

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SALESIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY IN CHINA

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Preamble: The successive development stages of an Institution and Historiography

Salesians in China are grateful to the many people who in different ways, some more scientific and better organized, other more popular and less ambitious, have helped preserve and transmit the memory of things past. Given the variety of approaches and contributions our team has come across in its research, the present report intentionally attempts to go beyond the concept of “historiography” in the strict sense, i.e. *the study of the way history has been and is being written with an acceptable degree of historical method*, and offer instead a panorama of the main publications that have been produced in the more than 100 year lifespan of the China Province with the explicit or implicit intention to narrate the vicissitudes of the almost 1000 men who were/are part of it, and of the considerable work they carried out, irrespective of whether these accounts qualify as “historiography” or not.

It is institutional historiography we wish to talk about, both in its strict and in its broader sense.

Why this broader approach? Why not leave aside the more tentative type of publication and concentrate on historiography proper? The idea was inspired not by disregard of the work of trained historians, but rather by the realization that historical accounts about, and stemming from, a living institution are there to serve the development of that institution and the self-understanding by the members. Trained historians are the people we turn to when we wish to get a reliable comprehension of the past. This breed of people have – or should have – a special interest in researching primary and reliable sources, and by reason of their training they should possess an above average sense of mission in attempting to dutifully hand down to posterity well researched accounts of bygone days. It is their professional duty to share with

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others the fruits of their painstaking research in archives and libraries, intelligently and conscientiously sifting through boxes and folders full of dusty papers, seeking further evidence to corroborate what is available, and on the basis of this work and materials produce Historiography, scientifically written history, to the best of their ability.

That having been said, we need to realize that historiography, especially institutional historiography, is seldom undertaken out of pure, selfless, personal love and interest for matters pertaining to history. Institutional historians and history lovers are part of institutions that at different stages of their development generate the conditions under which accounts that differ in nature, quality or outlook are sought and naturally produced, which may or may not meet the criteria of historiography, but whose content nonetheless qualifies as “historical”. Put in another way, it is not so much the historian who decides to write, but rather the very life of the institution that creates the needs, which historians address, and the opportunities, which historians seize.

That is what came to my mind when our team of young Salesians produced the bibliography they were assigned to prepare: what we got is a list of different types of books and publications that the China Province has produced over its span of existence, and that naturally contain historical information of unequal value, so they hardly qualify as historiography. And yet they are very important to understand the life of the institution that produced them¹.

Whether an historian can actually write objective history, and to what extent he can do it, is a well-known subject of discussion even among the uninitiated. The closest an historian can get to historical truth is as an outsider, as an observer. Rather than claiming to reconstruct historical truth, honest historians nowadays would simply admit *they merely wish to reach a reasonably accurate understanding of the past*. Institutional historians are no exception. Institutional historiography responds to diverse needs in the life of an institution, and anyone who attempts to write an historical account of any sort is influenced to do so by the particular developmental stage of the institution for which he writes: his horizon is pretty much circumscribed by time, circumstances and tools available, as we shall see in the course of this presentation. Besides, institutional historians are inevitably influenced by previous generations of writers, whether they decide to continue the work of predecessors or to steer clear of it. More imperceptibly, yet even more radically, they are themselves to some extent products of the institution they serve, and intentionally or unintentionally they respond to some of its core needs, such as understanding of self, of its origins, of its mission within the territory in which it has been implanted: an institutional historian who fails to do that would be a poor historian; responding to those needs differently expressed over a span of decades and generations again ac-

¹ *Storiografia Salesiana: prospettive e possibili piste di ricerca. Sintesi degli interventi della tavola rotonda (28 novembre 2007)*, in RSS 27 (2008) 207.

counts for the different types of historical publications, or general publications with a historical content one comes across.

The key concept, here, is *development* and its link with historiography: “the natural development of times”, as the *Istituto Storico Salesiano* people put it, “the diverse social, economic, cultural or political circumstances which have been the direct or indirect agent of the evolution” of Salesian work in any country². Salesian work in China started more than a century ago, in 1906, and the institution that gradually developed and expanded in all this time has gone through many phases of development: from being part of the Portuguese and Subalpine Provinces, to becoming first a Visitatoria (1923), then a fully-fledged Province (1926), with its territory at first limited to the tiny enclave of Macao, gradually expanding to the mainland, at first just across the border (1911), then further north to Shaoguan (1917), Shanghai (1924), Xuzhou and Beijing (1946), and westward to Kunming (1935), south to Hong Kong (1927) and east to Taiwan (1963)³.

Its outlook and vision-mission have changed time and again over all this time: it had its earliest mission territory entrusted in 1912, a Vicariate Apostolic of its own in 1920; it started out with an orphanage and industrial school in Macao, opened the very first industrial school in Hong Kong, and eventually in the 1930s strategically chose to set up a network of trade schools and grammar schools to serve the whole of China. It opened youth centres, managed parishes and, in the last 30 years or so, social services as well.

It has played different roles, and these have brought along different exigencies: it was involved in the birth of Salesian work in several neighbouring countries: Japan (1926), Thailand (1927), East Timor (1927), Philippines (1951) and Vietnam (1952). All these have been part of the China Province. And at one point, in 1927, China, Japan, Thailand and East Timor all obeyed the same Provincial Superior⁴.

Superiors and simple missionaries, locals and expatriates have written reports and accounts regarding particular aspects of the life of Salesian work in China: people needed to narrate, to report; there were events to chronicle, or to celebrate; there were people to be remembered, and things people needed to understand. Our bibliographical research has harvested titles on such genres as biographies, reports of various types, chronicles and diaries, celebratory publica-

² *Ibid.*, p. 208.

³ Carlo SOCOL, *The Birth of the China Province and the Expansion of the Salesian Work in East Asia (1926-1927)*, in Nestor IMPELIDO (ed.), *The Beginnings of the Salesian Presence in East Asia*. Part one: *The Salesians of Don Bosco*. Acts of the Seminar on Salesian History (Hong Kong, 4-6 December 2004). (= ACSSA – Varia, 2). Hong Kong, Don Bosco Press 2006, pp. 47-61; ID., *The history of Salesian education in China*, in XU XIAOZHOU – Roberto GIANNATELLI (ed.), *Educational innovation: perspectives of internationalization*. Hangzhou, Zhejiang University Press 2006, pp. 26-35.

