

# **THE IMPLANTATION OF THE SALESIAN CHARISM IN CHINA (1906-1936): IDEALS, CHALLENGES, ANSWERS AND RESULTS**

*Carlo Socol\**

## **Introduction**

The Salesians landed in Macao on 13 February 1906 to take over the management of a diocesan orphanage and set up a school of arts and crafts, with the aim of expanding gradually into China proper, which they first did in 1911, shortly after the Portuguese republican revolution forced them out of the enclave. For 17 years, from 1911 to 1928, a dozen Salesians (ten priests, a lay brother and a cleric) took turns three or four at a time and worked with some degree of success in the Heungshan district, in Chinese territory just north of Macao, under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Bishop of that city.

In 1916 the Society decided it wanted a mission of its own and gave the local superior, Fr Luigi Versiglia, leave to prepare the paperwork to be submitted to the Holy See. It was a favourable moment: since the 1911 revolution the China missions had entered a new, encouraging phase and the MEP Missionaries, who led the vast Vicariate Apostolic of Guangdong, could no longer guarantee the development of their mission (the pastoral care of existing Catholics and the evangelization of the large 'pagan' population) relying solely on their reduced personnel. The view of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide coincided with that of the Vicar Apostolic, Msgr. Jean B. de Guebriant, regarding the need to parcel out the vast mission territory to younger Missionary Societies or Orders. In 1919, after a period of gradual transition, the Salesians were entrusted the northernmost portion of Guangdong Province, the mountainous region

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\* Salesian, professor of Church History at the Holy Spirit Seminary of the Diocese of Hong Kong.

of Shiuchow. The territory was erected into a Vicariate Apostolic in 1920 and Fr Luigi Versiglia was elected its first Vicar shortly thereafter.

On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1923 the Salesian work in China, which up until then had come under the Subalpine Province and was directed by Bishop Versiglia, became a *Visitatoria* and three years later a Province. The newly acquired status pushed the territories ministered to by the Salesians towards a gradual self organization in terms of what a Province needs to function properly.

All along and up to then the work was carried out chiefly under the thrust of the *charism* of Don Bosco, the one motivating force being to make true what the Founder had written in his Testament and seen in his dreams, "*la realtà sognata da D. Bosco*".<sup>1</sup> It took the Congregation fifteen years of negotiations (1890-1905) before the first group of Salesians could set foot in Macao, and during all this time no one thought of a specific preparation for the China mission: members of the first and other expeditions were selected at the very last moment. Structures, both at local and provincial level, and organization could only have been tentative in the early stages. In 1923, at the birth of the Visitatoria, there was one regular house, the *Istituto da Imaculada Conceição* in Macao (1906), the Mission of Heungshan (1911) divided in three sections, and the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow (1920), which comprised four sections/districts and one house, viz., the Istituto (school-orphanage) S. Giuseppe at Hosai (1921). By 1926, when the China Province of Mary Help of Christians was established, two more houses had been added, the Istituto Don Bosco of Shiuchow (1924) and the Istituto S. Giuseppe of Shanghai (1924), and one new mission, viz., the independent mission of Mijazaki in Japan (1926).

These developments imposed the need to seek a *modus vivendi* between the newly born Visitatoria/Province and the Vicariate Apostolic. Questions such as the exercise of authority, now there

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<sup>1</sup> ASC F156 *Bernardini to Rinaldi 23.09.1923*. Chief archival sources are from ASC (Archivio Salesiano Centrale) in Rome and AIC (Archivio Ispettoria Cina) in Hong Kong.

being two Superiors claiming jurisdiction over the same group of people, the division of property, the management of personnel, the search for vocations, the development of works etc. needed to be thrashed out.

Furthermore, there were more fundamental questions awaiting an answer. The Salesians had all along gradually attempted to establish what one of the missionaries called "a Salesian missionary system" in China.<sup>2</sup> Fr Versiglia and the first group of Salesians who landed in Macao in 1906 had no experience in running a school. Imperial China (and Macao) did not have a school system they could copy and adapt. The Salesians did, and they were hence free to run the school as they wanted, or as they could and the circumstances allowed. The Orphanage was a kind of shelter, at first for the orphans of the diocese, and later for needy youngsters of the missions tended by the Salesians. These young charges differed greatly in age, cultural background, academic preparation and individual needs. The orphanage, now in the hands of the new arrivals, offered all of them a 'one stop solution' in the best Salesian tradition: a home first of all, then a church, a playground and a school of some sorts.

"The Salesians [...] excel[led] 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. In addition a noisy but charming 'western' brass band, the like of which had never before been seen nor heard in the region!"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Inter Nos*, 26.01.1924. *Inter Nos* was the internal monthly newsletter of the Shiuchow meant to help missionaries share experiences and keep in touch with each other and with the world. The leaflet also contained a roundup of Reuter's dispatches.

<sup>3</sup> Carlo Socol, *The First Twenty Years of the Orfanato of Macao between Ideal and Reality (1906-1926)*, in F. MORTO (Ed.), *Insedimenti e iniziative salesiane*

The school of arts and trades took longer to organize from an academic point of view. The years 1912-1918 were years of “growth”, while the 1918-1924 period was one of “development”, with the Orphanage taking on an identity of its own as distinct from the Vicariate, to which it was effectively attached up to 1919, Bishop Versiglia being the only superior of both. The St. Joseph Institute in Hosai had similar objectives: it offered primary school courses to youngsters, eager to obtain a Christian and human formation, hailing from the Shiuchow Vicariate, which was a very poor area.

### 1. **Fr Ignaz Canazei and Fr Carlo Braga, the Will and the Heart**

The two institutes of Macao and Hosai became grounds for rather different experiments in the application of the Salesian system in China. An interesting source, the “*Memoriale del Consigliere*” (Memorandum of the Prefect of Studies) of 1919 chronicles the efforts of Fr Ignaz Canazei to regulate the academic, disciplinary and, to a lesser extent, pedagogical aspects of the Macao Orphanage and the annexed *Escola de Artes e Officios* or School of Arts and Trades, and thus gives us an insight into the problems the institute was labouring under and the challenges it was facing to adapt to the situation of a Portuguese Colony set at the margins of Mainland China. The Memorandum covers two school years 1918-19 and 1919-20.<sup>4</sup>

The *Escola* was loosely organized along the model of the Trade Schools promoted by the Salesian Congregation in many parts of the world, naturally adapted to local circumstances and with obvious limits, some of which can be traced back to the number and quality of the teaching staff sent from Turin.<sup>5</sup> The limits were obvious in Canazei’s

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dopo Don Bosco. *Saggi di storiografia*. (= Istituto Storico Salesiano – Studi, 9). Roma, LAS 1996, p. 292.

<sup>4</sup> AIC Macao Orfanato – Ignaz Canazei, *Memoriale del Consigliere* (1919).

