

Aspects of the Christian Missionary in Nationalist China: Mrs Jiang Jieshi and the Missions

Vincenza Cinzia Capristo
Independent Scholar

Abstract The present essay, beginning with Catholic press and various authors known in the sector of Missiology, underlines a connection between Song Meiling and Mission in general, particularly the Catholic ones. This work aims at adding a further piece to complete the already well-known Song Meiling's career, after her marriage to Chiang Kai-shek. Further on, it will be clearly underlined the way she managed to established relationships with representatives of Missions, both Catholic and Protestant, thanks to the reform movement "New Life", which brought Chinese people closer to Christian values. All this was possible by starting from the family dimension, thus enhancing the link between civil and religious society. Song Meiling's strong point was the way she promoted social inclusion of the religious confessions, especially of the Catholic Missions, through solidarity initiatives, considering the religious community on the same level as the social community. This was a factor of potential development for the Church in China.

Keywords Song Meiling. Catholic Missions. The "New Life" Movement. The feminism debate. Reforms and cooperation.

Summary 1 Premise. – 2 Song Meiling: Mrs Jiang Jieshi. – 3 Commission of Inquiry on the Missions and Solkosky's Point of View. – 4 An Evolving Society. – 5 The "New Life" Movement and Song Meiling's Contribution. – 6 Chinese Representatives of the Government and the Missions. – 7 Song Meiling and the Feminism Debate. – 8 New Social Ideas. – 9 The Qing Empire vs Japan: The Mission Works During the War. – 10 Conclusions.



Peer review

Submitted	2021-01-25
Accepted	2021-05-28
Published	2021-06-30

Open access

© 2021 | Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License



Citation Capristo, V.C. (2021). "Aspects of the Christian Missionary in Nationalist China: Mrs Jiang Jieshi and the Missions". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 57, 457-474.

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2021/01/017

457

1 Premise

Dealing with Catholic Missions and more generally with Christianity in China, means to face all the problems the Church encountered in conveying the message of the Gospel and the ever-limited religious freedom. Behind the Missions, the Governments of European Powers repeatedly tried to carve out a living space in the Far East. Each power had its own areas of influence, leading to conflicts of interest among these powers.

Protestants aimed at the social life of the country influencing the educated Chinese classes, while for Catholics the priority was the “Plantatio Ecclesia” and only later did they deal with the social question. However, if these were the critical issues raised against the Catholic Church, there was no lack of support from representatives of the Chinese elite towards Christianity. Christian values such as solidarity and hospitality were, in any case, found among exponents of Chinese political and social class as well. This short essay focuses on the Chinese personality of Mrs Jiang Jieshi, linked to both Catholic and Protestant Missions.

This *modus operandi*, which was clearly evident among Protestants, could certainly favour that process of social integration between missions and civil society, with solidarity relations, craved by the Catholic Church in the process of evangelization of China.

The critical issue advanced to Catholics, was precisely the lack of dialogue with the intellectuals and political authorities of this country as opposed to Protestants, however, several representatives of the Chinese elite supported Christianity in general.

Despite the presence of several essays about Song Meiling in Chinese language, many more can be found in English, written by Chinese authors as well. However, nothing has ever emerged in these texts about the relation between Song Meiling and Catholic Missions. Therefore, it was necessary to start from the Catholic press and from newspapers of that time to give evidence of the bond between Song Meiling and Catholic Missions.

2 Song Meiling: Mrs Jiang Jieshi

Song Meiling (宋美齡, 1898-2003) born on March 5, 1897 in China, in Shanghai, was the youngest daughter of a wealthy Chinese merchant Charles Jones Song (Song Jiashu 宋嘉樹 1863-1918) (Furuya 1981, 222-3), who moved to the United States at a young age; with the advent of the Republic he returned to China as a Methodist missionary and was editor of the Bible, and collaborated with Sun Yat-sen (Sun Yixian, Sun Zhongshan 孫中山 1866-1925). Sun Yat-sen lately married Charles Song’s first daughter Song Ching-ling (Qingling 宋庆齡 1893-1981) in his third marriage (Ladany 1988, 122-3).

The two Song sisters were not the only members of their family to play a leading role in Chinese political life: in fact their eldest brother T.V. Song (Song Ziwen 宋子文 1894-1971) became Foreign Minister in nationalist China. Meiling studied in the United States and assimilated its culture; Christian by training, she returned to China on December 1, 1927 and married General Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi 蒋介石 1887-1975) with a private religious ceremony (Furuya 1981, 227), nourishing in him appreciation for Western ideas without denying Chinese values.

