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The Mission Schools in Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist China: Debate within the Chinese political world on educational and schools matters in the nationalist period

As Escolas de Missão na China nacionalista de Chiang Kai-shek: Debate no mundo político chinês sobre questões educacionais e escolares no período nacionalista

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RESUMO

O presente artigo visa fornecer mais um contributo sobre as escolas da Missão, tomando como ponto de partida a imprensa Católica e os seus diferentes autores conhecidos no campo da missiologia. Este trabalho propõem-se a clarificar a questão da liberdade religiosa a partir do nascimento das escolas da Missão, no período do Governo nacionalista de Chiang Kai-shek. O Governo nacionalista, entre vários regulamentos, chegou a um acordo com as diversas ordens religiosas, tanto Católicas como Protestantes: o que foi encarado como uma maneira satisfatória de ir ao encontro dos interesses de ambos com o registro das escolas da Missão. Estas escolas deviam cumprir os regulamentos governamentais. No entanto, o ensino da religião nas escolas era uma questão em aberto, porque, no que diz respeito a este assunto, os regulamentos ainda não eram claros.

Palavras-chave: Escolas da Missão; liberdade religiosa; Reforma da Educação; Regulamentos Governamentais; Governo Nacionalista; Escolas Privadas

ABSTRACT

The present article, beginning with Catholic press and various authors, known in the sector of Missiology, aims at adding a further contribution on the Mission schools. This work clarifies the question of religious freedom since the birth of the Missions schools in the period of Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist Government. The nationalist Government, among various Regulations, had find an agreement with religious institutions, both Catholic and Protestant: a satisfactory way of meeting both interests was found with the register of mission schools. These schools had to attain to the Government's regulations. However, teaching religion in schools was an open issue, because as far as this subject was concerned, regulations were still not clear.

Keywords: Mission schools; liberty religious; Education Reform; Government Regulations; nationalist Government; Private schools

1. Introduction

When talking about Catholic Missions in China, we cannot avoid mentioning the point of view and the manifolds publications of Giovan Battista Tragella (1885-1968) who argued that the Missions were something that not only focused on merely evangelization tout court, but were also involved in many connected activities, such as the scholastic one, intended not just as an educational purpose alone (Tragella 1941, 102).

This is a very topical issue in the globalized world in which we live, because school education cannot exist without civics and one cannot ignore a basic civics education to form aware citizens.

The school had multiple tasks in the Mission Countries and this had been repeatedly remarked by the Holy See since 1659 with the Instruction for the Apostolic Vicars of "Cochinchina", Tonkin and China: schools had to be established "scholas ubique erigete"^[1]. However, these directives repeatedly clashed with the internal legislation of the Mission countries (Tragella 1941, 98).

Before 1922 statistics on Middle Schools education into Catholic Missions of China are not easy available. Nothing is shown in tabular form, nor are complete statistics for the entire missions obtainable. After the birth of the apostolic Delegation with Celso Costantini (1876-1958) from 1922 to 1926 rather complete statistics had been carried on in the annual reports issued by the Bureau Sinological studies by Zikawei (Caroll, 1941, 142).

^{1.} Building up of schools everywhere.

However, the fact that the department of Chinese education had not drawn a clear legislation, difficulties emerged as for the terminology employed. In 1940, schools of Missions in China were approximately 13,632 with 443,461 pupils, few compared to a wide population (Caroll, 1941, 142).

2. Central Government Directives on education

One of the aims sought by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi, 蒋 介石 1887-1975) through the newly established National Government was laying emphasis on education throughout China. In May 1928 the school system was inaugurated, patterned to a great extent after the American educational system. In Nanking the Minister of Education Jiao Yubu (教育部公報) created different departments, similar to the European education ministries, below the provincial educational authorities. In the same way educational bureaus of the independent municipalities were created, such Beijing, Tianjin, Qingdao, Shanghai etc.

These municipalities did not receive instruction from the provincial educational authority, but directly from the Ministry of Education in Nanjing. Following there was the district school authority and Jiao Yu-kou was with the district school superintendent as head. In short, there was a hierarchy in the Chinese Government school system but also within each school.