<sup>5</sup> Carlo Socol, «Una Istituzione che si occupa della classe operaia»: la *escola de artes e officios* di Macao nel suo primo ventennio (1906-1926), in *L’Opera*

eyes: the School lacked a well organized academic programme perhaps to meet the needs of a body of students widely differing in age, school background and even race or nationality, or perhaps because of lack of knowledge, on the part of school authorities, of the school system then adopted in China. The programme did not meet the minimum requirements to qualify as a recognized primary school. In particular, the time spent in the classroom, especially to learn the Chinese language, was not sufficient. Every teacher decided on his own what programme he would follow. The Prefect of Studies, therefore, resolved to divide students into the 5 classes of the Lower Primary School; on reaching third year, students were allowed to join the Arts and Crafts course, but all had to complete the 5 years curriculum; teachers were asked to draw up a timetable; textbooks were mandated by the school; a system of grading was introduced and diplomas granted; at the end of each semester grades were read in public in the presence of all the staff and prizes were distributed to the best students. Fortnightly outings were organized, classes in good manners were introduced and singing class was enriched with a Chinese repertoire to supplement the Latin songs the students already knew.

“Our youngsters like to sing and learn quickly. Prayer in church is thus enlivened and there is some variety on the occasion of feasts and solemnities. I started from the principle that every nation sings better in its own language, and therefore we have to teach them sacred songs not in the language of the western teacher, but rather in the language of the Chinese pupil. Only in this way will singing be accepted and will serve to arouse a life of faith and piety”.<sup>6</sup>

The Salesian hymn was translated into Chinese and a school hymn was composed. The students were taught the official Chinese National Anthem, as well as the Portuguese Anthem to serve on special occasions, but, as expected, the bigger boys “boycotted” it somewhat.

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*Salesiana dal 1880 al 1922. Significatività e portata sociale.* (= Istituto Storico Salesiano – Studi, 17). Roma, LAS 2001, pp. 424-428.

<sup>6</sup> AIC Macao Orfanato – Ignaz Canazei, *Memoriale*, p. 5v

Attention was then turned to discipline, the need to tackle disciplinary problems, poor manners, rowdy behaviour, and find suitable punishments that did not contravene Salesian praxis and that were effective on the Chinese, whereas previously fasting was imposed too often, for instance for those who did not apply themselves to learning the Portuguese language, the subject pupils liked the least (taught as a matter of contract with the Portuguese diocesan authorities, and a must for typesetters!). Canazei proposed useful services such as asking the bigger boys to clean parts of the house, or direct smaller (or too numerous offenders) to stand against the wall. Canazei took upon himself the task of imparting Religion lessons, with the exception of Primary I students. It was not just rote learning of the catechism; also lessons in apologetics were given (there was even an "apologetic box"). The Sodality of St. Joseph was reorganized and 'pagan' pupils were given talks on religion adapted to their mentality and needs. An innovative way was introduced to help the boys follow Holy Mass: a picture booklet was printed with prayers they would recite and that matched the various moments of the Holy Sacrifice being offered by the priest at the high altar, his back turned to the congregation.

In a long paragraph Canazei lamented the absence of the rector, Fr Versiglia, who was busy setting up the newly established Shiuchow mission, thus missing out on a key element in Salesian pedagogy, to the detriment of both the boys who were deprived of a fatherly spiritual guidance and of the young confreres, who had nobody to turn to for encouragement and advice.

Being particularly sensitive to Chinese patriotic aspirations, Canazei also organized a celebration of the Anniversary of the Republic on 10 October: the national flag was hoisted, the event was explained by one of the teachers, the national anthem was sung together with "the hymn to St. Joseph, Patron of China". Then the students, who were better dressed than usual, saluted the flag. The recreation was longer; in the evening the students went for a walk and when they returned they were given snacks consisting of tea, peanuts and one-fourth of a mooncake.

Fr Canazei was a man who appreciated things Chinese and who understood the cultural and political climate of China. He had the will and went through the trouble of reorganizing life in the school with innovative and inculturated initiatives.

Fr Carlo Braga treaded a somewhat different path as he tried to apply the spirit and method of Don Bosco in working with his young charges at Hosai against the background of the tumultuous 1920s: civil war, leftist incursions, plundering armies and people seeking shelter within the compound of the Catholic mission. He wrote of this in the *Inter Nos* and in a letter to the Rector Major, Fr Filippo Rinaldi.<sup>7</sup>

Braga began to work with a small band of 24 pupils, of whom seven were boarders, and to them he dedicated his entire self: living together, praying and playing together, together setting up a school and a small community from the scratch, and in the process gradually becoming acquainted with the pupils' physical, moral, intellectual and civil background. It was a matter of "giving a new imprint and a new direction to their lives, their thoughts, their likes and their habits". Given the small number of pupils, it was not too difficult. His greatest effort and success was to manage to see "behind the yellow faces, the inconspicuous noses and the bony physiques, the hearts and souls of our children" and to treat them "as ours, to love them, to excuse them as we would excuse our youngsters, and even more to make appeal to their hearts (*'prenderli dalla parte del cuore'*)". The strategy worked and, with the help of this first group, it worked also with the new comers the following year.

A key point, Braga reminded his fellow missionaries, was to understand and accept the Chinese:

"Often the young Chinese do not know they err, they have no idea they are doing things that the conscience of Christianized Europe would feel thoroughly uncomfortable with. For them, on the contrary, it is the most natural thing

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<sup>7</sup> *Inter Nos*, 11.06.1922; 12.07.1926; ASC F158 *Braga to Rinaldi* 15-26.04.1926.

to do and perhaps it even represents the best of their civilization. Often I ask myself, whether our obsession to Europeanize even the deepest, unchangeable part of the Chinese soul, something that has nothing to do with the salvation of souls, is not blunting our best energies and compromising our work. Taking things with patience the Chinese way won't hurt anyone and it will not diminish our reward in heaven one little bit: be local with the locals, Chinese with the Chinese! For me, in my little and limited experience, there is one useful and practical saying: *Festina lente!* Let us affirm ourselves patiently.”<sup>8</sup>

With these principles in mind he gradually began to organize the Institute. Games, outings, vocal and instrumental music and Church functions were the attractions. The kids preferred life in the boarding school to life at home. Fr Braga began to be known as “China’s little Don Bosco”. Punishments were banned and the school almost resembled a novitiate. Fr Braga dreamt of the day when he could rely on local Salesians to give him a hand.<sup>9</sup> With the help of the brass band and of sporting activities the school had outshined the richly endowed Protestant schools. If these had money, the Salesians had “the educative system of Don Bosco”. The miracles promised by Don Bosco were slowly becoming a reality.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. The “Don Bosco System”

Fr Canazei and Fr Braga were the first two Provincials of the China Province and, to a considerable extent, by their work of animation they introduced their experience into the life stream of the Province with varying degrees of success.

