aulas de china, portuguez e inglez. A escola de S. Francisco Xavier, d'inglez para chinas externos, fica fazendo d'or'avante parte do Orphanato. [...].»<sup>110</sup>

The announcement underlined the fact that the instructors were all new and highly competent in their respective areas of specialization. Given the 'republican' climate still prevailing in Macao, the fact that the Salesians had returned was glossed over. The *Boletim Eclesiástico* gave 70 boarders and 30 day boys as the number of pupils attending classes. On 18 Dec. Versiglia wrote to Manassero thanking him for the confreres he had sent and announcing that the workshops were already functioning. The pupils had reached the number of 70. For the following year he was waiting for a typographer and a bookbinder to give impulse to the printing department, which was already equipped with machines and types worth 20,000 francs. On 8 January 1913 he wrote again:

«L'orfanotrofio grazie al Signore è già montato e grazie anche la buona volontà di tutti i confratelli, marcia già bene. L'unica cosa in cui ci troviamo malamente è la tipografia. È una pena avere già tutto l'occorrente: buone macchine, un sufficiente corredo di tipi, ecc. ecc. e non poter avere un maestro che valga un poco, tipografo e impressore. Ciò tanto più ci fa pena in quanto la tipografia qui nell'estremo oriente ha di certo un futuro splendido. Se ha un buon tipografo ce lo mandi al più presto possibile... Monsignor Vescovo è oltremodo impegnato per lo sviluppo dell'Istituto. Va già persuaso che il tipografo sta per venire. Ne parla già come cosa fatta, nonostante le difficoltà che noi accampiamo. Veda di accontentarlo, se può». <sup>111</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Versiglia to Gusmano 09.12.1912. *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> BGEDM 113-4 (Nov.-Dec. 1912) 94-95. Text quoted as in original.

<sup>111</sup> Versiglia to Manassero from Hong Kong, 08.01.1913, ASC A352 Versiglia.

And again two months later:

«Qui grazie al Signore tutto corre bene. I nuovi confratelli sono bene animati e lavorano con lena. Nell'Istituto vi sono già circa 80 alunni ed ha già destato una grande simpatia, nei Portoghesi ma specialmente nei Cinesi. Monsignore è animatissimo sia per lo sviluppo dell'Istituto come per gli ampliamenti voluti nel locale».

In Versiglia's mind the Orfanato was part of a broader strategy aimed at spreading Don Bosco's work throughout China:

«Come già dicevo nella mia proposta di riapertura questo collegio sarà quello che ci deve fare la reclame, perciò non dobbiamo risparmiar nulla di ciò che possa contribuire al suo sviluppo. Prima della chiusura non eravamo mai riusciti ad ottenere che alcuno pagasse un soldo. Ora quasi tutti si adattano a pagare qualche cosa e diversi pagano la pensione intera. Già molti vennero per essere ammessi a pensione e li abbiamo dovuti licenziare per mancanza di posto: dunque la reclame già incomincia...  
Riguardo ai progetti a Canton e a Hong Kong, gli orfanotrofi delle rispettive missioni dovranno cadere in mano nostra. Tuttavia vi sono ancora difficoltà da superare: lasciamo intanto che quel di Macao continui il suo reclame: ad ogni modo sarà mia cura di lavorare per la buona riuscita delle pratiche e tenerla informata. Fin qui si lavora solo per formarci la simpatia e la stima».<sup>131</sup>

He was writing from Hong Kong, where he had gone to buy provisions for the workshops. What he could not source locally, because it was either too expensive or unavailable, he sourced in Europe.<sup>132</sup> When the workshops were re-opening, visitors were invited to come and see for themselves. Many prominent citizens and working class people contributed sums varying from 100 dollars to 10 cents – the sum offered by one anonymous donor. Two Christian communities of Heung Shan contributed \$3.00 and \$2.80 respectively. The local opium factory gave \$20. A total of \$635.20 was collected and due thanks were offered through the diocesan bulletin.<sup>133</sup> The new *Orfanato*, now a «Learning Hall for Trades and Arts» or *Kung Ngai Hok Tong*, as it was officially known in the Chinese language, was pulsating at a faster rhythm!<sup>134</sup>

### 3.3. The Orfanato: growth (1912-1918) and development (1918-1924)

A protagonist of Salesian Missions in China described the years 1906-1910 of the *Orfanato* as «the beginnings», the years 1912-1918 as a period of «growth», and the years 1918-1924 as a period of «development».<sup>135</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Versiglia to Manassero 26.03.1913, *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* List of supplies for shoemaking and tailoring in ASC F478 Macau.

<sup>133</sup> BGEDM 115-116 (Jan.-Feb. 1913) 104-107.

<sup>134</sup> «*Kung Ngai Hok Tong*» is the translation of the Italian «Istituto di Arti e Mestieri». The title first appears in a seal appended to a letter of Versiglia to Manassero, 18.12.1912, ASC A352 Versiglia.