⁴ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

tions, periodicals, magazine articles, anniversary publications and, of course, books and articles written with historiographical intent. On the basis of this rich material the present report has been drafted.

First of all we have tried to identify criteria to rationalize the excessive fragmentation in the types of publication produced. As a consequence, we have divided the materials into five corpuses by reason of period or circumstances for which they were written, nature or genre, and content.

The first corpus of publications

The first group of publications comprises the following 8 items:

1. *Orfanato da Imaculada Conceição. Relatório. Ano de 1919*. [Macao 1919]
2. Luigi VERSIGLIA, *Un missionario salesiano in Cina: Don Lodovico Olive*. Torino, SEI 1919, 112 p.
3. *Inter Nos* (1919-1963).
4. Giovanni GUARONA, *La Missione del Leng Nam Tou. Chi Hing*, in IN 1.6, 31.10.1919, p. 1.
5. [Ignaz CANAZEI], *Orfanotrofio Immacolata Concezione di Macau (Cina). Monografia Storica*. [1925] in AIC, Ispettorìa. Cronache.
6. [Giovanni GUARONA ET AL.], *Vicariato Apostolico di Shiu Chow in Cina (Leng Nam Tou)*. Torino, SEI 1925, 167 p.⁵.
7. Carlo FRIGO, *Diario*. Venezia, Ed. Giovanni Borgo s.d.⁶.
8. *Lettere Pastorali di Mons. I. Canazei*. Printed in Chinese by the Don Bosco Institute of Shiuchow:

Anno 1931 Sulle Vocazioni
 Anno 1932 De Adiuuanda Ecclesia
 Anno 1933 De Anno Sancto
 Anno 1934 De Fide
 Anno 1935 Fructus Anni Redemptionis
 Anno 1936 De Sacrificio Missae
 Anno 1937 De Oratione
 Anno 1938 De Quaraesima
 Anno 1939 Questiunculae
 Anno 1941 De Maria Auxiliatrice.

Reports prevail, but there are also an important diary and a precious biography. These publications appeared in two distinct periods of time, both cru-

⁵ Putative author is Fr. Giovanni Guarona, Vicar General of the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow.

⁶ Authorship of the book as claimed by the editor – Giovanni BORGIO, *Avventure in tre continenti: dalle memorie di Carlo Frigo missionario Salesiano* – is misleading.

cial for the development of Salesian work in China: the years 1919-1925 and 1931-1941.

The year 1919 was a turning point for the Salesian work in China after a disappointing initial period in Macao, with the Salesians abandoning the orphanage in 1910 only to return to it two years later with a school project. In the meantime, they had started doing mission work in Heungshan (1911) and more recently in Shiuchow (1917). In 1919 a number of events coincided:

- The coming of age and the principal expansion, both in quality and size, of the Macao *Orfanato*, the motherhouse not only of the China Province but of the entire Salesian work in Southeast Asia, founded in 1906 and eager to preserve its roots and mission as a social service (an orphanage), but also proud and capable of offering reasonably well-structured courses in a variety of curricula taught at the adjoining School of Arts and Trades. Management was keen to explain the educational and social nature of the establishment, and to seek funds necessary to finance expansion. A report – the 1919 *Relatório* – was produced and distributed among prospective supporters. The historical relevance of this pamphlet derives from the fact that the Salesians for the first time explained to the public in an organic way the mission that the Institute was trying to carry out⁷. The breakthrough was made possible by the energetic role played during that year by Fr. Ignaz Canazei (future Provincial and Vicar Apostolic of Shiuchow) in the absence of the rector Fr. Luigi Versiglia, busy in the newly accepted Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow⁸.
- In September of that same year a second expedition comprising nine new missionaries (among whom was Don Carlo Braga) joined the six who had been sent the previous year to take over the Shiuchow mission, which was to be hived off from the Vicariate Apostolic of Canton. While the decree of erection of the new vicariate came in April 1920, the unconditional decision to entrust the Salesians with the care of the Shiuchow territory, or the Leng Nam Tou (North Guangdong), as it was then known, was taken in 1919.
- On 17 September 1919, twelve days prior to the arrival of the new missionaries, the death occurred of Fr. Ludovic Olive, a member of the 1906 expe-

⁷ On the *Relatório*, cf Carlo SOCOL, *The first twenty years of the Orfanato of Macao between ideal and reality (1906-1926)*, in Francesco MOTTO (a cura di), *Insedimenti e iniziative salesiane dopo don Bosco. Saggi di storiografia*. Atti del 2° Convegno-Seminario di Storia dell'Opera Salesiana (Roma, 1-5 novembre 1995). (= ISS – Studi, 9). Roma, LAS 1996, pp. 275-325.

⁸ On the role of I. Canazei as Prefect of Studies at the Orphanato during the year 1918-1919, cf Carlo SOCOL, *The Implantation of the Salesian Charism in China (1906-1936): Ideals, Challenges, Answers and Results*, in Mathew KAPPLIKUNNEL (ed.), *Implantation of the Salesian Charism in Asia. Ideals, Challenges, Answers, Results*. Acts of the Salesian History Seminar East Asia – Oceania Region (Batulao [Manila], 24-28 November 2008). (= ACSSA – Varia, 7). Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications 2009, pp. 126-129.

dition, missed by all. His sudden departure was a shock for Versiglia, who lost a trusted companion. Of him Versiglia wrote a short but inspiring biography addressed to young people in Italy, describing the life of a missionary, and the challenges he had to face, the environment in which he lived, worked and travelled, all of which of course did not refer to Pere Olive alone, but was what missionaries faced in China. Interspersed inside the narrative one finds first hand historical information not to be found elsewhere, including the circumstances that led to the publication of the first biography of Don Bosco in Chinese, a short account totaling 18 pages written in 1918 in classical Chinese by future sinologist, then just a scholastic, Pasquale D'Elia SJ. The printing shop of the *Orfanato* had just acquired Chinese language types, and it was suggested the first work to be printed should be the life of Don Bosco. It had to be eventually entrusted to a more experienced commercial printer⁹. The life of Pere Ludovic Olive is the first of many biographies that were written over the years, a favourite literary genre measurable not just in terms of quantity, but in some cases of quality as well¹⁰.