What Fr Braga wrote about the “miracles” promised by the Founder was not an isolated sentiment. One question the first

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<sup>8</sup> *Inter Nos*, 18.06.1922

<sup>9</sup> ASC F158 *Braga to Rinaldi*, 15-26.04.1924

<sup>10</sup> *Inter Nos*, 12.07.1926



generations of Salesians tried to give an answer to was: would the "Don Bosco system" work with Chinese youths? The doubt may have been sown in their minds because of the cultural and linguistic gap that existed between educator and pupil, which forced the educators to rely on outside teachers untrained in the Salesian methods of education in teaching and other activities. It became an existential issue, when the very *raison d'être* of a Salesian way of evangelizing was challenged by the more experienced China hands, the MEP missionaries, who had toiled for over 200 years in the mission territory of Shiuchow they were now handing over to less experienced hands, and with whom the new arrivals worked side by side during the first two years of missionary work.

The Salesians certainly discussed, observed and evaluated their methodology and work, which they experimented with and compared with others. Above all, they could not disguise the fact that they were first and foremost Salesian missionaries. The *Inter Nos* bears ample witness to this. The Salesians did take into account the work done by their predecessors, they collected the history and the Catholic geography of the districts where their sparse communities lived. But above all they did what they knew best: spread the devotion to Mary Help of Christians, start small scale oratories and set up mission schools for boys and girls in all major missionary centres; they would surround themselves with noisy young people even in smaller stations, work with zeal and sacrifice for the Catholic population, evangelize non-Catholics... all in a very familiar, Salesian way! And, of course, they observed the results.

The Salesian mission stations were full of young people, whose fervour and zeal, in the perception of the missionaries, would at times surpass that of their European counterparts. It was a way of evangelizing through the young; the missionaries saw the young as a 'power' to conquer China for the Church. Other missionary institutes may have had different experiences which brought them to conclude that the "substratum of the Chinese personality, a mixture of cold aloofness and self-centered interest, would be resistant to the warm

feelings and noble idealism rooted in Christianity".<sup>11</sup> Judging by what the Salesians saw even from the earliest stages, when language was still a barrier and the poor knowledge of it had been the root cause of some misadventures, the only conclusion they could draw was that "where the spirit of Don Bosco, this gentle humanization of God's love for the young, comes into contact with young hearts, it could only awaken that modicum of idealism that the Creator God had planted in all human hearts, whom He created only for Himself, so that they might know Him and love Him, no matter in which corner of the world they lived".<sup>12</sup> After seeing with what fervour the young boys of Macao and Hoshi, trained by a young Fr Carlo Braga, made their annual retreat, and indeed observing on a daily basis the experiences these youngsters could count on to grow and mature in the Christian faith, a missionary would exhort his colleagues to "set aside any doubt, any perplexity regarding the efficacy of Salesian work"; it really worked, on condition, of course, that they kept faith to the teachings of Don Bosco and worked untiringly for the greater glory of God.<sup>13</sup>

Had pessimists and doubters, skeptical about the religious future of China, seen a Salesian feast like the Feast of St. Joseph organized in Macao in March 1924, they would have to conclude that "the Chinese are not after all different from our overseas pupils" and perhaps "they would not even have realized they were in China at all!"<sup>14</sup> This is how a missionary described one such feast, the feast of Mary Help of Christian in Linchow in May 1925.

"The afternoon was spent in innocent fun. The youngsters had become masters of the situation and our joy; their rising boisterous shouts and the familiarity with which they moved with us gave us the feeling of being in a small festive oratory.

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<sup>11</sup> *Inter Nos*, 10.07.1920

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.05.1923

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.03.1924

Towards evening their loud noise gave way to busy preparations for the illumination.

At dusk the courtyard was illumined with multi-coloured Chinese lanterns obtained through the industrious affection of the students. The picture of Mary Help of Christians was at the centre decked with candles and flowers, flanked by as many people as I have ever seen I think in these parts, mostly made up of families of our pupils.

Amidst the joy of the youngsters and the splendour of the light, songs, music, speeches and a short gymnastic display were executed in front of the Madonna of Don Bosco. The entertainment over, all rose for the night prayers. *This is how it was done at Turin, and to be able to reproduce here in China what had evoked in us as youngsters a holy joy and a lively enthusiasm was for us a sweet consolation.* We felt ourselves united with our Superiors, our confreres and the youth of the whole Salesian world in a single thought of love and work; love and work, the holy legacy of our Venerable Father! He had told us to seek youth and to cultivate in their hearts two loves – to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Help of Christians. We just did this and it gave us a kind of assurance that we would see miracles, which we are actually beginning to see.”<sup>15</sup>

It was not just the missionaries. The newly appointed *Visitatore*, Fr Ignaz Canazei, observed developments with cautious satisfaction. The Confreres, as he saw, were well animated and mission work was proceeding in the right direction. Of course, there was the downside to a new situation: missionaries were grouped in small bands in the districts of the Vicariate, with a “*superior minor*” (a local superior) to whose care the confreres working in the district were entrusted. The confreres, however, lived and worked mostly alone, and pastoral work required great mobility as their flock was scattered over vast mountainous areas. Amid the jovial camaraderie of a group of Salesians just out of the trenches of World War I and catapulted at

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.06.1925

short notice into China one could detect certain amount of individualism. Hence this little step forward in the organization of missionary life, i.e., the appointment of three local superiors – achieved through a complete understanding between the Vicar Apostolic (Versiglia) and the *Visitatore* (Canazei) – together with the establishment of the novitiate for a dozen novices from abroad and three local lay brothers, was seen as the most important event of the year of the Jubilee, a double Jubilee: that of the Holy Year and of the Salesian Missions (1925). The *Visitatore* could not fail to spot the great utility these two important steps forward represented for the Salesian Congregation in China “by creating closer bonds of love and brotherhood and giving religious life an exemplary trait of discipline and obedience so as to render us more and more worthy sons of our Venerable Father D. Bosco”.<sup>16</sup>

For those who later knew Canazei, a man – as one Extraordinary Visitor put it – “not fatherly” at all,<sup>17</sup> the circular letters he wrote during his first years as Superior are surprisingly heart-warming. He repeatedly visited (on foot!) the missionaries in their districts scattered over a vast mountainous area, happy to meet the “dear confreres and beloved sons of the Congregation”, praying and making sure they lived in fraternal charity and in the love towards the Congregation, full of zeal for souls”. He reminded them of the “souvenir” left them at the end of the spiritual exercises, “spirit of discipline and observance”, a souvenir that would bind them together as “Salesians in China”, and enable them to promote within the limits of one’s sphere, “the good, the advancement, the honour and holiness of the Congregation”. He concluded:

“How much should each of us feel stimulated, in this year which recalls such a glorious event for the Congregation, to continue with zeal the grand programme entrusted to us by our Venerable Father, who was truly inspired by the Lord, and carried out in such a wonderful manner by our elder Confreres during the first fifty years (1875-1925). ‘*Esto quod*