When the Generalissimo married Meiling he was not a Christian yet. His conversion on October 23, 1930 in a Methodist church in Shanghai, would further seal their union by finding in these values the cornerstones of the Chinese tradition. Jiang Jieshi had taken this step following the promise he had made a year earlier to Methodist missionaries, when the uprising of the Northern Generals was underway, however, as Bays reports: "Mother Ni Guizeng (Ni Guizhen 倪桂珍) refused to agree to a marriage unless Chiang had seriously promised to investigate Christianity and consider being baptized" (Bays 2012, 125).

Song Meiling's contribution to China and her ability to mediate, especially during the release of the Generalissimo during the *coup d'état* of Xian in 1936 when he was taken prisoner by his own men, earned her the cover of Time in 1937 along with her husband, of woman and man of the year (Hoffman 1995, 32).¹

3 Commission of Inquiry on the Missions and Sokosky's Point of View

In September 1932, a Commission of Inquiry made up of 15 members, all secular members of 7 Protestant churches in America, following a visit to the Missions of India, China and Japan, had drawn up a report in which criticisms were addressed to Protestant missionaries and their Works. Georges Ephraim Sokolsky (1893-1962), a personality among Far Eastern publicists, and close to Song family having married Song Meiling's best friend Rosalind Phang, had published a copious article in the Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury² dated May 4, 1933, in which he debated, the conclusions reached by the inquiry. Herein, he praised all the Christian Missions present in China, not only those mentioned in the report, namely the Protestant ones, but

¹ The following texts should also be taken into account: Furuya 1981, 516-21; Tyson 2007; Hoffman 1995, 32.

² Sokolsky 1933. Chinese edition, Damei Wanbao, was first published in 1933. Messmer 2012, 35-80.

above all the Catholic Missions. The latter boasted a long tradition: though they had settled, in China since the thirteenth century, they suffered a setback at the end of the sixteenth century and finally experienced a radical growth until the twentieth century. On the contrary, the Protestant Missions counted only a century of existence.

According to Sokolsky, China was dominated in these years by six powerful revolutionary forces: the intellectual renaissance, Christianity, the social revolution, the industrial revolution, nationalism and communism. The tangle of these forces had, in his opinion, created an implosive situation in the Chinese society, even if the population had been catalysed in particular by Christianity. However, this was nothing more than a transformation of a nation during the process of being rebuilt.

Sokolsky agreed with a passage from the report of the Commission of Inquiry:

nobody will study religious life in these countries of the East without being struck by the fact that Christianity has a resonance that far exceeds the number of its followers. (Agenzia Fides 1933b, 406-8)

If this assumption was true, Christianity had not failed in its goal. Its success was not to be found neither in the number of converts nor in the construction of churches, but in the Chinese people having their attention focused on Christian values. This was the strength and success of the Missions, while the criticisms that could be made to the missionaries were mere details rather than substance.

China claimed a new season *construens* with men who represented guides and Christianity acted as an antagonist and orientation for future ruling classes directing them towards a social conscience. It is no coincidence that many personalities of modern China starting from Sun Yixian had been 'stained' with Christianity, obviously not doctrinal, but practical, fuelled by the example of the righteous life of the missionaries, which contrasted with the opulent one of the officers *in loco*. The missionary worked hard in the social sector, providing medicines, interposing with the local magistrate in favour of his followers, challenging banditry; from this perspective, it was favourable for China to have Christian missionaries. The missionary played a primary, active and effective role in Chinese society even though this was often limited, confined to the silent apostolate. Sokolsky was convinced that the foreign missionary presence in this country had been fundamental for two orders of qualitative factors: schools and health organizations.

Sokolsky (Brown 1997, 236-47) while disapproving the report of the Commission of Inquiry which judged schools a failure from a numerical point of view, also argued that schools were to be assessed on the basis of quality. In the years from 1920 to 1927 the Christian

schools, despite a dark period of civil war and revolution, had worked facing many obstacles allowing many young people to have an education; therefore, it would have been imprudent to shut them or put them back in the hands of Chinese Christians; among other things, the latter solution would have been awkward due to the challenging financial burden required to maintain them. The Mission schools, a crucial element for the formation of future ruling classes, were beyond the control of the Chinese authorities, for this reason it was appropriate to entrust the education of young minds to local teachers; this solution would surely have met the approval of the bourgeoisie. The second important factor for Sokolsky was represented by the Health Organizations, which had achieved results far superior to the educational sector, where much had been legislated with the promulgation of several circulars besides the establishment of a Ministry of Hygiene (Wang 1947, 38-41).

