

Chinese in Europe – Catholic Perspectives A Chinese Vision: Commitment and Solidarity

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Translated by Annie Lam

The theme of this Colloquium on pastoral work for Chinese migrants in Europe is “Chinese in Europe: Trends and Catholic Perspectives.” After three days’ intensive discussions, the Colloquium will soon conclude. I believe we have felt that this is a very concrete and meaningful Colloquium as well as a pioneering meeting and a landmark. It has given attention to and built a platform for those involved in pastoral work for migrants so that we can conduct more easily our pastoral work for migrants in Europe. I am convinced that this meeting will be a powerful impetus to further develop our Chinese Catholic communities in Europe.

I. Recognition of the Pastoral Work

The scale and influence of the Chinese Catholic communities in Europe are not very great, but we know that many of the important cities in Europe have established or are beginning to set up such groups. Those dioceses in Europe where Chinese migrants cluster have gradually become aware of the importance and urgency of pastoral work among the Chinese. Priests assigned for the service to the Chinese are also sharing the responsibilities to work hard for the Chinese Catholic communities in Europe.

1. Pastoral Work

The faith life of laypeople has been intensified. In many parishes Chinese-language services are conducted for the Chinese Catholics, sacraments are given, retreats and catechism courses held, youth pastoral camps organized and family prayers offered. Many Chinese communities have furthermore organized pilgrimage tours for the Chinese migrants. They visited different places of pilgrimage and thus deepened the faith.

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2. Missionary Work

The joint efforts of priests are beginning to bear some “fruit.” The number of new Catholics is growing. Groups formerly developed from laypeople’s initiatives have now evolved into diocese-managed regular Church parishes. More and more Chinese Church communities are using traditional Church festivals, Chinese festivals, and holidays to organize large scale evangelization activities. This enhances the name recognition of Church communities among local “Chinese circles” so that more Chinese migrants get to know more about our Catholic communities through these activities.

II. Insufficient Pastoral Work

While the Chinese Catholic communities in Europe have gradually developed, we feel that pastoral work when compared to the rapid increase of the number of Chinese migrants in Europe is utterly inadequate. The following are some of the main reasons for insufficiency of missionary work among Chinese people:

1. The Organizational Structure Is Far from Perfect

Under normal circumstances, each country’s bishops’ conference usually sets up a committee for pastoral work for migrants. This committee is responsible for coordinating domestic pastoral assistance for foreigners as well as pastoral work for one’s own emigrants in other countries. Regarding mainland Chinese, such committees are totally “blank.” In consequence, an effective communication channel is lacking, even though the Holy See has entrusted, with documentation, the pastoral care for Chinese migrants to the local Churches where these migrants are located. The local Churches, however, lack sufficient Chinese priests to serve the Chinese migrants. Therefore, in European cities where Chinese Catholics have volunteered to set up their own groups, the diocese thereafter has arranged a priest to look after the Chinese faithful. This is considered good already. There are, however, many cities (such as in Spain) with Chinese Catholic groups with up to 100 members, but without a single Chinese-speaking parish priest appointed by the diocese for the faithful groups. So, how can we talk about missionary work for migrants!

We cannot blame the individual Chinese who were Catholics in the mainland but have become Protestants after their arrival in Europe. The Church in Italy, is not by any means too bad. Its bishops’ conference pays attention to missionary work among the Chinese migrants. Within a few years it has appointed more than a dozen coordinators for various Chinese migrant communities and organized new Church groups based on their languages and dialects. However, this newly established group of migrant pastoral coordinators lacks an operating system and regulation. Due to various reasons, it can only function within “Church circles” for some “pastoral” work and some evangelization activities, let alone large-scale or vigorous missionary projects for migrants. Such a task still needs help from many aspects. Unfortunately, there is a lack of strong support and assistance, making missionary work very difficult.

2. Insufficient Attention Given by Church Authorities

While social development in the world is progressing, global migration has reached a never before seen level in human history. On June 16, 2010, China's State Council's Overseas Chinese Affairs Office announced: "China has 45 million people living overseas." This figure already equals the population of a European country. It is very high despite "difficulties to travel abroad" for Chinese. If mainlanders would not have to pay 15,000 Euros "agent fee" to enable them to go abroad, but could freely travel, probably the numbers of Chinese migrants in Europe would be much greater.

Facing such phenomena, how does the Church implement pastoral work toward Chinese migrants? Frankly speaking, "we are not ready." Until today, few understood the importance and urgency of evangelizing among migrants, the Church is still using policies formulated decades ago to assess and implement our pastoral programs. I just feel the pace of Church development is far behind the world's development. How can we adapt to the development of modern society?

During the several years of my missionary work for migrants, I have heard many high-ranking Church officials' negative responses which said that the mission for migrants is within the responsibility of religious congregations, and not of diocesan priests. Yes, according to the Church's division of work, such evangelization for outsiders should be the prime task of missionaries. But currently only a handful of religious congregations could afford to have a special mission for Chinese migrants. [...] In fact, to serve the migrants from China is a mission and that is straight-on missionary work for China. I suppose this is well understood.