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<sup>16</sup> ASC F160 *Circular of I. Canazei, Good Friday 1924*

<sup>17</sup> ASC A868.0207 *Visita Berruti*

*diceris*', our deceased missionaries exhort us, '*Esto Salesianus!*'<sup>18</sup>

The road ahead was clear: work as "missionaries and educators" in mission land and in schools.<sup>19</sup> For this the setting up of a house of formation, the adaptation of Salesian methods and work, the search for local vocations, and an integral inculturised formation were a must. These were issues that were very much at the top of Canazei's priorities. It seemed like a promising start; one can detect, in fact, a reasonable degree of cooperation among the various parties involved: the Superiors in Turin, the Vicar Apostolic in Shiuchow and the *Visitore* (Provincial/Superior of Vice-Province) in Macao. In January 1924 the first group of novices – eight expatriates and three Chinese lay brothers – started their novitiate in Hosai. It was the beginning of a new, hopeful chapter for the *Visitatoria* (Vice-Province).

### 3. A Change in Scenario

Or so it seemed. In the 1920's the newly born China Province was to go through an extraordinarily rough patch.

1. *Political situation* - An anti-imperialist movement was fuelled by lengthy strikes and boycotts directed against foreign goods first in Shanghai (May 1925), then in Canton (May 30<sup>th</sup>) and Hong Kong (June 1925). In July the students of Philosophy were removed from Hosai to Macao, and in August, as violence and strife seemed about to flare up, also the novices undertook the same perilous voyage to the Portuguese enclave. The Shiuchow mission was no longer a safe place for the house of formation.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> ASC F160 *Circular of I. Canazei*, 24.11.1925

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Domingos LEONG, *The Political situation in China in 1920-1930 and its effects on Salesians*, in Nestor C. IMPELIDO (ed.) *The Beginnings of the Salesian Presence in East Asia*. Vol. 1. (= ACSSA - Varia, 2). Hong Kong, 2006, pp. 33-45.

2. *Ecclesial missionary renewal* - With the appointment of Archbishop Celso Costantini as first Apostolic Delegate in China (1922), the celebration of the Synod of Shanghai (*Primum Concilium Sinense*, 14.05-12.06.1924), the Consecration of the first six Chinese Bishops in St. Peter's (October 1926) China became a laboratory for the new course in mission work: transition from mission to local churches, the preparation of local clergy to assume responsibility to run churches, the decolonization of missions (*ad extra* the issue of the French Protectorate, *ad intra* the issue of Congregationalism), the promotion of local religious congregations, both male and female, inculturation (adaptation), etc. All these were supported by programmatic documents such as the Encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* (28 February 1926) in line with the Encyclical *Maximum Illud* (1919), a letter of the Prefect of Propaganda Fide on the renewal of missionary methods (20 May 1923), etc.<sup>21</sup> The new course coincided with the effort by the new Salesian leadership in Turin to reflect seriously, and for the first time, on the nature of its participation in the work of evangelization and the intent to convince the Holy See that the Salesian mission was "special", different from that of other Missionary Institutes.
3. The creation of the *Visitatoria* and of the Province, as mentioned, created a *dual authority*.
4. The acceptance of *new missions*, which initially came under the jurisdiction of Fr Canazei, while being a sign of deference towards the Holy See, did make things unmanageable: the China Province extended from Tokyo to Bangkok, and from Shanghai to East Timor.
5. *The new missionary policies of the Salesian Congregation*: the need of new personnel to sustain missionary expansion (in

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<sup>21</sup> Francesco MOTTO, *Salesian missionary activity while Blessed Filippo Rinaldi (1921-1931) was Rector Major with particular reference to Eastern Asia*, in N.C. IMPELIDO (ed.) *The beginnings...*, pp. 15-18.

1925 the Salesians were taking care of 13 “huge missionary territories” and 12 “extremely important missionary works”) and to satisfy the demands of personnel-hungry provinces is the reason behind the policy of sending “*ascritti*” (novices) and even senior aspirants to the missions for their formation.<sup>22</sup> This meant an influx of considerable numbers of ‘formandi’ to be trained religiously and professionally in mission lands when there were no structures and no personnel *ad hoc*, and at a moment when the China Province was in the middle of a severe political emergency. This meant giving the Province a chance to gradually become a full-fledged institution, with houses of formation and young confreres to help in the houses, a provision universally welcomed, but it also meant shifting the burden of formation to the Province. This, in turn, had to face the problem of wastage and delay in the use of the personnel being sent. Turin no longer sent priests because it did not have any to send.<sup>23</sup>

6. *Contradicting opinions.* Fr Rinaldi and Fr Ricaldone encouraged not only Provincials and Rectors, but also single confreres to write to them. Several did so and always received personal answers to their letters, filled with advice and encouragement. The system enhanced paternity and love for the Congregation, but it also had its pitfalls, because – perhaps unwittingly – it encouraged a practice of writing behind the backs of the local superiors – in China’s case both the Vicar Apostolic and the Provincial.<sup>24</sup> There was also at least one serious semi-pathological case of a confrere who, to induce

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-21; ASC D872 *Verballi delle riunioni capitolari*, IV, 17 and 19 June 1922, pp. 110-111.

<sup>23</sup> “Non mandiamo sacerdoti per la Missione per l’unica ragione che non ne abbiamo. E non ne abbiamo perchè da 12 anni si sottraggono alle Ispettorie produttrici tutti gli elementi giovani, quegli stessi che, se fossero stati lasciati, avrebbero poi domandato di andare in Missione dopo la loro ordinazione sacerdotale”. ASC F156 *Berruti to Braga* 13.07.1934.

<sup>24</sup> See for instance ASC F156 *Bardelli to Rinaldi* 6.3.1929.

Superiors to listen to his views, disparaged what the Vicar Apostolic and the Provincial were trying to do. Both Bishop Versiglia and Fr Canazei got perplexing observations from Fr Rinaldi regarding a lack of Salesian spirit and method in China.<sup>25</sup>

In this situation Canazei began to speak – with increasing insistence – of “indigenous” vocations, the need to study the Chinese language and culture, of resisting the temptation to introduce European ways of Christian life, of the need for mature and committed missionaries, and of doing away with Romantic ideas of mission. All these were issues that other missionaries and, to a certain extent, also the Superiors in Turin shared. Canazei, however, believed in them and worked for them with passion, strong inner conviction and radical choices. He brought up the issues at the GC XIII when the Salesian missions were discussed, only to obtain the opposite effect. Not only was his voice not heeded to, but he was classified as being out of step with the Congregation: “It is convenient that the Chapter members know also this other opinion, or at least the man”<sup>26</sup>, Fr Rinaldi wrote in pencil at the top of a letter Canazei had written him before stepping down as Provincial.