According to statistics issued in June 1947, out of 67 million children of school age, 21 million had received education, while 45 to 46 million children had received none. Therefore, the Government welcomed private initiative educational institutions. Often the private schools were founded by religious communities. There was 15,287 private primary schools and 54 private universities at time (Arens, China Missionary, 1948, 155).

Attack on missionary schools came from both growing nationalism which was contrary to Christianity seen as cultural aggression, partially caused by the Protestant missionaries behavior as well certain Catholics and from Chinese intellectuals and Government officials who openly criticized missionary schools, which were trying in their opinion to westernize their students as well as Christianize them. Zhu Jingnong (朱經農 1887-1951) Vice-Minister of Education of Protestant faith, explained the Government's attitude:

The Government policy is clearly determined to separate education from religion, thus avoiding, on the one hand, religious controversy in schools by preventing any religious organization from forming a system of education parallel to the Government school system, and on the other hand, not allowing any compulsory training in any grade of schools. Below Junior Middle school, no religious instruction is allowed because young pupils under 15 years of age are not mature enough to make an intelligent choice as far as religion in concerned. (Kao, China Missionary, 1948, 162)

Education was not to be seen as the transmission of Christian values and for this reason, religion with its dictates was excluded from teaching. Catholics and Protestants opposed this legislation with petitions to the nationalist Government (Kao, China Missionary, 1948, 164).

The position taken by the Government which granted religious liberty, but at the same time prevented teachers from imparting religious instruction, found adversaries among the moderate elements of the country. As Ying Qianli (英千里 1900-1969) wisely remarked.

In 1932 Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in a speech given in Changsha spoke as follows:

The Chinese people are in great need of religious schools. If there are people who still arbor prejudices about them it is simply out of ignorance of their character [...] I am convinced of the great influence exerted by such schools for the peace and welfare of China. (Kao, China Missionary, 1948, 162)

This was also stated by the Minister of Education Zhu Jiahua (朱家驊 1893-1963):

Whatever the worth of religion is, it certainly contains strong educational values. Consequently, the Government should drop its policy of intervention, since religious instruction does not hinder the reconstruction of China but on the contrary, it possibly afford positive aid to its fulfillment. (Kao, *China Missionary*, 1948, 162)

To open mission schools meant being able to give a basic education to all those who did not have the economic possibilities as well as welcoming a number of little girls who, especially in China, were had not any access to education (Tiedeman, 2010, 635, 296). In the period of nationalist Government, this represented a form propaganda, albeit indirect, to convey Christianity and Catholicism in China and in the rest of the world.

3. Religious instruction forbidden by Nationalist Government: a new regulation

The nationalist Government legislation in matter of education did not reject the creation of private schools, although it set limits on these, namely their registration and government controls (Tiedeman, 2010, 432-434, 606). Steps had been taken to have the churches registered by the Government so that they could hold property and have legal personality in the country. Despite certain regulations were hardly interchangeable with the religious freedom accorded by the nationalist Government, some institutions decided to register.

That task has been made easier by presence of many Protestant authorities in the nationalist Government. In 1937 the Churches in China completed their registration. At the end of 1946 the China Christian Educational Association was granted these status. In this period, most of the Protestant schools but also many hospitals had registered (Tiedeman, 2010, 530). If other organizations still wavered about taking such a decision, it was due to the fear to become with time a nationalist Government's instrument and thus be subjected to rules incompatible with religious independence from the state. This was the Secretary National Christian Council's opinion writing for the Chinese Year Book 1944-45: «Practically all the church organizations would like to register with the Government if the process of regulations could be simplified and more in harmony with the church tradition and their fundamental belief» (Damboriena, *China Missionary*, 1941, 56). A matter about education in China was that private schools were forbidden by law from giving religious instruction during schools hours.

The religious bodies protested against this ban but at the same time they didn't want to impose their faith to their pupils. China was a country where a large proportion of the private schools were conducted by missionary organizations: this was an issue of extreme importance for religious institutes and the central Government. This clause was abolished by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and with the "New Life" Movement^[2] (Xin shenghuo yundong 新生活 運動) he called the missionaries to cooperation for the prosperity of the nation.