<sup>135</sup> [L. CANAZZI], *Orfanotrofio Immacolata Concezione di Macau (Cina). Monografia Storica*, [1925]



That the period 1912-1918 was one of growth is evident from statistics. Larger new premises, a contract that allowed the Salesians to accept pupils in increasing numbers, substantial reinforcements of personnel from Europe, a new role for the reborn *Orfanato* – now part of a mission territory that extended beyond Macao – new attitudes and demands of the local population in tune with the social changes ushered in by the republican revolution, all these factors contributed to a rapid increase in pupils, who from 65 in 1912 steadily climbed to 170 in 1918.

The new house could accommodate some 70-80 pupils. With the help of an outstanding benefactor – Dr. António Simplicio Gomes – a new block was completed in 1916 to a typical 'salesian' design, with dormitories, workshops and a portico, thus increasing capacity to 130.<sup>127</sup> Two new confreres arrived in 1911, both destined to the missions: Bernardini and Don Giovanni Pedrazzini. Both, however, would work extensively in Macao, especially Bernardini, who first was vice rector and later succeeded Versiglia in the rectorship. In 1912 five more were sent, four of whom were destined to the newly reopened *Orfanato*. Three more arrived in 1913, thus bringing to eleven the number of confreres assigned to China. With four nominally attached to the Heung Shan mission, but two actually retaining jobs in Macao, the personnel working in the *Orfanato* reached a total of 9, of whom 4 were priests and 5 coadjutors.<sup>128</sup>

The bulk of the students were initially from Macao, 50 being assigned by the bishop. A further increase was fuelled by poor children, mostly Catholics or catechumens, sent by the missionaries from the adjacent territory of Heung Shan and other missions under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Macao.<sup>129</sup> The *Orfanato* thus began to gear itself to the needs of the mission, fostering conversions, preparing lay catechists and laying the ground for future vocations.<sup>130</sup> The majority of students were Catholic. Non-Christian young boys were admitted with the intent of eventually reaching out to and bringing their families to the faith.<sup>131</sup>

in AIC, Ispettorica. Cronache. Don Ignazio Canazei (1883-1946) arrived in 1912 and was assigned to Heung Shan. In 1923 he became the first Superior of the Visitatoria and in 1926 the first Provincial. The essay was printed – partly edited and minus some interesting statistics – in the series *Missioni Salesiane* edited by S.E.I. in 1925 under the title: *L'orfanotrofio di Macao etc.* Cf p. 235 footnote n. 109 above.

<sup>127</sup> Versiglia to Albera, 10.01.1915, ASC A351 Versiglia. On Gomes cf KIRSCHNER, pp. 217, 222-3.

<sup>128</sup> Cf data from table in the appendix. Don G. Pedrazzini (1884-1939) worked in Heung Shan, in Macao – as assistant to the Economist (1926-28), Rector (28-31) and Catechist (31-32) – the USA and Hong Kong.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> A school for lay catechists in support of mission territories opened on 12 Nov. 1926 under the auspices of the bishop and the direction of Canazei. It offered classes in Chinese and religion. *Cronaca Ispettoriale 1923-1930*, p. 3 in AIC Ispettorica 4; *Monografia Storica*, p. 14. The first signs of vocations appeared in 1916. Versiglia to Albera 03.01.1917 in ASC 352 Versiglia.

<sup>131</sup> L. VERSIGLIA, *L'Orfanotrofio dell'Immacolata in Macao. Suo rifiorimento e suoi frutti*, Letter of Versiglia to Albera, 24.10.1914 in BS 38 (1914) 366.

The *Orfanato* now offered an improved Chinese primary school curriculum (both in the vernacular and written, i.e. classical forms) and supplementary classes of a rudimentary level (*aulas*) in Portuguese language, history and geography, technical drawing with some notions of arithmetic and geometry, instrumental and vocal music and the type of choreographic gymnastics that – judging from pictures published in the *Bollettino Salesiano* – was practiced in numerous Salesian colleges and oratories worldwide. Approximately half of the students were enrolled in the lower primary section for 9-12 year olds and the other half in the higher primary section, for 12 year olds and above, reserved for those learning a trade.<sup>142</sup> Professional training included tailoring, shoemaking, printing and book binding, with carpentry being added in 1917. Each trade introduced western design and technology, and made use of western machinery, thus meeting market demands. Versiglia believed this was a small but significant contribution to the ‘civilization of the country’,<sup>143</sup> a theme congenial to Portuguese Macao. Generally the programmes, even though not geared to the needs of an industrial society, did play an ancillary and mediating role in the gradual passage of local society from a culture totally based on traditional principles to one that was opening up to western ideas and trends. More concretely, perhaps, to the extent that the trades were taught by qualified instructors, the classes did make an impact both on the pupils and on the market, as evidenced by the steadily growing turnover of the work handled by the main departments in those years.<sup>144</sup>

A larger student body and increased personnel gave backing for a more proficuous application of the educative system of Don Bosco – sacred functions, altar boys association, daily catechism explained by the older missionaries who better possessed the language, excursions and pilgrimages, celebrations and entertainments, a brass band known far and wide and a gymnastics team unrivalled in the region.