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<sup>25</sup> “Mi fece pure un po’ meraviglia un’altra parola nell’ultima Sua dell’ 8 Sett. a.c. Mi permetterà questa libertà di parlare, chè altro non cerco che la verità e il bene delle ns opere in Cina. Mi scrisse in quella lettera: *‘Speriamo che la casa di Shanghai sarà la prima opera veramente Salesiana e che ci darà mezzo di spiegare il sistema di Don Bosco’*. Ma mi domando: il nostro Orfanotrofio [di Macao], con quasi 230 giovani, e il collegio di Ho Shi, non sono opere veramente Salesiane? Io desidererei che Lei stesso potesse venire qui per persuadersene; ci sono dei difetti e delle imperfezioni, ma ci tengo a dichiarare, che i ns confratelli di Macau dirigono col vero sistema di D. Bosco la loro casa, e lo stesso si deve dire, se non ancora di più, di Ho Shi. Avessimo un po’ più di personale qui a Macau potremmo aprire un oratorio festivo subito; il vescovo già ce lo chiese, ma come si fa, quando tutti i sacerdoti, compresi Direttore e anche il Visitatore, devono assistere e far scuola in casa, oltre il disbrigo dei loro affari ordinari”. ASC F156 *Canazei to Rinaldi*, 11.09.1923. As for Versiglia, see Guido Bosio, *Martiri in Cina*, Torino, Elle Di Ci 1977, pp. 238-239.

<sup>26</sup> “Conviene che i capitolari conoscano anche questa campana, od almeno l’uomo” pencilled note on ASC F156 *Canazei to Rinaldi* 5.12.1929.



#### **4. Challenges at the Vigil of the 1927 Extraordinary Visitation**

As it turned out, developments in China, in the Congregation and the China Missions, while setting the premises for a richer future, did not make it easy for the Provincial to fulfil his duty. What follows is a picture we gather from a letter of Canazei to Ricaldone, then about to set out for his extraordinary visitation (1927).

1. *Extension and jurisdiction.* The Province was overextended and unmanageable as it included, besides China (Macao, Heungshan, Shiuchow and Shanghai) and Japan, also East Timor and soon also Thailand. It held jurisdiction over three Mission territories and a handful of houses (the Provincial was not sure how many, e.g. whether Japan had one or three!), but the real authority of the Provincial was curtailed by the fact that Japan (Fr Vincenzo Cimatti) and Shanghai (Fr Sante Garelli) retained a high degree of autonomy and reported directly to Turin.
2. *The Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow* worked with Salesian style and spirit, but the structures were diocesan, or at best 'mixed', i.e., diocesan with Salesian characteristics. The missionaries were sort of "incardinated" in the Vicariate. The Provincial described the situation as follows:

"There are no Salesian houses properly so called; rather, there are houses of the Mission where there is a Salesian missionary, just like any other missionary priest (diocesan). The boardings – Don Bosco of Shiuchow City and [St Joseph] of Hosai – are in no way Salesian boardings, but boardings of the Mission directed by Salesians, in which the Provincial has no say whatever."<sup>27</sup>

The fact that the missionaries lived basically alone and were often on the move (the so called 'mobility' required by a

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<sup>27</sup> ASC F159 [Ignaz Canazei], *Memorandum da presentare al Rev.mo Signor Don Pietro Ricaldone, Delegato speciale per le Missioni, Visitatore straordinario dell' Estremo Oriente* (1927) 7ff.

missionary situation) and merely grouped in districts under a local superior as a matter of convenience and not as an effective set up, was a fact and an accepted necessity.

3. *Formation of clerics and brothers.* Out of a total of 116 confreres in the Province, there were 26 clerics and 13 prenovices (*ascritti*). Of the clerics, 6 were studying philosophy, 12 were in practical training, 8 'studied' theology; 5 such theology students (including Cl. Callisto Caravario) studied dogmatic and moral theology in Shanghai with the help of untrained professors, while handling all along a full-time job as teachers and assistants in the orphanage; the 6 practical trainees working in Shiuchow had had to interrupt their biennium of philosophical studies to be at their posts but were not in the least concerned about this. Nine of the 25 coadjutors had yet to complete their professional formation.
4. *Forming local vocations.* Given the complexity of the Chinese language and culture, Canazei (by far the best sinologist among the Salesians) had little faith in the ability of expatriates to effectively run good schools, especially now that the Chinese government required recognized diplomas to teach. He felt that only with local confreres he could do so, a conviction that others shared and that we also find reflected in the correspondence of young Callisto Caravario in Shanghai. Hence, for Canazei, the priority was to open a house of formation specifically for indigenous vocations. He felt that putting expatriates and locals together was no way forward: their (foreign) educators would have to put in twice as much work, with the risk (since their Chinese was substandard) of attempting half way approaches that helped neither side and would probably neglect the specific needs of the Chinese, who would thus see their difficulties multiplied and, besides, risked learning European ways rather than growing and maturing in their own native culture. Formation would thus lose its healthy naturalness and become something artificial.

5. *Send practical trainees, not novices.* Given the complexity and cost of running a full formation program and the rather unfavourable political moment in China, Canazei asked the Superiors in Turin to stop sending novices and send practical trainees and healthy young priests willing to consecrate their lives to the missions.
6. *Inculturation.* Work was everywhere carried out with great zeal, but with few consolations. The “religious movement” was very slow; it was time to look at reality squarely, leaving aside “poetical idealism” and “volatile optimism”. It was time to abandon the unconscious desire to “Europeanize” and do a serious and life-long work of inculturation, beginning from language learning – a must not only for priests, but also for lay brothers if they wanted their educative work to be effective.
7. *The Preventive System.* Salesian life was generally good: the Constitutions and Regulations were observed; the Preventive System was practiced “more than before”. Yet he added: “it is undeniable that any educative method, including ours, has to be adapted to the particular condition of the Chinese, who are gifted with much intelligence but with very little heart”. One needed step in the right direction towards adaptation was to offer Christians and ‘pagans’ diversified programs in religious education.<sup>28</sup>

Fr Pietro Ricaldone, for whom Canazei’s report had been prepared, took the following decisions at the conclusion of his Extraordinary Visitation:

1. He opted for an immediate division of the Province, setting up Japan and the incipient Thai missions as independent entities.
2. To make Canazei’s desire come true, he packed the master together with his entire group of novices off to Thailand right away.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

3. An agenda was set for establishing a house of formation in Hong Kong (eventually started in 1931).
4. He gave Canazei no encouragement in his intent to start a house for 'indigenous' vocations.
5. Solutions to the problems of the Vicariate Apostolic were still far off. The Visitor did remind all that it was a matter of principle that the Institutions that were in the Vicariate ought to depend not on the Bishop, but on the Provincial.
6. Discussions on the issue of adaptation were certainly premature due to divergences between the Turin and the Macao leadership on missionary policies.
7. The line of the Superiors was confirmed and "all agreed" that sending novices and young confreres from Italy to be formed alongside their Chinese counterparts under the same roof was still the best way for the former to learn the language and the culture, and for the latter to gradually absorb the genuine spirit of Don Bosco.<sup>29</sup>