The attention was paid to what had been done by the missionaries for the hospital service starting from the care of the destitute at the Hospital of S. Maria in Shanghai connected to the Aurora University (Agenzia Fides 1936d, 318-19), followed by the service of the Daughters of Charity of S. Vincenzo of Paolo, Franco-Chinese schools with the Marist brothers and the contribution of women's religious institutes such as the missionary nuns of the Immaculate Conception of Montreal. However, on a practical level, the results were disappointing. The Commission of Inquiry Report claimed the absence of qualified doctors, as well as a small number of hospitals for such a large population. Missionary activity regarding public health did not reach adequate standards; however, the construction of schools, universities and hospitals by both Protestants and Catholics endorsed Sokolsky's view about their quality. He had always lived in China and therefore was a connoisseur of this reality. Sokolsky highlighted how Christianity had introduced itself in China, that is, as a strong presence that claimed its own space. In line with Meiling's thought, Sokolsky's opinion had a strong influence on Chinese public opinion, especially among intellectuals (O'Connor 2010, 136-9).

On April 6, 1938, Mrs Jiang Jieshi, while attending a conference, praised the behaviour 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 favour of the people. We both feel 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)³

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).

4 An Evolving Society

Despite a millenary civilisation, China remained within itself a nation of uneducated people based on a rural society (Bays 2012, 126-34) struggling between problems of subsistence and political confusion. Many government leaders were corrupt and young people had no future prospects. People lacked directives, although Sun Yixian had indicated, with his principles, a way to safeguard Chinese society and the integrity of citizens. The failure of authority, at the expense of discipline and social order, due to a lack of political and school education had thrown China into the abyss, which had to find a remedy not only to its endogenous but also to its exogenous problems. To reform, it was necessary to start from politics and education, important factors to temper the character of a nation, starting from reforming customs by establishing new customary rules. To do this, a good government was needed. A healthy politics is intimately linked to the uses, customs and habits of a population that change in times of political transition when it comes to moving from the old state of affairs to a new social order. However, the “New Life” Movement could not solve all evils in Chinese society and in the nation too.⁴

This change was required from above, from public institutions such as the Party Bureau, the Hygiene Committee, the League of Social Welfare, which were to lead the movement and establish a dialogue with the groups of the various social categories: from the trade unions of workers, school representatives, women’s groups, rural associations,

³ See also Capristo 2000, 79-83.

⁴ The following texts should also be taken into account: Charbonnier 2007, cap. 24; Xi 2004, 870-4; Clark 1943.

as this movement embraced all human activities. In order to succeed, it was necessary to identify the real needs of a work in progress society and then find the right remedies and strategies. His leaders should have attracted the ruling classes first and then the popular ones. The principles of the movement had to involve not only the individual but also embrace the family up to the whole society. In its aim, the movement should have worked internally without foreign financial help. The means of disclosure, in addition to the oral transmission, were represented by traditional information channels and the distribution of brochures. If the fundamental aim was to eradicate from the people the habits that no longer adapted to modern life, the challenge was to accept the heavy responsibility of reviving the Chinese nation.

5 The “New Life” Movement and Song Meiling’s Contribution

Song Meiling⁵ with the “New Life” (新生活) movement, promoted by the Generalissimo and originated, *sic simpliciter*, from the analysis of the disorder, dominated by corruption, both political and moral that reigned in those years, encouraged the idea of a renewed nation. Mrs Jiang Jieshi accompanied the Generalissimo on representative trips and, while he was dealing with political and military affairs, she contacted and assembled Protestant missionaries, to join the *novus ordus*. In the impervious places where only Catholic missionaries arrived, she invited them to collaborate for the cause of new China. Working alongside the missionaries, she began a fruitful collaboration with the various Catholic Action Centers which felt the need to take root in civil society, longing to give in addition a well-defined path to the committees scattered throughout China. Both movements consisted of a juvenile force. All this in full harmony with Pope Pius XI’s intentions (1857-1939), who in his message to China in 1928, recommended to help and propagate faith and religion to promote the social well-being of the whole nation starting right from the young. In this sense, the Catholic Church could instill a new life. All this should have been followed by an *ubi consistam*, in fact there is no moral foundation *nisi dominus aedificaverit, nisi dominus custodierit civitatem, in vanum laboraverunt qui aedificant eam*.⁶

Even if China had made significant steps in the areas of civil life inspired by Western models, it was necessary to focus on individu-

⁵ The following texts should also be taken into account: General and Madame Chiang Kai-Shek 1937; Donovan 2007, 67 cap. 7; Tyson 2007.