A moratorium on new missionary expeditions and the lack of financial means brought about by World War I inevitably stunted growth. The postwar period, however, with the assignment of a new mission entrusted entirely to the

<sup>142</sup> Macao not yet having an approved Chinese primary curriculum of its own, the system adopted at the *Orfanato* likely followed the one that had been introduced in China in 1903-4. This was based on the Japanese model: five-year lower primary schools leading to four-year higher primary schools. W. MARRITT L., *Modern China. The Mirage of Modernity*, London 1985, p. 170. In 1920 there were 125 pupils in the trade section, 5 in the commercial section, 75 in the (lower) primary section. By 1926 100 were in the lower primary, 90 in the trade section (30 printers, 3 bookbinders, 11 carpenters, 23 tailors, 23 shoemakers), 40 were enrolled in the catechetical school. ASC F478 Macau. The commercial section opened in 1917. *Orfanato da Imaculada Conceição. Relatório. Ano de 1919*, p. 5. Versiglia mentions a weaving section and a small commercial school in 1914. Cf BS 38, footnote n. 141 above. What was previously called *Escola de S. Francisco Xavier*, i.e. English classes (*rules*) for Chinese day boys, was appended to the *Orfanato* in 1912. BGEDM 113-4 (Nov.-Dec. 1912) 95.

<sup>143</sup> L. VERSIGLIA, *L'orfanotrofio etc.*, in BS 38 (1914) p. 366.

<sup>144</sup> Cf table in appendix.



Salesians combined with the effort of the Congregation to provide human and material resources saw the *Orfanato* rise to maximum development.

To prepare for the expansion in 1919 the management of the *Orfanato* went public and produced a printed *Relatório* aimed at the Portuguese community. It explained the aims and the achievements of the establishment and declared the intention to expand its action to reach 250-300 pupils. It refuted the tale that development could be financed with the income generated by the workshops or by the fees collected from the pupils. Appealing to «principles of humanity and true sociology» it showed how the courses aimed at helping rather than exploiting students. Not only did the Institute afford an opportunity to achieve a well rounded education but it offered the students monetary incentives in the form of 15% of the net income of their work. Subsidies provided by the Portuguese mission and by the government covered running expenses. If it was to expand, the *Orfanato* needed the support of the community.<sup>145</sup>

The acceptance of the Shiu Chow mission in late 1917 had triggered a major expansion of the Salesian work in China, with the new mission taking the leading role over existing works. The dream of Don Bosco had finally come true.<sup>146</sup> New missionaries actually recalled from war trenches started to arrive. On 1 Jan. 1923 a new Visitatoria was erected. It was upgraded to a Province on 28 May 1926. Prior to these developments the *Orfanato* had been part of the Subalpina Province. With the erection of the Vicariate on 22 April 1920 it was placed under the jurisdiction of the Vicar Apostolic until the advent of the Visitatoria. Both mission and college had been under the sole direction of Versiglia until Sep. 1919. The *Orfanato* was assigned an auxiliary role, that of providing formation services and financial support. However having a leadership of its own and an identity apart from the mission as such did help its development acquire additional momentum.<sup>147</sup>

In the years 1918-1926 nine expeditions brought in a total of 88 new missionaries to China, 25 of whom were priests, 10 coadjutors, 18 clerics and 35 of whom some were novices and some postulants, with the bulk arriving in the years 1924-26. Prior to that, three Italian lay workers and a music teacher arrived between 1921 and 1923 to work as instructors.<sup>148</sup> The first local novices,

<sup>145</sup> *Relatório*. Cf note 137 above. Hints of monetary incentives first appear in the 1908 *Regulamento*, art. 19 on rewards and punishments, an article which reflected Salesian policy. Cf p. 226 in this article. They were introduced at the recommendation of the 6th General Chapter (1896), which had discussed ways of applying the principles of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) in Salesian hospices. *Annali II*, p. 247. For details of how the system worked, cf *Rimunerazione proporzionata ai frutti del lavoro*, in *Ordinamento scolastico e professionale [...] degli alunni artigiani dell'Ospizio del S. Cuore di Gesù in Roma*, Roma 1910, pp. 13ff.

<sup>146</sup> Versiglia to Aliberti 04.01.1918; Versiglia to Conelli 10.10.1918, in ASC A351, A352 Versiglia.

<sup>147</sup> *Monografia Storica*, p. 10.