- The appearance of *Inter Nos*, a bulletin circulated among the Salesian missionaries in China, now stationed in territories 400km apart (that is the distance between Macao and Shiuchow) coincided with the arrival of the new missionaries. It was an organ of information, communication and animation. The first issue (29 Sep 1919) starts precisely with the announcement of the death of Fr. Olive, a piece of news that challenged the faith of the first group of missionaries as they enter, united in solidarity, the “dear mission the Lord has entrusted to us”, as Versiglia put it. *Inter Nos* has had many lives: early on it was stopped by the Superiors, who felt it was becoming too gossipy; it was stopped by the war, as many missionaries were interned. And yet it managed to survive even then in a much simplified ‘war edition’. Most issues were printed: it was a good typesetting exercise either for the apprentices in Macao or those from Shiuchow. For a rather long period it was hand-written and hand-printed with a rudimentary mimeographic device. As we saw, it was first published in September 1919, and was supplanted by the Newsletter (the present news periodical of the China Province) in 1965.

⁹ Luigi VERSIGLIA, *Un missionario salesiano in Cina: Don Lodovico Olive*. Torino, SEI 1919, p. 95; 德修士 (Pasquale D'Elia) 童鮑司高若望司铎传略, 澳门无原罪工艺学堂 1918.

¹⁰ Best biography: Vasco TASSINARI, *Don Braga, l'uomo che ebbe tre patrie*. Bologna 1990, 871 p.; also Francesco CASELLA, *Profilo biografico storico-documentario di mons. Michele Arduino ultimo vescovo di Shiuchow*, in RSS 19 (2000) 223-277 and others. Tassinari's biography of Don Braga is a bold attempt with a historical and journalistic approach which has produced some important scoops. It is based on a huge amount of material researched with passion, but at times not evenly handled, and its writing towards the end is somewhat rushed.

In it one finds well written articles such as *La Missione del Leng Nam Tou. Chi Hing*, written by the Vicar General Fr. Giovanni Guarona, and a treasure trove of precious historical information on the single missions not found anywhere else, the lives of missionaries, the territory and its social and political vicissitudes.

By 1925 the two main areas where the Salesians exercised their apostolate, viz. the *Orphanato da Imaculada Conceição* in Macao, together with the Heungshan mission entrusted by the bishop in adjacent mainland territory, and the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow, had developed to a mature status. The Macao orphanage had been chosen by the Hong Kong government as the model for the first industrial school to be set up in the British colony, the future Aberdeen Trade (later Industrial and now Technical) School. The Salesians were expanding further inland in China: the first Salesian work in Shanghai had started the previous year. China, still a Visitatoria, had its novitiate for the formation of both missionary and local personnel, and was soon to become a fully-fledged Province, projected towards future expansion both East and West, with missions in Thailand and Japan in sight. The time seemed ripe to illustrate how mainstream Salesian work had developed. The opportunity to do so was given by the World Expo of Catholic Missions to be held in Rome on the occasion of the 1925 Holy Year Jubilee¹¹. Two important reports, with plenty of photographs, were prepared at this stage: *L'orfanotrofio di Macau e la missione dell'Heung-shan in Cina*, by Ignaz Canazei¹², 83 pages in all; and *Leng Nam Tou – Vicariato Apostolico di Shiu Chow in Cina*, 167 pages in all. Both were published by SEI in 1925 in the series Missioni Salesiane.

In 1930, only months after the death of Mons. Luigi Versiglia, outgoing Salesian Provincial Ignaz Canazei was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Shiuchow. A man with an above average understanding of the cultural, political and ecclesial climate of China, Canazei fully supported the transition of the China missions towards the goal of becoming a local Church, a process that had begun with Benedict XV's Encyclical *Maximum Illud* (1919). He doggedly took steps to bring the Shiuchow Vicariate in line with the thinking of the Church, something not appreciated by everyone, in Turin as well as in Shiuchow, especially those who wanted the mission to be typically Salesian in all aspects, with regular communities, schools, oratories and so forth¹³.

¹¹ *Atti [ACS]*, Anno III 24 giugno 1923, N. 20.

¹² There are two anonymous manuscripts, in the handwriting of Canazei, one entitled *Orfanotrofio Immacolata Concezione di Macau (Cina). Monografia Storica*, [1925] in AIC, Ispettorìa. Cronache. It was published – partly edited and minus some interesting statistics – in the Salesian Missions series. The other, entitled *Monografia della missione del Distretto di Heung Shan (Cina) affidato ai missionari Salesiani (1900-1924)*, in ASC A8650304.

¹³ Fortunato MARGIOTTI, *La Cina cattolica al traguardo della maturità*, in Joseph METZLER, *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Rerum Memoria 1622-1972*. Vol. III/2. 1815-1972. Roma, Herder 1972, 528 p.; C. SOCOL, *The implantation...*, p. 124.

The set of annual circulars written since 1931 cannot be considered historiography in any sense, but they do have a strong historical 'valence' which nowadays we may appreciate even more than it was back then: in fact it allows us to enter into the problematic, the challenges, the values, the choices that induced Bishop Canazei to write to his flock using the Chinese language. There are numerous reports on the Shiuchow Vicariate written in Italian for the sake of the Holy See or benefactors. There are two known circulars of Versiglia in Chinese, but here we have systematic communication privileging the local church, in order to better reach the not so numerous local clergy, church community leaders and workers (the more numerous consecrated 'virgins' attached to the various churches) and believers at large, many of whom were active members of Catholic Action, a strong movement in China warmly recommended by the Apostolic Delegate Archbishop Celso Costantini.