At a meeting held by Fr Ricaldone with the members of the Provincial Council on 12 October 1927, Visitor and Provincial expressed diverging views regarding the primary objective of the house of formation. For Fr Ricaldone it was primarily for novices from Italy, while for Fr Canazei it was for local candidates. All agreed, however, that competent teachers needed to be assigned to the house, "so that the clerics might receive an adequate formation, completely adapted to China", and "young Chinese aspirants and novices were to receive a complete formation, equal to that of expatriate novices". Fr Ricaldone also promised to send every year three practical trainees to compensate for the loss of the novices sent to Thailand.<sup>30</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Provincial Chapter (4-8 April 1929) declared itself favorable to a novitiate and philosophy house for expatriates "on condition that suitable

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<sup>29</sup> C. Socol, *The Birth of the China Province*, p. 59 ; AIC Ignaz Canazei, *Cronaca Ispettorale*, p. 46-47.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

personnel be assigned to form them". The Chapter furthermore expressed the "desire that the programme of studies be geared to missionary life".<sup>31</sup> Since in spite of the "desires" expressed by the Chapter the difficulties remained, Canazei reaffirmed his views before the Superior Council in Turin on 7 August 1929; he explained that "the House of Formation was the *opus praecipuum* of the China Province". The Province was trying to speed up the project by sending the Provincial Economer on a fund raising tour of the US. As "there were obvious and numerous difficulties to continue sending novices and students of Philosophy from abroad (many have left!)" it might be "easier if for the time being it catered exclusively for local students".<sup>32</sup>

In May 1930, after General Chapter XIII, Canazei's mandate as Provincial ended and in the aftermath of the murder of Msgr. L. Versiglia and Fr C. Caravario (25 Feb. 1930), Fr Braga was appointed the new Provincial (1 June 1930). Two months later, to the disappointment of the Superiors in Turin, Canazei was appointed to succeed Bishop Versiglia at the head of the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow, Propaganda Fide having opted for the third name in the list of three candidates submitted by the Society. The event did not bode well for the relationship between the Vicar Apostolic and the Provincial, notwithstanding the latter's conciliatory disposition. The new Provincial fell in line with the central policy. By the end of 1930 he had managed to persuade the Vicar Apostolic of Hong Kong to allow the Salesians to have a house of formation in his Vicariate and proceeded to buy some property in the Shaukiwan district. In 1932 the premises were expanded and in 1933 new novices and clerics were accepted, all at enormous personnel and financial cost, due mainly to the lack of well prepared formators and funds for the construction. Five rectors succeeded each other in the first seven years, with Fr Braga himself having to stand in as rector for the year 1933-34. The policy would

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<sup>31</sup> AIC *Capitoli ispettoriali*.

<sup>32</sup> ASC D873 *Verbali*, p. 252.

undergo no radical change; in the years to follow considerable number of expatriate young people from different nations would mingle with the few Chinese clerics who began to enter the novitiate, the first five joining the seven expatriate novices who had arrived in 1933. At one stage Fr Braga and the Superiors in Turin dreamed of turning the Salesian Missionary House in Hong Kong into a regional seminary for China, Japan and Thailand. Fr Cimatti was persuaded – somewhat reluctantly – to send his students of theology to Hong Kong (two groups arrived – six in 1933-34 and three in 1934-35).<sup>33</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Provincial Chapter (1932) was quite divided on the issue of the language to be adopted by the house of studies, hence it opted for the resolution of having a commission draw up a curriculum that included the study of the Chinese and English languages. The teaching language would, of course, be Italian for all, with any notion of an inculturated approach *de facto* taking second place. The great difficulties faced by formators and formandi were to be taken by all as part of the growing pains of a future, well established Province.

### **5. Evaluation by Extraordinary Visitor Fr P. Berruti in 1937 and the Test of Further Development and Policies**

From May to October 1937 Fr Pietro Berruti visited the 21 houses of the China Province and of the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow in his capacity as Extraordinary Visitor, beginning from Yunnanfu (Kunming) and proceeding to Hong Kong, Shiuchow, Macao, Shanghai, and again, after a detour to Japan and Manila, to Hong Kong and Macao. The visit to the house of formation in Shaukiwan, a suburb of Hong Kong, was one of the highlights and was done without haste.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The experiment did not work; some of the students were suspended and eventually left the Congregation. In 1935 three of them were suspended for three years, others for two. ASC D873 *Verbali*, p. 741. See Fr G. Compri's article in this volume for the views expressed by Fr V. Cimatti.

<sup>34</sup> Pietro ZERBINO, *Don Pietro Berruti, luminosa figura di Salesiano*, Torino, SEI 1964, pp. 328-357

### 5.1. *The House of Formation*

Given the policy of sending almost exclusively young personnel to be formed in Hong Kong, it is obvious that for the decade 1930-1939 formation was and remained a priority in the mind of the Superiors in Turin, while the development of Salesian work was to be put off for some years. For this Turin had to curb Braga's tendency to accept houses too readily and above all make sure that the development was sustainable and that the Province would not incur crippling debts. Qualified formation personnel, however, was scarce and supplied in very small quantities. When he reached China, Fr Pietro Berruti found the following situation:

The *Studentate of theology* had moved to Macao in February 1937 after the first batch of students (which included the missionaries from Japan) had graduated. There were 8 students in 1<sup>st</sup> year (1 Chinese and 7 expatriates of four different nationalities) with two 'professors': Fr Luigi Ferrari, a BA in theology who had arrived two years earlier, in charge (actually – notes the Visitor – he was more of a prefect of studies and an assistant) and Fr Marian Mielczarek (who had arrived barely two months earlier). They occupied improvised space or used common areas and were considered an appendix of the house. Besides theology, the students had three hours of Chinese language, and three hours of English language a week; no Greek, Hebrew or liturgy (= *cerimonie*).

That the students should have classes in English and Chinese was a decision of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Provincial Chapter in 1932. The Visitor asked that the English classes be moved to the holidays. As for the Chinese language classes, they could be continued provisionally until the Superior Chapter would rule on the issue.<sup>35</sup>

*Aspirants*: The aspirants had moved out of Shaukiwan to Aberdeen in 1936. There were 31 of them divided into 5 classes: 3 years of junior middle school and 2 years of an incomplete high school

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<sup>35</sup> ASC A868 and B584 P. Berruti's papers regarding the 1937 Extraordinary Visitation to China.

curriculum (in line, apparently, with Italian aspirantates, which provided five years of secondary education up to *ginnasio*). They were “well taken care of” by two priests, one cleric and three lay (external) professors.<sup>36</sup>

*Novices and Philosophy students* were housed in Shaukiwan. There were 28 clerics doing Philosophy (13 in 1<sup>st</sup> year, 7 in 2<sup>nd</sup> year and 8 in 3<sup>rd</sup> year). Among them four were Chinese. The classes actually lasted only for five semesters, due to the late arrival of expatriates from abroad. There were also 11 novices, of whom 7 clerics and 4 brothers. Three of them were Chinese.