<sup>148</sup> A certain Sig. Cova and a certain Sig. Bartolomeo Grasso, a carpenter, arrived in 1921. A certain Sig. Resso, a tailor, and Sig. Elisio Gualdi, a music teacher, arrived in 1923. The contract of the three instructors was terminated in Feb. 1926 when Salesian instructors arrived. *Monografia Storica*, p. 10;

three coadjutors, were admitted in 1924, the year the novitiate was first set up.<sup>129</sup> While the bulk of this new personnel was destined to the new Vicariate with others being destined to Shanghai (1924) and Thailand (1926), some 8 confreres were eventually assigned to the *Orfanato*. In 1922, thanks to the munificence of Bishop José da Costa Nunez, the building set up in 1916 was doubled in size, thus increasing capacity to 250. The annual enrolment averaged in excess of 200 and peaked in 1924 with 220. Local secular teachers and instructors were also employed – 7 in 1918, 13 in 1919, 4 in 1920, 7 in 1922, the years for which we have statistics.<sup>130</sup>

Academic standards were further improved. The teaching of Portuguese was entrusted to «authentic Portuguese». Student wastage, which had always been a major problem and was ascribed to the inconstancy of Chinese students who often sought jobs before completing the required courses, was tackled. A 10 step, 5 year system was introduced that required students to achieve a pass in 10 courses before receiving a skilled worker's Diploma. Theory and practice were more equally distributed: out of 9 daily classes 4 were given to academic subjects and 5 to the trade (2 of theory and 3 of practice). The system of financial incentives enabled graduates to accumulate a capital of 70, 80 or even 100 patacas. By 1924 the following had graduated and received a Diploma: 15 tailors, 14 shoemakers, 2 bookbinders, 7 typesetters, 7 printers and 1 carpenter.<sup>131</sup>

Better equipment was provided and the content of the trade syllabuses was broadened. A 12 horse power generator provided electricity to both the house and the workshops. The tailoring, shoemaking and printing departments churned out sophisticated products. Gross income reached an all-time high, with the printing department leading the way when it took on the printing of the eight page Catholic daily, *A Pátria*<sup>132</sup>. The carpentry department, which was set up in 1917 became fully operative by 1924. With the acceptance of the Vicariate of Shiu Chow the number of non-Christian students also tended to increase.<sup>133</sup> On 12 May 1925 the *Orfanato* received the visit of a delegation led by Hong Kong's Secretary for Chinese Affairs. One month earlier Canazei had visited Hong Kong to start discussions on the project of setting up an Industrial

*Cronaca Ispettorale*, p. 29; *Cronistoria della Casa di Macao (Cina) 1906-1938*, p. 31. AIC, Macao 1890-1968.

<sup>129</sup> Discussions held in Sep. 1923 concluded that the best venue to set up a novitiate was Ho Shi (Ho Sai) in the Vicariate, with Macao as second choice. A month later, when application for the canonical erection had to be submitted, the situation favoured Macao. Eventually it opened in Ho Shi on 29.01.1924. Money for the support of the novitiate had to come from the *Orfanato*, which meant that the monthly subsidy of \$400 which it was paying to the Vicariate had to be halved. *Cronaca Ispett.*, pp. 1-5. Also Canazei to Rinaldi, 09.11.1923, and 31.01.1924. ASC F156 Cina. Corresp.

<sup>130</sup> *Mapas Estatísticos da Diocese de Macau, 1900-1916*, in *Arquivo da Diocese de Macau*.

<sup>131</sup> *Monografia Storica*, p. 14.

<sup>132</sup> The first issue was published on 01.07.1923. *Cronistoria*, p. 34.

<sup>133</sup> Available statistics for Catholics/pagans: 125/26 for 1918, 155/40 for 1919, 170/50 for 1920, 150/70 for 1922. *Mapas Estatísticos da Diocese de Macau 1917-23*. Arq. Dioc. Macau.



School in the British colony. The visitors inspected the institution systematically, were quite impressed by what they saw and left convinced that they had gained the knowledge they needed to assist them in the establishment of an Industrial School in Stanley Bay, Hong Kong. The news was carried by seven Chinese and English language newspapers.<sup>154</sup> The *Orfanato* had largely achieved the goal of providing a base for mission work and also becoming a propaganda tool for Salesian work in China.

### 3.4. Achievements and challenges

The declared aims of the *Orfanato* were evangelization, moral education and professional training. Between 1906 and 1926 the *Orfanato* baptized approximately 190 pupils and a few more adults and children who attended the annexed semi-public church. It also prepared an unspecified number of youngsters who eventually received their baptism after graduation.<sup>155</sup> The non-Catholics being a minority and the system being geared to Catholic practice, the psychological pressure to receive baptism must have been considerable. The practices of piety were held for both groups together. Only in 1926 did Canazei give orders that the annual retreat and the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death be held exclusively for Catholics and that «pagans» be given a talk on morals. Yet sufficient freedom of choice must have been allowed if a number of students opted for baptism only after graduation and if Canazei could write of the presence, which he considered a source of inconvenience, of «pagan» pupils who gave no guarantee of conversion.<sup>156</sup>

Records and statistics of students who graduated from the *Orfanato* and eventually found employment were not properly kept, and whatever figures have come down to us are not always reliable. In 1911 the *Boletim Eclesiástico*, referring to a report submitted by Versiglia, mentioned 17 students who by 1911 had found employment – 6 printers, 6 tailors, 5 shoemakers, not all of whom had completed the course and only a few of whom had obtained a «diploma d'habilitação para mestres dos respectivos ofícios», a record no other institution in the colony could match. Besides, requests for qualified printers kept coming from Hong Kong newspapers.<sup>157</sup>

The first batch of graduates from the reborn *Orfanato* came on stream in

<sup>154</sup> *Cronaca Ispett.*, pp. 19–20; *Cronistoria*, p. 37. Both carry transcriptions of an article published by the *Daily Press* of Hong Kong on 16.05.1925. The Salesians entered Hong Kong in 1927. The Industrial School was eventually set up in Aberdeen in 1934.