The fact that we have ten topics, through a program developed over a 10 year period, gives us a fair understanding of the systematic type of formation being imparted, the program of catechesis that had been prepared for the formation of the laity. The first circular, on *Local Vocations*, came out in 1931, the first year of Bishop Canazei: he was an ardent promoter of autochthonous vocations and right away set up the minor seminary in the Vicariate Apostolic. The 1932 circular, on *Helping the Church*, or rather *Being Church*, introduced the concept and praxis of Lay Apostolate (宗座宣传信德会): what is the work of evangelization, how the association would be organized, and an exhortation by the Bishop to seize this opportunity to become Church. The last circular, issued in 1941 when the Sino-Japanese war had reached Shiuchow, is on *Mary Help of Christians*: and we can understand why the bishop decided to write a letter on this particular topic. Shortly thereafter Bishop Canazei was interned and kept incommunicado by the Japanese in the belfry of the church in Hosai, next to the minor seminary¹⁴.

Second Corpus

This second corpus of history books revolves around two major events that severely traumatized the life of the China Province: the 1930 murder of Bishop Versiglia and Don Caravario, and the communist liberation of the mainland in 1949.

1. Bassano LARENO FACCINI, *Assassinio di Mons. Luigi Versiglia e Don Callisto Caravario (25.II.1930). Documentazione Storica*. Hong Kong 1933, 78 p.
2. Giuseppe CUCCHIARA, *Tre anni di Bolscevismo in Cina: la missione salesiana di Shiu-chow durante il periodo 1926-1929*. Firenze, Scuola Tipografica Salesiana 1931, 70 p.
3. Guido BOSIO, *Monsignor Versiglia e Don Caravario. Testimonianze sull'eccidio di Lai Thau Tsoei*. Torino 1935, 200 p.

¹⁴ Complete collection of Canazei's pastoral letters in ASC B666.

4. Guido BOSIO, *Martiri in Cina. Mons. Luigi Versiglia e Don Callisto Caravario nei loro scritti e nelle testimonianze dei coetanei. Profilo storico*. Torino 1977, 483 p.
5. Callisto CARAVARIO, *Lettere*. A cura di Antonio da Silva Ferreira. Roma 1998. Edizione extra commerciale. [Ed. poligrafata, contiene 222 lettere].
6. ID., *Mia carissima mamma. Cinque anni di corrispondenza del giovane salesiano martire in Cina (ottobre 1924 – febbraio 1930)*. A cura di F. Motto. Roma, LAS 2000, 151 p.
7. ID., *Lettere di S. Callisto Caravario, salesiano martire*, Hong Kong 2000, pp. 273 [versione cinese, contiene 103 lettere]
8. Pietro POMATI, *Blood on the River bank*. Hong Kong, Salesiana Publisher 2000³, 137 p. [Chinese Original].
9. Mario RASSIGA, *Blood on the river bank*. Hong Kong 2000², 46 p.
10. Rosalio José CASTILLO LARA, *I Santi Martiri Luigi Versiglia (vescovo) e Callisto Caravario (presbitero). Commemorazione ufficiale [...] in occasione della loro Canonizzazione*. Roma 2000, 16 p.
11. Giancarlo MANIERI, *Lai-Tau-Tsui, punta d'aratro*. Roma, Editrice SDB 2000, 174 p.
12. Rudolf HASELSTEINER, *Pietro Yeh Ming Zen, chierico salesiano cinese, 1921-1952*. Hong Kong, Tang King Po School 1964, 180 p.
13. Mario RASSIGA, *Per la Chiesa e per il Papa. Sac. Luigi Yeh sdb, Sac. Giuseppe Fu sdb, Ch. Pietro Yeh sdb*. Hong Kong 1989, 81 p. [testo poligrafato].
14. Yun Sung WONG, *Memoirs of a Chinese Salesian Brother, Marco Wong Yiko (1910-2000)*, unpublished pamphlet transcribed from an oral account, 29th August 1990.

Eleven titles relate to the martyrdom of Versiglia and Caravario, which occurred on Feb. 25, 1930. People like Don Larena and Don Bosio, who wrote shortly after the event and tried to collect documents and witness declarations, initially speak of “assassination” and “slaughter”, but the very purpose for which the books were written was to prove that it was actually martyrdom the two missionaries had suffered. The declaration of martyrdom, however, came only in 1976, and this is reflected in the title of the biographical and spiritual portrait of the two martyrs (the well-known *Martiri in Cina*) published by Bosio, more on the basis of correspondence and (prevalently hagiographical) testimonies collected by the author than on the examination and interpretation of early witness reports which concentrated mainly on facts.

The argument for martyrdom rests on the fact that the two Salesians were killed by Bolshevik stray soldiers in a period in which anti-foreign and consequently anti-Catholic sentiment ran high as a consequence of the political awakening of China, the birth of the Chinese Communist Party and the support China received from Soviet Russia in this process. This is where the work of Fr. Giuseppe Cucchiara comes useful. Though he is not the first author to

document the new, worrisome political climate¹⁵, Cucchiara can rightly claim to be the first to have written a book on Bolshevism and its trail of terror and destruction in the region of the Vicariate¹⁶. The apex of this work of collection of documentary evidence came with the Diocesan Informative Process, which was decided at the 1932 Provincial Chapter, and was actually celebrated, not without internal dissent, in 1934-35¹⁷. All this documentation has a unique historical value, but it has not yet been fully and duly analyzed. We wish we knew more about the dynamics and above all the motivation of the murder, but it is not an easy task to sift facts from opinion and emotive evaluations. The material collected in the Vicariate needs also to be supplemented by further research in other archives, such as the archives of the Italian Foreign Ministry, to whom consular authorities reported the incident: Italian authorities worked with their Chinese counterparts, but while the Italian papers are there, I am not sure if Chinese government papers still exist, and if they do whether they can be consulted or not.

Equally interesting and appealing from an historical point of view is the correspondence of Callisto Caravario, published only in part in both Italian and Chinese. It is interesting not only for what it tells us, but also for what it does not say. It tells us of the candid spirituality of this young priest, of his love for his family and his ardent love for missionary life, of his first steps as a young missionary and zealous service to the young, but little about the momentous things that happened around him, especially in Shanghai, like the civil war, labour and anti-foreign strife between 1924 and 1927: reading his letters one can hear the rumble of the cannon in the distance, as if war did not touch the daily life of students and teachers. The world of a missionary in a Salesian house appears contained mainly within the walls of the institute. Quite different was the case of the missionaries in the Vicariate, constantly on the go and in daily contact with the challenges families, villages and the entire region faced in those years of civil war and political unrest.