On April 6, 1938, Mrs Chiang Kai-shek, Song Meiling (宋美齡, 1898-2003) while attending a conference, praised the behavior of missionaries during the war and announced the decision of the Generalissimo to revoke the pre-existing 1931 law which forbade compulsory religious teaching in private schools. This law had in the past greatly hindered the Catholic apostolate. She expressed herself in this way:

General Chiang Kai-shek instructs me to tell you that he greatly appreciated your works in favors of the people. We both feel

^{2. &}quot;New Life" Movement promoted by the Generalissimo and originated, *sic simpliciter*, from the analysis of the disorder both political, dominated by corruption, and moral that reigned in those years, encouraged the idea of a renewed nation. In practice, it was a reform movement.

that the words are not enough to express our gratitude to all the Missions of China which have been of loyalty to all the trials, whenever their help has been evoked from all countries. Those who have criticized you for the past have surrendered to the evidence and recognize now your works. Thanks to your work and your charitable attitude, you made them understand what Christianity really is. The results of your efforts are so appreciated by the Government and the people that the Generalissimo has been able to revoke the law that prohibited compulsory teaching in Christian schools; these schools are now free to teach religious matters. This decision is proof that We recognize the real value of Christianity and the vital contribution that led to the spiritual elevation of the Chinese people. (Agenzia Fides 1938, 292)

This passage is a clear sign that schools and education in general were one of the cornerstones of Chinese government policy at that time (Lutz 1971, 219-224).

She stated that the Government appreciated this work and the Generalissimo had decided to amend the old regulations and to permit Christian schools to teach the Christian religion as a facultative course. Nearly a year later, the Ministry of Educational made a revision of the prohibitive regulation and allowed elective religious courses in primary and Junior Middle Schools. On March 2, 1939 the measure was approved by the Executive Yuan and promulgated in the Government Gazette. In the Article 9, we read:

> If in private schools, there are courses of religion, pupils are completely free to follow them as facultative subjects. If, outside schools hours, there are religious ceremonies, pupils are free to attend them. (Kao, *China Missionary*, 1948, 163)

However, in the Ministry of Education Revised Regulation for Private Schools published on May 7 1946, the Article 6 seems to have returned to the original Article V of August 29, 1929:

> A private school founded by a religious body is not allowed to give religion as a required subject, nor is religious propaganda permitted in class instruction. If there any religious exercises, students shall not be compelled nor induced to participate. No religious exercise shall be allowed in primary schools. (*Press Review China Missionary* 1941, 211)

It is possible that there was a mistake about the Revised article of 1939 and the interpretation of Article VI of the Revised Regulations of 1947, or that they were merely orders and not revised regulations, because Han Linwu (杭立武

1903-1991), Vice Minister of Education was not unable to find any report of the above mentioned Revised Regulations of 1939 (Kao, China Missionary, 1948, 163). It all could be due to the fact that in 1947 Chiang Kai-shek inaugurated the New Constitution, therefore, the revised Regulations of 1947 had replaced these.

The legal Department of the Ministry of Education interpreted the Article VI with the meaning that free religion classes may be held in any private school no matter whether they are primary, middle, or university and that religious exercises may be held in middle and university schools but that no one must be compelled nor induced to attend them. However, in primary schools such religious exercises are not permitted. Although this would seem to be the natural meaning of the regulation, local inspectors who are either anti-religious or unfriendly have often used this regulation to prohibit religious classes in primary schools (Kao, *China Missionary*, 1948, 163).

With the registration of most schools, conforming themselves to the Government's program, much of the opposition had largely disappeared. Han Linwu, Vice-Minister and policy former member said that missionary schools have done a great deal to Government education in the past and he stated that the Government welcomed all grades of missionary schools, that is, primary, middle, and university (Kao, *China Missionary*, 1948, 164).

The Chinese Government was glad to have the assistance of those now in existence, welcoming new schools of all grades as long as they conformed to the Government regulations concerning such schools. Han Linwu said that the Government realized that they lacked trained personnel in such large numbers that they had to rely on the endorsement of missionary schools to help in the Education of China's youth. The Government would especially welcome polytechnic schools, vocational schools, engineering colleges and agricultural colleges. Meanwhile, the missionary organizations focusing on a college instruction could create a real leadership in a particular field.