<sup>155</sup> *Liber Baptizatorum* 1906, in Archives of Instituto Salesiano di Macau, *Monografia Storica*, pp. 8, 15. *Cronistoria*, *passim*.

<sup>156</sup> *Relazione della Visita Annuale fatta alla Casa Salesiana di Macau* (16–22 Maggio 1926). ASC F478 Macau. At the beginning of the school year he himself addressed «pagan» pupils separately for the opening triduum. *Cronaca Ispettoriale*, p. 34.

<sup>157</sup> BGEDM 101-2 (Nov.-Dec.1911) 111.

1917. A report prepared by the prefect of studies, Don Giovanni Guarona, has this to say:

«Alcuni hanno già trovato un lucroso impiego in città, nelle ripartizioni del governo ed alcuni furono persino ammessi nella banda municipale. Questi primi risultati hanno messo più in vista la nostra opera e fanno apprezzare il nostro umile lavoro tanto dal governo, che ci dispensa larga protezione, come dai cittadini che moltiplicano la loro cooperazione».<sup>128</sup>

The 1919 *Relatório* mentions 42 pupils who had achieved sufficient proficiency in the Portuguese language to be employed by the Macao government with a monthly salary averaging 35 patacas. Others had found employment as musicians, teachers of gymnastics and draughtsmen in Macao and in other colonies, including Hong Kong.<sup>129</sup> In 1924 the Past Pupils Association already had 60 members, the majority of whom had found employment in two shops (shoemaking and tailoring) set up by two of the more enterprising among them.

«Fa veramente piacere, andando per Macau, entrare in queste botteghe e vederle popolate di exallievi salesiani».<sup>130</sup>

The *Relatório* and the 1924 *Monografia* give the following statistics of pupils who obtained a diploma from the year 1917, when the first batch of students graduated, having completed the prescribed 5 year course:

	<i>Relatório</i> (1917-1919)	<i>Monografia</i> (1917-1924)
Type-setters	08	07
Printers	02	07
Bookbinders	01	02
Tailors	07	15
Shoemakers	09	14
Carpenters	00	01
Total	27	46

A Macao annual report for 1927 blamed two factors for the difficulty in reporting data on pupils who had followed these courses: (1) the inconstancy «própria dos chineses» who tended to leave school and take up a job as soon as they were capable of earning a few cents; (2) the impossibility to contact the past pupils since so many of them were from outside Macao. However it offered the following data:

<sup>128</sup> Guarona to Albers 04.03.1917, in ACS A893 Missione Cina - Heung Shan. On G. Guarona (1887-1961) cf *Diz. Biogr. Sal.*, p. 148.

<sup>129</sup> *Relatório* p. 6. The same information is repeated in *Monografia Storica*, p. 11. The figure given for government employees, however, is 50: same source...updated to 1924!

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14

- existing photographic records showed that at least 37 had graduated;
- three alumni exercised their trade as tailor, shoemaker and printer in Salesian establishments in Shiu Chow;
- in Hong Kong two tailor shops were owned by alumni and some printing shops employed many who had learnt the trade in the *Orfanato*;
- two printers had set up business in Singapore, two in Dily (Timor) in the government's printing shop; a tailor was employed in the Lahane mission;
- all shoe shops in the colony of Macao and almost all the western-style tailoring shops had been opened by alumni of the *Orfanato* and employed exclusively people who had graduated from the school;
- ten printers worked for the *Imprensa Nacional*, 8 of whom for the daily *A Pátria* and the others for the weekly *O Combate*;
- the instructors that ran the shoemaking and printing shops in the Institute were former pupils of the Institute itself.<sup>51</sup>

The main challenge for the *Orfanato* was undoubtedly that of personnel. Personnel is *the* major topic in the correspondence that Versiglia and Canazei had with the Superiors in Turin – its scarcity, professionalism, suitability and, when clerics, novices and postulants began to be sent – their age, their studies and formation.

Some of the problems had roots elsewhere, i.e. in the way new ventures were conceived, managed and developed. Salesians did not have much mission experience and whatever experience they had acquired in other parts of the world was not always readily applicable to China. A well rooted culture, long standing customs and traditions, developed and well established religions and systems of thought, the difficulty of the language and a simmering political situation made the China mission far more challenging than any of those that the Salesians had previously opened. The 'running in' period was bound to be long and bumpy. Yet not much thought went into long term planning. The Salesians began by gaining a foothold on the borders of China and 'exporting' a model they were familiar with, a method of operation then in use elsewhere. The contrast that arose in the years 1906-1910 between Versiglia and the bishop was one of conflicting models rather than of freedom and authority. The Salesians sought freedom to work in the way they knew, something they succeeded in doing beginning from 1912. From there they went on to acquire experience in the field. This is what they essentially tried to do in Heung Shan.