On Oct. 1, 1949 Chairman Mao Zedong proclaimed the birth of the People's Republic of China. The Communist Party went on to establish a socialist

¹⁵ The first to chronicle the early activities of bolshevism in the mission district (1924-25) was [Giovanni GUARONA et alii], *Vicariato Apostolico di Shiu Chow in Cina (Leng Nam Tou)*. Torino, SEI 1925, pp. 87-99. Soviet support of Kuomintang began in 1921. Cf PERMANENT BUREAU OF THE INTERNATIONAL ENTENTE AGAINST THE 3RD INTERNATIONAL, *Bolshevism in China*. Geneva 1932.

¹⁶ Giuseppe CUCCHIARA, *Tre anni di Bolscevismo in Cina: la missione salesiana di Shiu-chow durante il periodo 1926-1929*. Firenze, Scuola Tipografica Salesiana 1931, 70 p.

¹⁷ "Sinarum seu Vicariatus Apostolici Shiuchow BEATIFICATIONIS SEU DECLARATIONIS MARTYRII servorum Dei Aloysii Versiglia Episcopi Charystens. Vicarii Ap. Shiu-chow et Callisti Caravario Sacerdotis, e Pia Societate Salesiana S. Joannis Bosco. Processus informativus super fama martyrii eiusque causa, signorum seu miraculorum in genere (Anno Domini MCMXXXIV)", in ASC A3600101.

society, using the tools they knew best: not the law, of which they only had a rudimentary and utilitarian grasp, but revolutionary struggle, of which they were masters. Attack against the Church came in the midst of national campaigns, such as the Campaign to Suppress Counter Revolutionaries (1951), movements, such as the “Three Self Patriotic Movement” (1951), or local crackdowns, such as the arrest of Bishop Gong Pingmei of Shanghai and many members of the clergy (including Salesians) in an attempt to break Catholic resistance to the new, independent course¹⁸.

The entire Salesian personnel on the mainland, 130 in all, were affected. By 1956, all foreign missionaries had been expelled, vilified in the press individually or as a group. Left behind were 21 mainly young Chinese confreres, 8 priests, the rest clerics or coadjutors, not counting Cl. Peter Yeh, who had died in jail in May 1952. In the 1956 Province directory 6 were listed as dispersed, the rest as being imprisoned. All 21 houses were listed either as “occupied” or “temporarily closed”. Meanwhile a group of senior aspirants had been transferred to Hong Kong or Macao. The China Province looks back at those years with a feeling of admiration for the confreres who died and suffered for their allegiance to Rome, with sadness for the amount of energy and good will frustrated, and with hope in a future return to the mainland when the conditions will be there to do so. The 2013-2014 directory of the China Province of Mary Help of Christians still lists all houses and schools on the mainland as “Temporarily Closed”¹⁹.

Some confreres eventually died in prison, others suffered lengthy labour camp sentences, a few cracked up. So far no one has dared to attempt to produce a serious reconstruction of those years to try to understand and put into perspective the events. These events deserve proper consideration and evaluation. So far all we are left with are the individual testimonies of “heroic witness to Christ and to His Church”, and one book, the life of *Pietro Yeh Ming Zen, chierico salesiano cinese, 1921-1952*²⁰, and several other unpublished accounts, like the *Memoirs of Bro. Marco Wong*²¹.

¹⁸ Cf R. P. Riquet, *L'Eglise des Ecrases: Shanghai 1949-1955*. (= Cahiers du Temoignage Chretien, XXXVI). Paris s.d.; James T. Mayers, *Nemici senza fucile: la Chiesa Cattolica nella Repubblica Popolare Cinese*. Milano, Jaka Book 1984; Elisa Giunipero, *Chiesa Cattolica e Cina Comunista: dalla rivoluzione del 1949 al Concilio Vaticano II*. Brescia, Morcelliana 2007.

¹⁹ CHINA PROVINCE OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, *Directory 2013-2014*. Hong Kong 2013, 64 p.

²⁰ Mario Rassiga, *In memoriam: A tribute to the deceased Salesians who worked in China (1906-1986)*. Hong Kong Salesian China Province 1987, 57 p.; Rudolf Haselsteiner, *Pietro Yeh Ming Zen, chierico salesiano cinese, 1921-1952*. Hong Kong, Tang King Po School 1964, 180 p.

²¹ Yun Sung Wong, *Memoirs of a Chinese Salesian Brother, Marco Wong Yiko (1910-2000)*, unpublished pamphlet transcribed from an oral account, 29th August 1990.

Third corpus

This sector is the most prolific, and it regards anniversary celebrations: it is clear that celebration is an important part of life. Here only the most significant papers are quoted.

1. [Ignaz CANAZEI], *The Golden Jubilee of the Salesian Missions*, Macao 1925 [Text in 5 languages].
2. [ANONYMOUS], *Souvenir of the Salesian Work in the Far East 1906-1966* Macao 1966 (trilingual edition: Portuguese, Chinese and English).
3. Mario RASSIGA, *Quindici lustri di apostolato salesiano in Cina 1906-1981*. Hong Kong, s. e. [1981], 44 p.
4. Giuliano CARPELLA, *St. Louis School, Hong Kong. A short history written for the golden jubilee of Salesian administration*. Hong Kong 1977, 68 p. (English and Chinese Ed.).
5. [Lanfranco FEDRIGOTTI – Domingos LEONG], *60th Anniversary of the Salesian House of Studies 1931-1991*, [cronistoria con testo inglese e cinese], Newsletter of the Salesian Chinese Province Jan-Feb. 1992, special issue, 55 p.
6. Carlo Socol – Domingos LEONG, *The Dream Continues. Centenary of the Salesians of Don Bosco in China*. Hong Kong, Don Bosco Publishing Services 2006, 239 p.
7. Mario RASSIGA – Joseph CHEUNG, *One Hundred Years of Salesian Presence in China*, Bilingual Edition. Hongkong, Vox Amica 2009, 133 p.