A high Government official pointed out that both Protestant and Catholic Chinese holding high position in the Ministry of Education manifested a friendly spirit on the part of the Government toward Missionary education. Likewise, he noted that the reception given to His Eminence, Cardinal Thomas Tian Gengxin (田耕莘 1890-1967), by the Guomindang (中国国民党) on his visit to Nanking, two years before, had indicated a friendly attitude on the part of the Government. The Chancellor of the National Chengchi University of Nanking Chen Lifu (陳立夫 1900-2001) stated that Chinese education needed the presence of missionary schools of all grades to help the Government to take care of the large number of students, to give them technical training and especially to give them discipline and respect for authority. Missionaries often had difficult relationships with local authorities even if the central Government was on their side: thus, the construction and the consequent administration of schools was in certain cases a hard work for them. As consequence, a clear regulation was necessary to have religion taught freely in any school and grade of education.

4. Uniformity in the Catholic schools system

Antonio Riberi (1897-1967) talking to the National Catholic Education Convention, in Shanghai February 15-21st 1948, had said that: more attention and greater endeavor should be devoted to the schools. He thought that a general convention of Catholic educators throughout the country was necessary to discuss important problems concerning the promotion of Catholic schools in China.

The invitation was also extended to the Minister of National Education and to the civil and educational authorities of the city of Shanghai, among them: Wang Zhao Chuan, who represented the Mayor Wu Guozhen (吳國楨, 1903-1984), Bang Guang zhan (丛凤玲) Chairman of the People's Political Council, Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培 1868-1940), Secretary of the local Bureau of the Guomindang Party, and S.M. Lee, Commissioner of Education. Wang and Lee spoke, both extended cordial welcome to the delegates and Lee emphasized three educational needs: more primary schools, more efforts for adult educational to combat illiteracy and more vocational training. He pointed to the Catholic institutions in Shanghai as an example of dedication to the work in meeting these needs (Kao, *China Missionary*, 1948, 164).

After wads, Ignatius Li Ying-Chen, director of the Social Education Department of the Ministry of Education, read to the Congress a telegram from Zhu Jiahua, Minister of Education whom he represented:

> The Catholic Church has a long history in the establishment of schools in China and has succeeded in educating the Chinese people to serve their country. The Catholic Church has also led the youth during the war to fight against the enemy and has made great contributions in this line. Both the Government and the public have approved this. Presently, at the National Catholic Educational Convention, at which important members of the Church will be gathered, the problems concerning the future of education in China will be discussed with the aim to ameliorate the conditions of the country and society. This you have always done and I am certain that you will succeed. I, as the Minister of Education, wish to express two points: In the past year the discipline in schools has slackened. The students have instigated strikes and have made bold demands, sometimes holding up the traffic and even causing injuries to the government offi

cials, completely forgetting the essence of learning and application. This is contrary to the principles of our education. If this should continue, our education will result in deterioration. It is an imminent danger to our country. The Catholic schools have always maintained a good discipline over the students, but they are prone to the influence of the corrupted ones. Therefore, I beg you to continue your efforts in maintaining discipline in your schools to guide students on the right path. Science must be improved. Since the establishment of educational institute in China, we have never been able to cope with the wide and great development of science in other countries. Likewise, we have not devoted sufficient efforts to introduce our ancient culture in other countries. Dr. Sun Yat Sen always laid much importance on the ancient Chinese culture, and always encouraged people to keep pace with the science and knowledge of other nations. The Catholic Church has done a remarkable work in promoting the exchange of Chinese and foreign cultures. I ask you therefore, to continue your good works to promote scientific development, and thereby to glorify our nation. I feel deeply sorry that I am not able to attend your convention, but I have expressed my views in the above form. I am sincerely with your success. (Chu Chia Hua, China Missionary 1948, 153)

In the telegram by Zhu Jiahua high tribute was paid to the part played by the Catholics in China in every phase of the nation's struggle in particular during the Sino-Japanese War years (Tiedeman, 2010, 567).