Difficulties were also the consequence of the selection process, which was centralized. It was Turin that largely decided who would be sent, trying as far as possible to satisfy the requests of the local Superior. This, coupled with a scarcity of well trained and motivated confreres, often resulted in poor selection and, consequently, in severe wastage, something which Don Pietro Ricaldone ac-

<sup>51</sup> M. TEIXEIRA, *A Educação em Macau*, Macau 1982, pp. 369-70.



knowledge in 1927.<sup>162</sup> One of the reasons for the 1906-1910 failure was, in fact, lack of qualifications – four out of six confreres were either sent back or did not wish to return. Things improved considerably in 1912 at Versiglia's insistence, yet problems lingered. The redeployment of Bernardini, unfit for the missions, from Heung Shan to the *Orfanato* turned out to be a blessing. Other similar cases resulted in confreres being shifted from Macao to the missions or viceversa every few years. Things did not go so well for the coadjutors, however, who could not be redeployed in the missions. Inevitably, there were also cases of people who had to be sent back home because of 'culture-shock'.<sup>163</sup> The 1923 policy of sending novices, aspirants and postulants tried to cure such problems at the root. But such policy had disadvantages as well as advantages, since while younger men could adapt more easily to the new environment, the presence of increasing numbers of yet to be formed young men was bound to apply undue stress to human and financial resources.

The development of the Salesian presence in China, however, complicated the life of the *Orfanato* and forced new roles on it, since it was losing out in importance to Shiu Chow and had to adapt to a supporting, yet not less demanding, role. Yet if notwithstanding all these personnel related problems, which defied total and immediate solution, remarkable results were still achieved, this must be ascribed firstly to a system that relied more on teamwork than on talent and so was able to function in spite of shortages in both quantity and quality, and secondly to the sheer dedication and strenuous efforts of both capable and humble confreres who repeatedly won the praises of both Versiglia and Canazei.

### *3.5. Language and inculturation*

The challenge of language turns up at every stage in the development of the *Orfanato* and was possibly the single most important element that conditioned the performance of individuals and system alike. In 1910 Cogliolo noticed that religious instruction of the pupils was entrusted to two lay teachers «due to the great difficulty of the Chinese language». He further observed that the on-going formation of the priests was neglected since their entire attention was absorbed by the study of the language, to which they still applied themselves – four years after their arrival – for several hours a day under the guidance of a teacher, this being the sole means of rendering oneself useful to the mission. While Versiglia

<sup>162</sup> Don Pietro Ricaldone visited China as extraordinary visitor from 16 May to 16 Oct. 1927. Cf *Relazione Ricaldone* pp. 62-3. ASC F158 Cina.

<sup>163</sup> «2 Novembre 1923. Il confr. coad. Gonzales Ramón, arrivato l'ultimo marzo [...], non potendosi egli adattare alle esigenze della sua vita in China e nemmeno alla sua vita di Macao, fece reiteratamente petizione di tornare in Europa... 13 Gennaio 1926. Il confr. [coad. Emmanuele] Gomez, venuto dal Kimberley, non desiderando in alcuna maniera vivere in China, rimpatriò». He had arrived less than three months earlier. *Cronaca Ispettoriale*, pp. 3, 28.

and Fergnani were making progress, and were able to hear confessions and give simple sermons and instructions, Olive, being older, was lagging behind. Through sheer will power Coad. Rota had managed to learn just enough to perform his job, something that could not be expected of Carmagnola.<sup>164</sup> Poor Carmagnola himself felt quite frustrated, as we gather from a letter he wrote to a fellow coadjutor:

«...me la passo abbastanza bene in tutto. Solo mi trovo un poco impacciato nel laboratorio, perché non posso parlare. Lei pure sa quante difficoltà si trova nell'insegnare un mestiere a ragazzi; anche quando capiscono a parlare, pure non intendono, e bisogna dire, ripetere e ridire molte volte la medesima cosa. Ora faccio il confronto mio, che quando io parlo essi non capiscono, e [...] ricavi le conseguenze».<sup>165</sup>

The stress was such that Versiglia contemplated sending him back. In 1914 the tailor Luigi Viola wrote to the Provincial asking for reinforcements. The work was such a burden that he did not have time to learn the language, which was indispensable if he was to do any good.<sup>166</sup> Difficulties were not limited to lay brothers. Bernardini, the second rector of the *Orfanato* (1919-26), never managed to master the language even moderately. José Lucas, appointed rector in 1926, a veteran of 14 years, spoke only conversational Chinese and never managed to summon the courage to address the pupils in the 'good night' talk. His vicar, Emilio Rossetti, in Macao for about half a year, was having difficulty with both the Chinese and Portuguese languages. António Carvalho, the prefect of studies in the trade section, did not speak Chinese, nor did he intend to learn the language.<sup>167</sup> The three lay brothers that directed the workshops had difficulty in making themselves understood. Aurelio Pamio, the prefect of studies, was a consoling exception. He had managed to learn the language fairly well, being the first of a new breed of missionaries who, unlike the previous ones, had arrived in China in 1921 as clerics.<sup>168</sup>

The strategy of supplying younger people to the missions picked up pace in the years 1924-26, when 36 novices and 11 clerics in temporary vows were sent in different batches to help sustain future expansion. This expansion gradually

<sup>164</sup> Casa di Macao (Cina), report of 12.03.1910, in ASC F007, fasc.13.