3. Insufficient Missionary Personnel

With the underestimation and neglect of the need for missionary work among migrants by high-level Church officials, how many missionary personnel do we need to evangelize 45 million Chinese? If we follow Church tradition that migrants' evangelization should be undertaken by missionaries, may I ask which religious congregations currently can provide Chinese-speaking missionaries for the Chinese migrants? Which religious congregations have been founded specially for Chinese migrants?

Certainly we recognize that many members of missionary societies are willing to serve Chinese migrants. Due to a lack of enthusiasm and attention by the leaders of the congregations, however, mission work among Chinese migrants has become individual services of certain missionaries enthusiastic about China. Some Religious congregations lack young vocations to undertake the task and Westerners have difficulties in learning Chinese. Thus there is a will, but not enough strength. Diocesan priests in Europe who can speak foreign languages are actually very few. Chinese priests studying in Europe abide by the policy of the Vatican's Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (Propaganda Fide) which disallows them to stay behind to work. (I personally do not oppose this policy, but I just want to state it as a fact.) All this makes our searching for priests who can serve the Chinese migrants very difficult. In Italy, we have enough priests. If certain dioceses need Chinese priests, we will try various means to find a priest for them who can serve

the Chinese Catholics. But elsewhere, it seems quite difficult. Currently, the situation is: once elderly priests serving Chinese migrants in Europe retire, there is no replacement by younger priests, which causes problems in development. Even sustaining the Chinese Catholics is already a problem.

4. Sources of Funding

With the mentioned structural problems our ideas cannot be channeled to the top nor can we spread our messages to the grassroots. Related problems inevitably will arise. First of all is the question of funding. All Chinese Catholic communities in Europe, except those in Paris, are small. Many Chinese Catholic communities in Italy have just been founded two or three years ago, mostly consisting of new Catholics. Some migrant Catholics are without legal documents, their own survival is a problem and they can only spare very little for the Church. There are too few funds available to help these groups. They can neither be self-financing, nor funded by the dioceses. (Some groups can be reimbursed by the diocese on costs of printing promotional materials or photocopies.) In many cases, even phone bills to contact Chinese migrant Catholics are paid by the priests out of their own pocket. How can we thus develop into large scale evangelization work? The total lack of funds has a serious impact on missionary work among Chinese migrants.

III. Reflection on the Development of Other Religious Groups among Chinese Migrants

Europe has always been known to be a region with a high concentration of Catholics. In recent years, other religions have developed rapidly and are amazingly effective among the Chinese migrants. According to the information that I personally acquired in Italy, it may help explain what these religious groups are doing among the Chinese migrants in Italy. The phenomenon in Italy can be taken as a reference to understand the situation in other European countries, which can inspire us to have an urgent sense of mission towards the Chinese migrants' pastoral work.

1. Protestant Groups

Protestants are strongly supported by Protestants in the United States. In less than 10 years they have formed their groups in all major cities in Italy. With their own 10 percent offerings and foreign financial assistance, they have vigorously bought up abandoned movie theaters, opera houses, halls, apartments, etc. Then, they converted these houses into chapels and activity venues so as to run missionary activities and to render services for the Chinese migrants. Chinese migrants speak highly of them.

In order to preach to the Chinese migrants, 400–500 Italians were sent to mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan to study Chinese. Now, it is very easy to find Italians who can speak fluent Chinese and are preaching the Gospel and serving among the Chinese migrants. Although we might think they came from different denominations, the Protestants have unified and set up in Europe a common “European-Chinese Theological

Seminary” with Chinese as the medium of teaching. Copies of a monthly called “Clarion” (*Haojiao* 号角) published in Europe are distributed free. They have their own common website in Europe. Various Protestant groups have issued publications and promotional materials (such as “Outlook” magazine [*Zhanwang* 展望] of the community in Rome) to be distributed free in Chinese shops. College students also help organize “European Youth Leadership Camps” and “Happy Life Gospel Camps” etc. Within 10 years in Italy, their all-round efforts made it possible to establish 35 Chinese groups in Italy. We learnt that in the Eastern District of Rome, the Protestant community could attract more than 1,500 Chinese migrants to their Christmas gatherings each year. This is Rome only. You can imagine how influential they are in other places.

2. Buddhist Groups

Buddhist groups among Chinese migrants in Europe are also very active. There are temples of various sizes found in all major cities. In 2008, the Prato government in Italy approved the application from Chinese Buddhist groups to build a gigantic Buddhist temple. In Rome, the balance sheet of every Buddhist temple reveals huge amounts of income and expenditure. You can see how popular the Buddhist activities are. On average, every month 5,000 Euros are spent. However, the annual expenditure of our Chinese parishes does not even reach that amount.