We have publications not only for the 25th, 50th, 60th, 75th and 100th anniversaries of the Province. Virtually all our schools have annual magazines, and every 10 years or so they produce special anniversary issues, which – one must say – are quite repetitive as they serve successive generations of students. They are entrusted to editorial committees of students under the direction of teachers. The tendency is to copy: no incentives are provided to deepen, for instance, the history and mission of the school. There are, of course, exceptions, e.g. the well written and informative 20th Anniversary “Souvenir Number” of the Aberdeen Trade School (1935-1955) or of some outstanding features of the 60th anniversary issue (1927-1987) of the St. Louis School magazine.

For ordinary people who are not very demanding, and who consider history to be made of dates, chronologies and old photographs, this kind of literature is all they need. When they see something studiously prepared, well written, handy in size and shape, they turn to it for all their knowledge requirements, and these nifty little booklets turn out to be the most consulted reference materials for readers at large, especially when little else exists, as in the case of M. Rassiga’s *Quindici Lustri di apostolato salesiano in Cina 1906-1981*, a slim little booklet of 44 pages, produced in three languages, Italian, Chinese and

English²², or G. Carpella's 1977 *St. Louis School, Hong Kong. A short history written for the golden jubilee of Salesian administration*, the booklet to consult about the first Salesian house in Hong Kong, the one that Don Bosco negotiated to have, unsuccessfully, in 1873-74²³. There are of course people who approached chronology in a scholarly manner: this is the case of the chronology of the Salesian House of Studies: the *60th Anniversary of the Salesian House of Studies 1931-1991*, by Lanfranco Fedrigotti and Domingos Leong, well researched and reliable.

The most recent example of what a celebratory book can present is the China Province centennial publication, *The Dream Continues. Centenary of the Salesians of Don Bosco in China*, written by C. Socol and D. Leong, and published in 2006. This book manages to strike a good balance between attractive narration of events and editorial layout, and an acceptable historiographical approach.

Fourth corpus

1. Carlo A. KIRSCHNER, *Dom Bosco e a China. Contributo para a História dos Salesianos*. Macau 1970, 370 p.
2. Mario RASSIGA, *Breve cenno storico dell'opera salesiana in Cina*, 3 voll., 8 tomi. Hong Kong 1975 [mimeographed text].
3. Mario RASSIGA, *L'opera salesiana in Cina. Cenno storico, parte 1-3*. Hong Kong 1973-1975 [testo poligrafato].
4. Mario RASSIGA, *A short historical account of the Salesian work in China (1906-1930)*. Trad. B. Tohill. Hong Kong 1987 pp. 67+66 [English translation of part 1-2 of work above. Mimeographed text].
5. Mario RASSIGA, *La missione salesiana di Shiu Chow. Cenno storico*. Hong Kong 1989, 152 p.

With the fourth corpus we approach historiography proper.

The earliest attempt to write a history of the Salesians in China was conceived by veteran China missionary Fr. Pietro Pomati (+1994) and dates back to 1935. It was probably inspired by the Diocesan Canonization Process of Versiglia and Caravario celebrated in 1934-35 of which Fr. Pomati was one of the secretaries. It was abandoned and taken up again twenty years later, but it never went beyond Ch. 1 and of course remained unpublished. It was entitled *Don Bosco in Cina*, and what unwittingly put the word "the end" to it was Fr. Ziggiotti's timely advice: "Continua pure così: attenti scrupolosamente alla storia, alle statistiche e da rilievo al metodo educativo e ai risultati ottenuti tra i giovani

²² Mario RASSIGA – Joseph CHEUNG, *One Hundred Years of Salesian Presence in China*. Bilingual Edition. Hongkong, Vox Amica 2009, 133 p. updated Rassiga's 1975 work.

²³ Carlo SOCOL, *Don Bosco's missionary call and China*, in RSS 25 (2006) 215-254.

cinesi. La storia della Missione va trattata a parte"²⁴. For a man who essentially grew up in the mission, the task suggested by the Rector Major was becoming too challenging.

Carlo Antonio Kirschner and Mario Rassiga delivered the first histories of Salesian work in China. They were both second generation missionaries who arrived in China in the 1920s and grew up and did their studies mainly in the missions. They are the links between their generation and mine, the 5th generation, when most early generation missionaries were beginning to, or had already passed away, and management was increasingly entrusted to locals who had not been involved in early historical context, or were too young to have had any significant knowledge of it.

In their earlier years they both worked in the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow. Fr. Kirschner (arrived in 1921, died in Macao 1984) witnessed the destruction of the mission after the Sino-Japanese war²⁵, and was instrumental in smuggling precious documents out of the vicariate, some of which were quite sensitive and personally entrusted to him by Ignaz Canazei. For this reason, perhaps, the documents were not deposited in the Provincial Archives (AIC), where they should naturally belong, but were brought to Rome and partly entrusted to Raffaele Farina and are now kept in the Centro Studi Don Bosco, partly eventually ending up in the Central Salesian Archives²⁶.

Kirschner was close to Bishop Canazei, from whom he absorbed a strong sense of mission, through which he closely identified with the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiuchow. In the period before his expulsion he was vicar forane and rector of the Lokchong house. His long sojourn in Macao, where he died in 1984, helped him win the confidence of Bishop Paulo Jose Tavares (1961-1973) and gain access to hitherto unknown documents in the Macao Diocesan Archives. He eventually published a series of partly connected and partly unconnected articles on Don Bosco and China in the *Boletim do Governo Eclesiástico da Diocese de Macau*. These he collected and eventually published in a volume: *Dom Bosco e a China: contributo para a História dos Salesianos*, Macau, Tipografia da Missão 1970. In 26 chapters he gathered all that could be found related to Don Bosco or the Salesians in China. The most valuable documents are those regarding the negotiations for the arrival of the Salesians in Macao, and the strenuous beginnings of the Salesian House there.

²⁴ Pietro POMATI, *Don Bosco in Cina. Prima Parte: Alle porte della Cina 1906-1918*, in AIC Cronache.

²⁵ His is a 95 p. *Contributo alla storia della missione salesiana della diocesi di Shiuchow, specialmente del distretto di Lokchong, sotto la maschera della liberazione dei rossi AD 1950-51*, which he presented to Fr. R. Ziggotti on 14 Mar 1955. With a note: Con preghiera di non pubblicare in questo periodo di emergenza. AIC, Shiuchow II.