<sup>165</sup> Carmagnola to Merlo Angelo, 08.09 (year not given), ASC B871. L. Carmagnola (1856-1932) returned to the Subalpine Province in 1911 and worked in Novara, Perosa Argentina, Biella, Canelli and Trino Verc.

<sup>166</sup> Viola to Manassero, 29.03.1914, ASC F478 Macau. L. Viola returned to Italy in 1917 and left the Society in Aug. 1918 while in Milan.

<sup>167</sup> Don Emilio Rossetti (1874-1971) had been transferred from the Vicariate Apostolic of Kimberley in Oct. 1925 together with three other confreres. In Aug. 1926 he resigned. In 1927 both he and Carvalho were assigned to Timor, *Cronaca Ispettorale*, pp. 34, 38. On P. José da Silva Lucas (1888-1931) cf. ANCS, *Centenario*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>168</sup> Don A. Pamio arrived on 18.08.1921. In the same party there were three other clerics: A. Kirschner, a Hungarian, T. Wiczorek, a Pole, and J. Kerec, from Slovenia.

involved Shanghai, and later Hong Kong, Japan and Thailand, posing problems of formation, language and inculturation as young trainees of European provenance mixed with the first local novices.<sup>168</sup> The problems came to a head in mid 1926 when formation-related difficulties, without the benefits that had been expected from the large number of new arrivals, were compounded by stubborn and dangerous xenophobic movements that forced Religious Congregations to examine their past and present strategies and drove Canazei to lead novices and students of philosophy in an adventurous exodus from Shiu Chow to Macao. To make room for the new arrivals, the *Orfanato* reduced the number of pupils it could accommodate. The event, however, showed how wise Rondina's advice had been on the need for a *pied-à-terre* in a foreign administered territory in case of turmoil on the mainland.

Adding to the problems, four newly arrived confreres, two novices and two priests had to be sent home, the former because found unsuitable and the latter for health reasons.<sup>170</sup> With numerous clerics in houses of formation and no one to send to the school in Shiu Chow, the Provincial was compelled to have three clerics interrupt their philosophical studies six months before completion, even though after two and a half years in the studentate they did not know enough written Chinese to work in a school. The two Chinese novice lay brothers had to be given instruction apart and were largely cut off from their fellow novices. It was – in Canazei's mind – a great waste of time and energies. He suggested it was better to send practical trainees, since they were easier to tend to and could learn the language in the region of their future assignment, rather than all having to learn the Cantonese dialect in Macao only to be sent to Shanghai or to Shiu Chow's Hakka country. He made his point clear with an example:

«...In Europa certo non si penserebbe giammai di inviare novizi, per esempio italiani in Inghilterra, perché ivi apprendano due o tre anni l'inglese, mentre più tardi (cosa che si sa) dovranno essere inviati nel Belgio ed in Germania».<sup>171</sup>

Rather than to Don Ricaldone, who handled mission affairs, the letter was addressed to Don Rinaldi, probably intentionally. On 11 Dec. 1925 Don Rinaldi had written to Canazei to illustrate his vision and desires about Salesian missions, among which that of «seeing next to priests...clerics running the oratory, teaching in classrooms, assisting in the playground», an essential feature of any

<sup>168</sup> The first three Chinese lay brothers joined eight Italian novices when the first novitiate opened in Hoshi in 1924. *Cronaca Ispettoriale*, pp. 1, 7.

<sup>169</sup> In 1926 Canazei lamented the fact that in 4 years he had to send back home fourteen priests and clerics, or 25% of arrivals, for reasons of health, lack of vocation or of suitable qualifications. He quantified the loss and asked a refund of \$8,680.40. Report of 22.09.1926. ASC P161 Cina. Statistiche.

<sup>171</sup> Canazei to Rinaldi, 27.06.1926. ASC, A895 Shiu Chow. Corrispondenza. On these issues of also *Cronaca Ispettoriale*, pp. 31, 33-34.