The management could not agree on a shared and well planned formation method:

“For several years now there are two contrasting tendencies in the formation of clerics: that of the Provincial and the old missionaries, who desire a Salesian formation based on work, sacrifice, trust in the superiors and cheerfulness, at times a bit carefree and a bit too enthusiastic about sports; and that of the rector, who would like the formation to be based more on piety, recollection, reflection and serious interior work. Both currents fell into excesses and lacked essential elements.”<sup>37</sup>

Salesian formation, even though solid as regards Christian and religious spirit in general, still remained defective, chiefly due to the personality of the rector, who was a cool thinker and did not know how to reach the hearts of the young confreres. There was a lack of enthusiasm, of warm affection and the power of example that move people. The Visitor also observed that:

- Two of the Chinese novices did not understand Italian well; meditation and reading for them were practically useless, and from the conferences they obtained what they could.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*



- The curriculum of the students of Philosophy was not organized in such a way as to allow them to obtain the necessary diplomas they would later need to teach. Given the number of Chinese and non-Italian expatriates, the study on textbooks in the Italian language required unnecessary efforts and placed everyone, even the Italians, in the impossibility of acquiring the vocabulary and the method they would need to use in schools later on.

He made the following recommendations:

- The curriculum should be geared to the acquisition of the necessary qualifications: for this a study should be made to see if the academic programmes of the Chinese State in Mainland China could be integrated in the Philosophy curriculum.
- Those who did not know enough Italian, whether Chinese or expatriates, should be imparted the necessary religious and Salesian instruction in the language they knew.
- Time allotted to study was insufficient: the Italians should study more Chinese and English and less Italian; the Germans needed to study mathematics; music classes could be reduced. Besides, science and mathematics textbooks in Italian merely multiplied the difficulties of Chinese and non-Italians, and all ended up ignoring the terminology they would later need to use in the classroom. Could anything be done to avoid repetitive courses and offer diversified formation?

## *5.2. The Preventive system adapted to the local situation: Freedom of Religion, Catholics and Pagans.*

Most Salesian schools in China (Macao, Hong Kong - West Point, Hong Kong - Aberdeen, Shanghai, Kunming) had boarders. The need to guarantee religious freedom and offer diversified religious instruction to Catholics, catechumens and 'pagan' boys had been perceived, as we have seen, quite early on, and may well be regarded

as a first effort to adapt the Preventive System to the Chinese environment. A test of the flexibility of the System came when the Salesians began to discuss the opening of the Aberdeen Trade School under the supervision of a Management Committee made up mostly of non-Catholic wealthy gentlemen. In 1924 Fr Canazei accepted a compromise formula that was to be enshrined in the contract: “*As regards religion there will be no compulsion, every boy being free to follow his own, provided that the internal discipline is observed*”. A perplexed Fr Braga, who inaugurated the school ten years later, could not but ask himself whether the Salesians could effectively work in a Salesian way under such an arrangement.<sup>38</sup>

Fr Vincenzo Bernardini, the Rector of the Aberdeen school, sided with Canazei in the full confidence that “the Educative System of Don Bosco is such that, if practiced as one is supposed to, young people will spontaneously ask to be admitted to our Religion”. Hence, when addressing government supervisors, benefactors or parents, he preferred to talk about “moral and social education”, rather than religious education being imparted in the school. There were only about 70 Catholics among the 300 boys, all boarders, who attended the first school year. Non-Catholics were offered religion classes twice weekly, which they were free to attend, just as they were free to join morning and evening prayer. 180 of them attended, which means that the remaining 50 were not under pressure to do so. Catholics were given a choice of two Sodalities that they could join, while non-Catholics could enroll in the “Cheerfulness Society”, whose protector was Don Bosco and whose regulations were simple and applicable even to non-Catholic boys: (i) Sincerity, (ii) Constant cheerfulness, (iii) Avoiding foul language and grumbling.<sup>39</sup>

In other schools the degree of adaptation varied from place to place, a sign that adaptation was dictated by the circumstances, rather

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<sup>38</sup> Carlo Socol, *The Salesians of Don Bosco in Hong Kong (1927-2006)*, in *Conference Papers – Conference on History of Catholic Religious Orders and Missionary Congregations in Hong Kong*, Hong Kong, 2007, p. 675.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 688-689.

than by conviction. In St. Louis Industrial School, for instance, where the boarders were a mere 70 (30 apprentices and 40 students) and the Catholics numbered 58, the tiny minority of 'pagans' attended all practices of piety. Of the 500 day students, only 20 were Catholic; all of them, both Catholic and 'pagan', attended Mass only on solemn feasts. All they did on a daily basis was to say two *Hail Mary's*, one at the beginning and one at the end of the school. At Shanghai's Don Bosco Institute most of the 80 boarders were Catholic, and so the problem did not exist. In Kunming's Salesian Institute there were 25 boarders, 16 of them Christian, 9 non-Christian; all of them spontaneously went to church and said all the prayers together. Fr Berruti added: "Morality is observed. Recreations are lively and traditional games are played (*barra rotta, bandiera, palla avvelenata*). Football is banned".<sup>40</sup> Was it an indirect snipe at Fr Braga, who was an ardent promoter of football matches?

In Shiuchow 'pagan' students were free to join religious functions and the Sodality of the Immaculate was replaced by Catholic Action, a typically diocesan association, which met in the bishop's house. Bishop Canazei was in command there!

The Visitor made the following recommendations:

- Both sodalities and Catholic Action should be nurtured, as they are seedbeds of piety, morality and vocations.
- Prudently favour participation of 'pagans' to daily sacred functions and above all provide them with religious instruction, making it more attractive (with movies, slides, stories...). Those who do not wish to attend should not be left free, but assisted in either studying or engaged in a "less attractive" occupation.<sup>41</sup>

### 5.3. *The Oratory as Symbol of the Don Bosco System*

Fr Braga took on himself the task of promoting the Oratory as the symbol of the Salesian system. When in mid-1930s he visited

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<sup>40</sup> Berruti, *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

Japan with Fr Adolf Tornquist, he put it to Fr Rinaldi that his visit aimed at learning “many things from those dear confreres so outstanding for their (Salesian) spirit and zeal”; and when he saw the success obtained there, he wrote, “I feel terribly ashamed; they have 800 oratorians, and we have not even a hundred!” He stressed the same intent in another letter, as he wrote: “[...] we hope soon to be able to imitate [the Salesians in Japan] and evangelize the Chinese with the Salesian Method, especially by cultivating the young”.<sup>42</sup>

#### 5.4. *Clash of Mentality and Methods in the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow*

In his fourth year as Provincial Fr Braga complained that he had received no personnel for the missions, meaning the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow, since he had taken over as Provincial, to which Fr Berruti answered with some astonishment: “What about the personnel we sent to China these last four years, is it not for China? [...] We send personnel to the Provincial, so that he, having heard his Council, gives the part that he deems fit to the Vicariate, in accordance with the opinion expressed by the Vicar Apostolic.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, the Provincial was responsible for the formation of young confreres and had the authority to decide who would be assigned to work in the mission. Fr Braga apparently either did not know this or pretended he did not. The Vicar Apostolic did not want clerics in his Vicariate, and hence asked if it was possible to have some priests. The Superiors in Turin, answered Fr Berruti, did not send priests for the simple reason that they had none to send.<sup>44</sup> Hence Canazei in the Vicariate, kept waiting and complaining.