⁶ If the Lord doesn’t build His home, if the Lord doesn’t look after it, in vain others will succeed in doing it.

als and their morality, referring to the founding father Sun Yixian's doctrine, Confucius' dictates and the four cardinal virtues: Prudence (谨慎), Justice (正义), Temperance (有节制) and Fortitude (坚强), pillars, as the philosopher Zhuangzi said (7th century BC), of the state as well as factors of stability for the progress of a nation.

The driving force of this movement was Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi, where the Generalissimo usually resided; hence the movement mentioned in 1934 had its birthright in the presence of many government officials as well as the Guomintang leaders (国民党) and the entire army (from soldiers to generals) (Agenzia Fides 1934, 397).

On November 7, 1934 Jiang Jieshi questioned and invited the members of Catholic Mission of Beijing to a meeting. The European missionaries were therefore received first by Mrs Jiang and then by the Generalissimo who praised the Mission Works urging them to cooperate, with all their strength for the recovery of China. This meeting aimed to elaborate the Catholic point of view on the reforms to be undertaken. In addition, Mrs Jiang encouraged the women of the provincial government of the city to take a position at the head of the "New Life" movement and to establish a Hygiene Bureau for the renewal of the city. The help of foreign missionaries was particularly requested as valid propagators, since they lived among the people. According to Mrs Jiang, if they wanted an effective change, compromises and corruption could no longer be tolerated, only in this way in a few years could an era of prosperity, peace and well-being be opened for China (Gasperment 1935, 207-11).

The first prohibitions soon arrived in the various provinces; in Shaanxi the ban on smoking opium; in Gansu that of bandaging women's feet, and so on. The spirit of the "New Life" aimed to withdraw China from its age-old traditionalism by instilling a modern civilisation to improve the living conditions of citizens by making them more aware of their duties towards their homeland. In Nanjing in May 1934, the first prohibitions were applied too; in the same period in Tianjin a Congress took place to inaugurate the new era. In the province of Hubei precise guidelines were given to instil feelings of brotherhood and solidarity among the people. In Beijing, under the direction of the Bureau of Social Welfare, a *vademecum* was established for all women who exercised public employment: Chinese women could dress in the European style, but they were not allowed to emphasise their breast and wearing suits. The propriety of clothes also concerned men. What established by the Bureau of Social Welfare appeared to be in contrast with Song Meiling's open mind, but let's not forget that she remained a Chinese woman despite her Western influences.

However, the statutes of the various provinces had to be conformed and the promoters of this movement had to support it effectively. In fact, an executive committee had unanimously approved a decalogue and decrees. The statutes were: order and respectability;

simplicity and decency, that is, being simple from dressing to nourishing, facing the harshness of life with virile strength and being frugal; be witty and sincere; know and act in accordance with the rules of probity, economics and conscience, in other words, observe the laws being faithful, with honesty and modesty; good use of household goods; exercise to maintain health; consistency and patience in decisions and difficulties; use the spare time to study the system, striving to have an adequate culture and moral integrity as citizens, that is, a sense of responsibility: be ready to sacrifice for the homeland. The decrees, eight in total, were nothing more than the prohibitions already in force in many provinces such as the interdiction to play, to make use of opium and other narcotics, to drink alcohol etc (Gasperment 1935, 207-11).

6 Chinese Representatives of the Government and the Missions

In 1933 H.H. Kung (Kong Xianxi 孔祥熙 1881-1967), a senior official of the Chinese government, Minister of Industry and representative of Guomintang, and husband of the first Song sister, Ailing (宋霭龄 1890-1973), planned a trip to Europe with the intentions not only of studying the industry abroad and examine the best methods to adopt to advance the Chinese industry, but also of evaluating the best organisational social system in the various European countries, in order to be able to achieve the harmonious union of social classes in China and avoid future conflicts (Agenzia Fides 1933a, 511-12, 519; J.L. 1933).