3. Jehovah’s Witnesses

Their rapid development is only second to the Protestants’, but they do pose a serious threat to the Catholic Church. Among Chinese migrants in Italy, few people know about the Catholic Church, but most Chinese migrants could name Protestants and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Reflection

We need to reflect on the impact of religious groups in Europe: Why Protestants with different denominations can be united and form a common seminary, can have a publication in Europe, can set up numerous groups so quickly, and can gather students in Europe to meet? Yet, the “oneness” of our Catholic Church has not enabled us to jointly develop our Church among Chinese migrants in Europe? It has already taken four years of application in Italy, but we still cannot get a place to function as an office for the evangelization of Chinese migrants. What are the reasons for this? The issue demands the reflection of those religious congregations and Church people who care about the China.

IV. Proposals for Pastoral and Mission Work among Chinese Migrants in Europe

It seems difficult to change the high-level Church officials’ mission direction. But at least we can do something within our scope to carry out concrete missionary work among the

Chinese migrants. This is of imminent importance. This Colloquium has provided a good opportunity. May we remind you that the closing of the Colloquium is just the beginning of our work? If we do not follow up the work, then what we have discussed, heard and reported here will only become history, not creating any tangible effect. Also, it would be a waste of resources for the organizers. I think, if possible, we should focus on the actual situation in the following areas to begin our future work.

1. Establishment of a Coordinating Body for Evangelization among Chinese in Europe

If we could propose to the Holy See to establish a leadership organization in Europe to be taken as a coordinating body for missionary work among Chinese migrants, as long as there is no Chinese Bishops' Conference [recognized by Rome], it would be most perfect. If this proposal is not feasible, an alternative is to have one [...] or more religious congregations to set up a special "European Coordination Center for Evangelization among Chinese Migrants." This office could coordinate the distribution of publications and the set up of a website. Through its publications and website, Chinese migrant groups in various European countries could be informed about their activities and exchange information. The groups could be mutually inspired. This Coordination Center may also consider setting up some kind of "Evangelization Foundation for Chinese" which would effectively resolve the problem of funds. Also this Center could link up all migrants and pastoral committees of bishops' conferences in Europe and urge them to arrange national coordinators for missionary work among the Chinese in the individual countries and thus help build up a unified pastoral service in various countries, enabling local coordinators to consult their respective dioceses to appoint priests so that they can arrange services for local Chinese migrants. The European Coordination Center for Evangelization among Chinese Migrants may help the individual country's bishops' conference to screen and recommend a coordinator for Chinese migrants, and to link up with diocesan priests or religious in China. The Coordination Center may also find Chinese students (priests, seminarians, and sisters) for temporary service during their vacations in places that have not yet established a regular Chinese community.

2. First Establish Chinese Groups in the Cities Where Chinese Migrants Gather

With the above mentioned Coordination Center the tasks may easily be coped with. Without such a Center the achievement of the goals of our Chinese European Church communities is much more difficult. As a Chinese saying goes: One will not take up responsibility if one is not in the position. However, suppose there is no statutory organization, at least we hope there will be someone who can gather communication information (contact lists) of all the Chinese Church organizations and groups in all cities in Europe within a period of one year. Where there are no official communities, at least a layperson or laity representative from each city could function as a contact person so that Catholics or those who are interested in the Catholic Church may contact the Chinese groups or communities.

(This also forms the basis of building up a formal Chinese community.) Then, this contact method of the Chinese migrant groups can be shared with other cities in Europe. Once a Chinese group is formed, a designated priest or sister for evangelization can be arranged as chaplain or pastoral assistant as soon as possible.

[...] Through the sharing of missionary work, various groups are founded gradually. The morale of our priests in the migrant services will then be raised and the laypeople will actively participate in the evangelization, too. If our Chinese groups are lifeless, the whole team will have no energy. Then, the missionary work for the Chinese in Europe will remain stagnant, and function the way it has been.

V. Need to Unify Names of Chinese Groups

Missionary work for migrants is different from that of ordinary parish missionary work, since each of our groups comes from different parts of Chinese-speaking Churches. The southern and northern Chinese have very different cultures. Moreover, there are Chinese-speaking Catholics from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia. Our hymns, liturgy, and even names of communities sound so different. We cannot be identical, but at least we should have a unified name for our organizations. Many communities have begun to register with the government as local Church groups. I think there is a need to unify the names, for instance, Chinese Catholic Church in Paris (local), Italian Chinese Catholic Church (national); Chinese Catholic Church in Florence; or Catholic Chinese Community Vienna. Please standardize the names to be used by all Chinese communities.

VI. Prospects of Chinese Churches in Europe

Experience has told us that the harvest comes only after hard work. As we said before, the experiences of the Rimini group and the Napoli group in Italy told us that as long as we work hard, our groups will prosper. Only when our groups are built up well, will the number of Catholics grow day by day, and more and more non-Catholics will come and ask for baptism. There is a saying in Europe: "Wherever there are pigeons, pigeons will gather there." With more new Catholics, the morale in evangelization work will be raised. Many Chinese migrants in Europe have previously been educated to have a negative view of religion. To change their minds, we have to promote actively our missionary and charity work, enabling them to accept our Catholic faith more easily. We entrust ourselves to the prayers of Our Lady of China. May our Chinese Catholic communities in Europe grow steadily!