²⁶ One such document is the manuscript *1. Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben oder vom Tyroler-Naz zum Missionsbischof 1883-19xx*, Heft 1 Erste Niederschrift 1945: Hosai. 21.VII. 1945, pp. 1-241; Heft 2, pp. 244-273 + 2pp. addenda. ASC A865.

To Kirschner we owe the fact that he made available the early documents related to the negotiations of the Salesian leaders (Rua, Cogliolo, etc.) with the Portuguese side, the role of the nuncio in Lisbon, the strenuous life of the early Salesians in Macao and some rare photographs. One thing that jars in his book is that there is no critical apparatus, no bibliography, no attempt to produce any kind of analysis. Documents are often unconnected and are systematically given in the Portuguese language with no reference as to their origin or source.

Mario Rassiga, arrived in China in 1924 and died in Hong Kong in 1999. After his departure from Mainland China he was closely connected with the archives, first as Provincial Secretary and Archivist (1959-1972), and then as Archivist (1982-1987).

Very early, as a cleric, he was assigned to the Vicariate Apostolic of Shiu-chow. After the liberation he worked briefly in the publishing services, and thereafter he succeeded Fr. Clemente Benato as provincial Secretary and Archivist, a post he kept for over 28 years. In this post he continued the methodical work of archival conservation and classification started earlier on by his predecessor. His is a document by document card retrieval catalogue now surpassed by informatic systems. He had a thorough knowledge of sources in his archives, and so he produced not only several major works on the history of Salesian work in China, the most valuable being his *Breve cenno storico dell' opera salesiana in Cina*, 3 voll., 8 tomi, Hong Kong 1975 [mimeographed text], but also numerous other writings, many of them small biographies of deceased Salesians of the China Province. The *Breve cenno storico*²⁷ is a massive work and is the most complete research to date based on the archival material from the AIC. That's both its strength and weakness!

Reading Rassiga's work one has the impression of something written in the mold of Eugenio Ceria's *Annali* or volumes 11-19 of the *Memorie Biografiche*: readable, reasonably well organized stuff, strung together by abundant documentary evidence and the personal knowledge of the author²⁸. The account evolves smoothly. It is credible and a pleasure to read. Many documents are reproduced in full. As in all prevalently narrative history, Rassiga's subject matter is organized chronologically; it is focused on one coherent story; to achieve this he abounds on the descriptive and disregards the analytical. Not too many questions are asked; no effort is made to get a deeper and better comprehension. It is concerned with people and events, not abstract circumstances or con-

²⁷ An abridged version is his *L'opera salesiana in Cina: cenno storico, Voll. I-III, 1906-1945*. Hong Kong, Aberdeen Technical School 1973-1975, 350 p.

²⁸ On Ceria's historiography, cf Francis DESRAMAUT, *Come hanno lavorato gli autori delle Memorie biografiche*, in Mario MIDALI (ed.), *Don Bosco nella Storia*. Atti del 1° Congresso Internazionale di Studi su Don Bosco (Università Pontificia Salesiana – Roma, 16-20 gennaio 1989). Roma, LAS 1990, pp. 37-65.

clusions; and it deals with the particular and specific rather than the collective and statistical²⁹.

But it is a mere internal, one-faceted, mainly inward look at the institution. As a result the narrative falls flat: it is one dimensional. It would have been more effective if it was done with critical rigour, if questions were asked, if documents had been compared and cross-examined with documents from different archival sources. One would wish to have, in fact, a multi-faceted and contextualized story, supported by a more critical and analytical approach that goes beyond the document, and addresses the social environment in which people lived, travelled and worked. Narrative history has its own way of representing reality through fact, it is particularly apt at telling us *what was going on inside people's heads in the past, and what it was like to live in the past*, but fails to reach a breadth and depth of understanding that only a good analysis can reach. That is the way people wrote in the time of Don Ceria: it may be called a diligent but *pre-scientific* approach to historiography.

Fifth corpus

1. Carlo SOCOL, *The first twenty years of the Orfanato of Macao between ideal and reality (1906-1926)*, in Francesco MOTTO (ed.), *Insedimenti e iniziative salesiane dopo don Bosco. Saggi di storiografia. Atti del 2° Convegno-Seminario di Storia dell'Opera Salesiana* (Roma, 1-5 novembre 1995). (= ISS – Studi, 9). Roma, LAS 1996, pp. 275-325;
2. ID., “*Una istituzione che si occupa della classe operaia*”. *La Escola de Artes e Oficios di Macao nel suo primo ventennio (1906-1926)*, in Francesco MOTTO (ed.), *L'Opera Salesiana dal 1880 al 1922. Significatività e portata sociale. Vol. II. Esperienze particolari in Europa, Africa, Asia. Atti del 3° Convegno Internazionale di Storia dell'Opera Salesiana* (Roma, 31 ottobre – 5 novembre 2000). (= ISS – Studi, 17). Roma, LAS 2001, pp. 413-438;
3. ID., *The history of Salesian education in China*, in XU XIAOZHOU – R. GIAN- NATELLI (ed.), *Educational innovation: perspectives of internationalization*. Hangzhou, Zhejiang University Press 2006, pp. 26-35.
4. ID., *The Birth of the China Province and the expansion of the Salesian work in East Asia (1926-1927)*, in Nestor IMPELIDO (ed.), *The Beginnings of the Salesian Presence in East Asia. Part one: The Salesians of Don Bosco. Acts of the Seminar on Salesian History* (Hong Kong, 4-6 December 2004). (= ACSSA – Varia, 2). Hong Kong, Don Bosco Press 2006, pp. 47-61;
5. ID., *The Salesians of Don Bosco*, in L. HA – P. TAVEIRNE (ed.), *History of Catholic Religious Orders and Missionary Congregations in Hong Kong. Vol. 2.*

²⁹ Freely quoted from Lawrence STONE, *The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History*, in “Past and Present” 85 (Nov 1979) 13.