Until now, the agricultural sector had prevailed in this country, therefore the rebirth of the new China had to start again from the development of the agricultural industry. Many Chinese intellectuals supported the Catholic religion because it came from realities, such as Europe and America, where the industrial experience was well established, therefore China could open up to what good was coming from outside: the keyword was industrialisation. The machines had to replace an agriculture which was fundamentally based on human labour. A new modernisation was planned for China while maintaining its own cultural traditions. Progress demanded infrastructural works, the construction of a road network with new and wide routes which would have facilitated trade and made ties between provinces closer. Cooperation became more necessary than ever.

Kong arrived in Rome and after official visits with the representatives of the Italian Government, he was received on February 7, 1933 by the Pope accompanied by Paul Yu Pin (Yu Bin 于斌, 1901-1978) professor of Chinese literature at the College of Propaganda Fide and by the *Chargé d'affaires* of China to the Italian State, Rai-

mondo H. Wang.⁷ During the visit he did not fail to praise the work of Celso Costantini (1876-1958) who had been able to combine the work of evangelization with the Chinese cause contributing to the social well-being of this people (Agenzia Fides 1933a, 511-12, 519; J.L. 1933). This meeting served to strengthen the ties between the Holy See and the Chinese government with the moral and spiritual renewal of China as its fulcrum.

The Minister of Communications Chu Chia-hua (Zhu Jiahua 朱家驊 1893-1963) thus defined the situation in the country:

Political incapacities and social unrest have undermined the vitality of the nation, our Eastern Provinces are under the occupation of the armed forces of a foreign nation. The communists have destroyed lives and goods and our cultural and spiritual heritage in the regions they hold. What is worse is that our compatriots try to destroy the base on which we have built our civilization, resulting in destruction, confusion, the inanity of everything and disdain for common morality. (Tregella 1935, 81-5; Zhu Jiahua 1934, 500)⁸

During a commemoration in honour of Sun Yixian the Generalissimo reaffirmed and denounced the bad ownership, indolence and neglect of the Chinese masses, indicating the ancient virtues as a remedy: Justice (正义), Integrity (正直) and Honesty (诚实) (Tregella 1935, 81). In addition, he appealed to the military to set an example to refrain from using opium, gambling and malpractice. In the course of the Conference of Generals of the South West and North West in Nanchang, while discussing the anti-communist military campaign, much emphasis was placed on this reform movement, which has become a key strength of the government program. In fact, there was no official government demonstration that did not pay attention to it. Jiang Jieshi argued that, in order to face the enemy, represented by the communists, in addition to taking military and economic measures, the people had to be directed towards moral norms that, alongside the sense of discipline and national solidarity, could have saved the nation. The director of the Shanghai municipality and public education office, Ban Gongzhang reported:

Today the President of the Military Committee Chiang Kai-shek promotes the movement in favour of “new life”, however the aim of this movement is very extensive, it is above all a question of en-

⁷ Ministero degli Affari Esteri Servizio storico e documentazione, Inventario della serie Affari Politici 1931-1945, Archivio storico diplomatico, Busta n. 92 (1944) 1/1, S.T.E., Roma, 1976, 141-2.

⁸ If not otherwise stated, all translations are by the Author.

couraging the people to virtue. That's why Chiang insists mainly on rites, justice, moderation, modesty. Now if we examine the doctrine of the Catholic religion, we see that it rests mainly on these four virtues. It creates schools, founds hospitals, does charitable works: all this corresponds perfectly with charity, the ancient virtue of China. (Tregella 1935, 85)

Propaganda movements arose from above and the press promoted these new ideas. However, there was no shortage of opponents among these Hu Han-min (Hu Hanmin 胡漢民 1879-1936), head of the Southern resistance, Feng Yu-hsiang (Feng Yuxiang 馮玉祥 1882-1948), the Christian General and Yen His-shan (Yan Xishan 閻錫山 1883-1960), Governor of Shanxi himself, all three in open contrast with the Central Government.

On the Catholic side, the *Commissio Synodalis*, at the Chinese Apostolic Delegation in Beijing, had expressed in favour of the movement since it had focused, like the Catholic Action, on young people. Kong, Minister of Finance in Taiyuanfu, during a Conference of representatives of Catholic and Protestant Missions, presented Song Meiling who, speaking to the broad audience, argued that a movement for the renewal of the country was to be founded and what mattered was not the economic side, but the spiritual one, urging everyone to cooperate (Tregella 1935, 84).