He stated that the Church had introduced the best elements of western civilization into China and at the same time had acquainted the western world with Chinese culture.

Chu also noted that while a widespread forfeiture of discipline had been observed among Chinese students in recent times, while the students of Catholic Schools had proved a stability in studies and sense of discipline.

Speaking on the "Attitude of the Chinese Government towards Catholic Education" Albert Richard O'Hara (1907-1983) Professor of Sociology at the National Central University of Nanking, said that the previous opposition to mission schools had died away. This was a result of the registration of schools and a greater tolerance on the part of intellectuals (Kao, China Missionary, 1948, 165). Moreover, he declared that the Chinese Government through a Ministry of Education's spokesman had stated that mission schools were accepted and new ones will be welcomed on all levels.

Religious institutions were asked a good knowledge of their own rights and duties through the law, in order to respect them. Moreover, good relations with local bureaus and educational institutions were required. For the Catholic Church the importance of this Convention had been proved by the presence of Cardinal Thomas Tian Gengxin (田耕莘 1890-1967), by the active interest of Internuncio Riberi attending the convention and by the way Paul Yu Bin (于斌 1901-1978), president at the congress, had carried out all debates. Amongst the most pressing questions there were: the liberty of religious teaching, class text-books for Catholic schools, manuals for religious instruction, a quarterly review in Chinese for Catholic schools, training courses for teachers, and the foundation of a National Association of Catholic Schools of China. The central Government, conversely, was eager to have an adequate higher education, looking at improvements of technical schools and colleges of engineering and agriculture (Min-Ch'ien, 1930, 215-222).

5. Education leaders statement

In an interview with Hua Ming's correspondent, Dr. Renmei Tan (任美坛) Executive Secretary of the China Christian Educational Association, which represented thirteen university and colleges and more than 240 middle schools, expressed his point of view on this question. He said:

> There is a growing conviction among Christian educators that the time has come for general recognition of the value of religious teaching. Moreover, the country is entering the constitutional period in which freedom of religious belief is guaranteed by the Constitution. Therefore, our young citizens have the right to learn about religion in private schools, and the schools should be free to offer courses in religion. (Agency Central News, *China Missionary* 1948b, 703)

On September 23, Press Agencies had published a declaration of the Vice-Minister of Education Han Linwu giving an interpretation of the law and stating that he would personally welcome reconsideration of the whole matter. Reuters Agency published in English the Chinese text in the Shanghai and Nanking Press. Han said that there have been suggestion by some legislators that this question should be reviewed and he cited the following regulation:

> Religion is not permitted as a required subject, nor is any religious propaganda permitted in class instruction. In private schools founded by religious bodies if there are any religious exercises the students shall not be compelled or induced to participate. No religious exercise shall be allowed in primary schools. (Agency Central News, *China Missionary* 1948b, 703)

Private schools in China are forbidden by law from giving religious instructions. Han Linwu stated that the spirit of this article was to ensure that religion cannot be made compulsory, and class instruction cannot be utilized for religious purposes.

The interpretation by the Ministry of Education had not interfered with the inclusion of religious courses in the curriculum, nor had the Bureaux of Education in the Province and local governments interfered. As far as religious practices are concerned, these were not prohibited as long as they weren't made compulsory.

On the other hand Paul Yu Bin had said "If our people are free to believe they should be free to learn" as enshrined by Chinese Constitution (Agency Central News, *China Missionary* 1948b, 701).

6. Conclusion

Schools have represented a central point in the evangelization of China, mostly with the nationalist Government offering a chance for more relaxed relations.

After Chiang Kai-shek's conversion to Christianity and thanks to the many Christian and Catholic government leaders, the nationalist Government was moving towards an open policy where Catholic and Christian schools not only could be a reality but also teach their own doctrine.

Mission schools getting to work meant both to convey Christian and Catholic ideas, but also to give many Chinese people a chance to study. However, the training of young Chinese as well the ideas to be placed at the basis of a future Chinese society, paved the way for a conflict in terms of ideology. Although the set of values was to remain that of the ancient Chinese tradition, Christian values could also merge into a single "modus operandi".

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