One specific objective of the Visitation was to tackle what the Congregation felt was the uncooperative and un-Salesian attitude of

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<sup>42</sup> ASC F156 *Braga to Rinaldi*, 22.08.1930; and undated [August-September] 1930.

<sup>43</sup> ASC F156 *Berruti to Braga*, 13.07.1934

<sup>44</sup> ASC F156 *Braga to Berruti*, 22.06.1934; ASC F156 *Berruti to Braga*, 13.07.1934 and 11.10.1934 (drafts). See also note no. 23 in the present article.

the Vicar Apostolic Msgr. Ignaz Canazei. Canazei handed over the management of the Province with some observations regarding the "Regulations for Missionaries" which GC XIII had approved *ad experimentum*, and on which a circular of Fr Rinaldi dated 2 June 1930 invited local superiors to express their views. Canazei's view was that the Regulations were excessively tilted towards the rights of the Society on several points and that they did not reflect the letter or even the spirit of the *Instructio* that Propaganda Fide in the meantime had issued (8 December 1929). Canazei's understanding of the document was that the Congregation was called to co-operate with the Church in the task of evangelization and establishment of local Churches, that this co-operation was shown chiefly by providing personnel and financial means, and that all the while the Church reserved for itself "the entire government of the mission" through a Vicar Apostolic, the "one real Superior", who reported directly to the Holy See.

"The Ecclesiastical Superior will wisely apply our methods of working with Salesian spirit, avoiding, however, the mistake of giving Christian communities such a specifically Salesian character that would result in their differentiation and separation from the other Vicariates, because our duty is to make Christians without further qualification, and not Salesian Christians."<sup>45</sup>

Canazei envisaged two successive phases in mission work: the setting up of a fully local Church in response to increasingly pressing directives of the Holy See, followed by the development of Salesian works. The Salesian leadership felt that the specific way to evangelization of which the Society was the depository should be guaranteed and allowed to develop and bear fruit, and that the two objectives, i.e. the *implantatio Ecclesiae* and the development of Salesian work, should proceed hand in hand.

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<sup>45</sup> ASC A868.0101 Ignaz Canazei, *Osservazioni intorno al regolamento missionario approvato ad experimentum nel CGXIII, fatte in base alla Instructio emanate dalla Congregatio de Propaganda Fide addi 8 Dicembre 1929.*

It took the Congregation several years to revise its Regulations, as Francesco Motto showed in his learned article<sup>46</sup>, and this allowed Canazei to work for several years on the basis of his own observations and conclusions. The acceptance of the *Instructio* by the Salesian Congregation and what the Congregation effectively did to put it into practice, especially in terms of providing financial support and personnel to the Shiuchow mission, became an issue on which Berruti confronted Canazei. The Visitor tried to impress on the Vicar Apostolic the fact that by not allowing the Provincial to intervene in the lives of the Salesians working in the Vicariate and by refusing the Salesian method (chiefly the setting up of Salesian Communities) in the organization of his Vicariate, he was effectively contravening the *Instructio* itself, which recommended that the Ecclesiastical Superior and the Religious Superior work in a harmonious way toward the same aim.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusions

The Salesians reached China under the thrust of a strong charismatic urge, but quite unprepared in terms of knowledge of the local culture. Efforts were certainly made to understand the socio-political and ecclesial environment in which they were working. Evidence is there to prove that during the Rectorship of Michele Rua (+1910) and that of Paolo Albera (+1921) the Salesians in China were basically given a free hand in seeking to adapt the charism to the local situation, whereas with Filippo Rinaldi (+1931) and Pietro Ricaldone (+1951) choices were made and directives were increasingly imparted from Turin that privileged the peculiar nature of the Congregation, leading to a policy that we might call of 'charism above inculturation'. The background, origin, evolution and finer points of this new policy need to be further studied in depth. What is clear is

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Francesco MOTTU, *Catholic Church and the Missions in the Twenty Years between the World Wars. Salesian Missionary Strategy* in this volume.

<sup>47</sup> ASC A868.0201 Berruti to Canazei, 20.10.1937.

that it set the agenda for decades to come. Even in the second phase of development of the Salesian work in China during the 1930s, the Salesians (with few exceptions) did not show enough sensitivity towards local culture and the epochal changes that the Church in China was going through, caught as they were at world and local level in the effort of establishing their own identity and method of evangelization, reassured in this by the official ecclesial recognition of Don Bosco's way to sanctity (Beatification in 1929, Canonization in 1934).

The 'charism vs. inculturation' dilemma became the root, at times, of serious confrontations between the Province and the Vicariate, both under the leadership of Msgr. Versiglia and Msgr. Canazei. As the confrontation became a stalemate, and Salesian work began to expand in various cities in China outside the Salesian Vicariate, the perception became clear that everything considered, it was better for the Congregation not to accept missions any more.

The abandoning of a way to inculturation in favour of pushing forward the plans hatched from the early '20s by Fr Rinaldi and Fr Ricaldone had its costs, chiefly regarding the quality of Salesian and missionary formation imparted to both local and expatriate Salesians and the quality of their educational work and pastoral ministry for decades to come, well beyond the 1930s, which this paper focused upon. Again, this aspect, i.e., the results of the policies of the Congregation on the immediate generations of Salesians, warrants further in-depth studies. Notwithstanding the choices made the Salesian charism, however, continued to expand both in China and, when this became off limits, in neighbouring countries as a valid and effective contribution to ecclesial work.

The vicissitudes of the China Province, which we tried to comprehend, were in great part the result of a dilemma: whether the heart should rule over the mind, or vice versa. Had the two, mind and heart, accepted each other and worked together, the outcome might have been different. The first generations of missionaries worked with what they possessed and knew best – the Salesian spirit. It may

be unrealistic of us today to expect of them to have had the mindset and qualities required to do a good work of inculturation. The same cannot be said of us: if history has anything to teach us, it is that the way forward for the Congregation may only be that of an inculturated charism.