- Centre for Catholic Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Hong Kong 2009, pp. 540-618;
6. ID., *The Implantation of the Salesian Charism in China (1906-1936): Ideals, Challenges, Answers and Results*, in Mathew KAPPLIKUNNEL (ed.), *Implantation of the Salesian Charism in Asia. Ideals, Challenges, Answers, Results*. Acts of the Salesian History Seminar East Asia – Oceania Region (Batulao [Manila], 24-28 November 2008). (= ACSSA – Varia, 7). Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications 2009, pp. 126-129.
 7. ID., *Situation Report: SDB Chinese Province*, in *Evangelization and Interreligious Dialogue XI*. Roma, Salesiani – Dicastero per le Missioni 1994, pp. 21-23;
 8. ID., *Don Bosco's missionary call and China*, in RSS 25 (2006) 215-294;
 9. Francesco CASELLA, *Profilo biografico storico-documentario di Mons. Michele Arduino ultimo vescovo di Shiuchow*. Roma 2000.
 10. Anjos AMADOR, *The First Salesians in East Timor: 1927-1929*, in N. IMPELIDO (ed.), *The Beginnings of the Salesian...*, Part one, pp. 111-137;
 11. Michele FERRERO – Carlo SOCOL, *The Salesian educative work in Macau 1906-1926: the "Escola de Artes e Oficios"*. Paper delivered at The Third International Conference on Macaology *The Intellectual Construction and Academic Development in a Global Perspective: with Macaology as an Example* (Beijing 15-16 Nov 2012), and soon to be published.

People of our generation, who have no direct knowledge and only a superficial understanding of the events leading to the origins and development of the Salesian work in China, rightly seek better documented accounts that fill that void. As Pietro Stella put it, “every Order or Congregation, at a given point of its development, feels the exigency of setting its history on a critical foundation, especially as regards its origins”³⁰. The fifth corpus of research materials belongs to that mould. But (what we might call a more) scientific or critical type of historiography did not come to the China Province by chance. Remotely, it has been the fruit of the scientific activities of the Salesian Historical Institute and – more directly – of the initiatives of ACSSA. The first research quoted in this section – *The first twenty years of the Orfanato of Macao* – was published in 1996 on the occasion of the symposium on *Insedimenti e iniziative salesiane dopo Don Bosco* held in Rome the previous year. The several papers that followed were mainly prepared for regional symposia organized by ACSSA.

Since its inception in late 1981, the Salesian Historical Institute and the systematic editorial activities it launched, helped develop a new mentality, a new ideological and methodological approach to Salesian historiography. What the Congregation wished to achieve, and the program the scholars embarked on, effectively reached the whole Salesian world through the establishment of ACSSA, born in October 1996, thereby providing formation, methodological tools

³⁰ Quoted in Pietro BRAIDO, *Pietro Stella, storico professionale, maestro di storiografia di don Bosco e salesiana*, in RSS 27 (2008) 183.

and opportunities to a growing group of “cultori di storia Salesiana”, history enthusiasts who might not have received formal training³¹.

As one can see in the case of Pietro Stella, essentially a self-made historian³², formal training though desirable is not indispensable. What are essential, though, are passion and some degree of dexterity in researching, handling, questioning, comparing and contextualizing relevant documents, and all this can be learnt by doing.

Several authors have written authoritatively about Salesian work in China: Francesco Casella on Mons. Michele Arduino, Amador Anjos on the early stages in East Timor, Michele Ferrero on Educative work in Macao, and Carlo Socol. The last named has published mainly articles: on Don Bosco and China, the beginnings of Salesian work in Macao and Hong Kong, both from the institutional point of view and of their educative and social impact; the expansion in the region and inside China, a study on the inculturation of the Salesian charism, and one on the classification and preservation of archival memory³³. As already mentioned, these articles were mainly written for the various ACSSA meetings held in and outside the EAO Region.

What is the new historiography offering that previously was not offered, or not offered enough?

Sources. The most obvious things one finds are the many more archival sources from different archives used, allowing for a sufficient degree of comparison and cross checks.

Methodology. Documents are analyzed and interpreted with a scientific and multi-disciplinary approach, and not simply reproduced. Questions are posed and contextualized conclusions are drawn by utilizing a variety of sources. Attention is given not only to people and events, but to the significance and relevance of a presence and the work it carried out.

Contextualization. Supplementary information is offered that is not found in institutional archives. The background and the context are the framework within which accounts are drawn up.

Critical apparatus. A critical apparatus is in place throughout and an acceptable bibliography provided for support and further research.

Conclusions: capitalizing on what we have learnt

The present paper was prepared as part of a course on the History of the China Province for post novices. The class agreed that the first and most obvi-

³¹ Stanisław ZIMNIAK, *Cenni storici sull'Associazione Cultori di Storia Salesiana (ACSSA) e sulle sue realizzazioni*, in RSS 27 (2008) 157-162.

³² P. BRAIDO, *Pietro Stella...*, p. 186.

³³ Manuel ROMERO TALLAFIGO – Carlo SOCOL, *Classification and preservation of archival memory*. Report delivered at the “*Scripta volant. Saving our Cultural Heritage*”, an All Asia Seminar on Salesian Archival Documentation (The Citadel, Chennai, 19-22 December 2001).

ous thing to be done was to draw up a list of all publications, a complete bibliography, aware that it is good to know what we already have, and that all that has been written is useful for further historical research.

We learnt to appreciate good history, but also how to draw valuable information from other works as well, by learning to ask the right questions from them, and asking what else we wanted to know that we had not found in them.

We became more and more convinced that our generation needs to know, but even more needs to have a deep understanding of its past, its origins and development, and so needs good, well-researched and well-written history. We learnt that in order to be able to map our way forward it was vital to know where we came from and how we developed.

Naturally, we began acquiring the tools to appreciate well-researched historiography and the tools to be able to write competently. Involving young confreres at an early stage was a good choice, since competence develops gradually by acquiring knowledge and skills.

Our team will strive to prepare one good article for every Seminar organized by ACSSA, thus putting our newly acquired competence to work.

We also resolved to read lots of Salesian history: understanding Don Bosco and the dynamics of how his work developed and expanded is the basis for spiritual development and dynamism.