Salesian house. On April 3rd Canazei took time to explain why, because of the demanding nature of the Chinese language only half of his dream was likely to come true.<sup>172</sup>

In Sep. 1923 the Provincial and his Council had welcomed the idea of receiving novices in China. Now, given the overall negative situation, on 13 Jan. 1927 they decided to send a memorandum asking the Superiors to suspend the sending of novices or clerics at least for the time being. The extraordinary Visitor responded by packing off clerics, novices and novice master, 20 persons in all, to Thailand.<sup>173</sup>

If Canazei showed some «passion» when discussing matters concerning the Chinese language,<sup>174</sup> the heat of that passion rose by several degrees when he wrote about inculturation. The need for adaptation must inevitably have surfaced in the very first years at the *Orfanato*, even though one never finds the topic discussed, except in very rare instances and rather superficially at that. A measure of that superficiality was the idea that by opening a western style trade school the Salesians would concur in «the civilizing of China».<sup>175</sup> Naturally, the strongly colonialist bias of Macao could hardly have favoured a debate. It was the missions, that of Heung Shan first and that of Shiu Chow later, along with the xenophobic movements that swept China from 1925 that forced the issue and found deep repercussions in Canazei, who began to conceive a 'Chinese way' for the implantation of the Salesian Society in China. His ideas did not make inroads, however, probably because he was perceived in Turin as someone who tended to exaggerate issues. On the other hand, given the times, the problem of nationalism and of nationalities (of which there were thirteen in the Province) was a reality with which the Provincial Community itself had to contend in the 1920s, a problem which complicated the question of inculturation and itself defied immediate solution. A solution could only have come within the parameters of an ongoing indepth inculturation.<sup>176</sup>

The Community as such was probably culturally unprepared to contend with these issues. The house of Macao, in the meantime, was not doing too badly. In his report at the end of the Canonical Visitation in May 1926 Canazei highlighted a host of problems that required attention. Before doing that, however, he observed:

<sup>172</sup> Canazei to Rinaldi, 03.04.1926. ASC F156 Cina. Corrispondenza. Earlier Canazei had to defend the true Salesian nature of the work done in Macao against doubts indirectly raised by the Superior General. Canazei to Rinaldi 09.11.1923. ASC *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> Bernardini to Rinaldi 23.09.1923, in ASC F156 Cina, Corrispondenza; *Cronaca Ispettorale*, pp. 36, 44; the memorandum was written and signed on 27.01.1927. ASC *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> «Ha forse troppo passione pel Cinese e per lo studio...» wrote Don Pietro Ricaldone in his 1927 visit report. ASC F158 Cina, p. 70.

<sup>175</sup> L. VERIGLIA, *L'Orfanotrofio dell'Immacolata in Macao etc.*, in BS 38 (1914) 366-8.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. Canazei's correspondence with Rinaldi and Ricaldone from June 1925 to January 1927. ASC F156 Cina. Corrispondenza. Also *Cronaca Ispettorale*, pp. 21ff.

«La casa di Macao è al presente quella che qui nell'Oriente rispecchia più di qualsiasi altra l'opera salesiana: ci sono scuole elementari, scuole professionali, noviziato, studentato, (aspirandato), unione ex allievi, cappella semipubblica... Premetto con piacere – a mo' di osservazione generale – che tra i confratelli regna la carità fraterna, che tutti in generale lavorano con amore e zelo, e che nella casa vi è buon affiatamento ed allegria salesiana».<sup>77</sup>

These observations, coming as they did from a man who was judged to tend rather to underlining than solving difficulties, are sufficient evidence that problems and limits had not hindered the setting up of a well established institution nor the performance of meaningful work at the *Orfanato*, notwithstanding certain opinions and ideals that from the very beginning had envisaged no future for Salesian work in Macao.

### Appendix

#### Data regarding the *Orfanato*: 1906-1924

year	Salesians pt/cl/cd	pupils	baptism	commu- nions	shoemg turnover \$ p.a.	tailoring turnover \$ p.a.	printing turnover \$ p.a.	binding turnover \$ p.a.	carpent turnover \$ p.a.	donations income \$ p.a.
1906	3/0/3	50	02		630	800	540			45
1907	3/0/2	50	02		950	1220	799			29
1908	3/0/2	50	03		780	1250	770			64
1909	3/0/2	15	03		925	1075	650			—
1910	3/0/2									
1911	0/0/0									
1912	4/0/3	65	—		846	617	930			1200
1913	4/0/5	80	09		2160	2120	430	150		287
1914	4/0/5	102	04		2735	1980	2000	660		400
1915	4/0/5	124	06		3600	1680	2220	580		900
1916	4/0/5	130	09	12000	4180	2120	3250	1140	11482	
1917	4/0/5	140	12	20900	4370	1120	5520	1440	1450	2498
1918	4/0/5	170	11	22650	5280	6960	3870	470*	1416	2391
1919	4/0/5	200	07	22100	6520	2040	4850	560	660	2824
1920	4/4/4	205	11	26800	7900	2642	7190	670	750	500
1921	4/4/4	210	27	28000	5880	4190	5520	480	740	287
1922	4/4/4	215	17	30560	5440	2180	8050	960	1670	1500
1923	4/4/4	220	04	33950	6820	3800	9600	1050	1500	—
1924	4/4/4	220	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

\* Bookbinding and printing sections were combined as from 1918.

<sup>77</sup> Relazione della Visita Annuale fatta alla Casa Salesiana di Macao (16-22 Maggio 1926). ASC F478 Macao.