In practice, this propaganda was promoted to have the same principles as Christian morality, although some Chinese intellectuals had criticised foreign missionaries about their doctrinal teaching, as there was a feeling that their way of teaching was not uniform (Wieger 1932, 79-275). However, in Fangcheng, in the diocese of Nanyang, during a meeting between a Catholic missionary and a Protestant catechist, albeit with striking differences, it was pointed that a dialogue between the different religions could be put into effect.

In 1934 in Shanghai ten associations, including seven secular ones, welcomed the new Apostolic Delegate Mario Zanin (1890-1958), opening themselves to collaboration both with the Missions and with the Catholic Action. The Ming Bao (明報) published an article supporting the theory according to which the Catholic religion ensured peace and sowed the seed of fraternity that rises above nations, races and social classes; it argued that Catholicism alone could bring about universal peace. All this, invoking the cooperation of Catholic Action Associations scattered throughout China (Tregella 1935, 85).

7 Song Meiling and the Feminism Debate

Wherever Mrs Jiang passed, she would leave ‘her perfumed trail’, conquering the hearts of Chinese and foreigners. Not only did she get in touch with the missionaries and collaborate with them, but she emphasised the women of religious orders by releasing them out of that anonymity that forced them into the background, compared to their male religious counterparts. She also sought the support of Chinese women from all social statuses, with the conviction that women could contribute to the change that was taking place. The ideas of “New Life” were being promoted among Chinese women (Liang 1946, 38-43), focusing on their primary needs. Therefore, institutes for maternity arose where Catholic nuns in possession of a midwifery diploma also joined. Even the Protestant missionaries, who had penetrated the upper strata of Chinese society, made impression on the Chinese ladies too. Government leaders were convinced that a profound transformation in other sectors could also be drawn from this collaboration between the Chinese Government and the Catholic Church, so that religions were not only a pretext for conflict. During a visit by the Generalissimo to Suiyuan (Moreau 1934, 627-30), Song Meiling founded a committee where a woman presided over it, Governor Fu Tso-I’s wife (Fu Zuoyi 傅作义 1895-1975).

Long before this, the Church in Europe had already begun to deal with social issues since the times of Leo XIII (1810-1903) in 1891 with the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. In 1935 Catholic France, in an international conference, addressed the issue of underground work with great attention to women’s work; the Catholic Union of International Studies was established, which, alongside other national and international Catholic organisations such as the International Organization for Work, pointed out a study of the working conditions of women in colonised countries (Beaupin 1935, 446-50). All this in line with the Song Meiling’s idea, who had started talking about women’s work and the role of women in Chinese society. At the general meeting of Catholic Action held in Shanghai in 1935, two Chinese secular women were awarded an honour and one of them carried a report with an emblematic title: “the role of women in Catholic Action” (Agenzia Fides 1936c, 110).

In 1939 in Rome, during a Congress, the Catholic Female Youth gave precise guidelines for the countries of Mission. Lu Zengzuo, Joseph Lo Pa-hong’s daughter (Lu Bohong 陸伯鴻 1875-1937), first President of the Chinese Catholic Action and active in this movement, stated that it was women in recent years to have given new impetus to this association. This was also perceived in Japan through the news supported by the same Japanese representative, Miss Minami, who had stated that Catholic Action in Japan was formed not only by male leaders, but above all by non-Catholic women conquered by the faith (Agenzia Fides 1939, 329-30).

Representatives of foreign Catholic and Protestant Missions worked in unison alongside laics and young Chinese women *vis unita fortior*, but the union movement needed modern times to get Christian principles accepted by the elite (Legrand 1944, 621-4; Legrand 1945, 22-65).

This also was the missionary dynamism, made up of a spirit of adaptation, courageous charity and cooperation. New social ideas inevitably brought new problems; the strong commercial and then ideological tension of the new democratic and material ideas in China responded to the needs of the new Chinese leadership.

8 New Social Ideas

This evolution could not be achieved without a social transformation based on the equality of the natives; some ancestral customs could be maintained, but these had to be compatible with the dignity of the free responsible man, aware of his rights and duties. To prepare for social transformation and to train capable citizens (Lesourd 1933, 438-9) it was necessary to have an education and it was the school system that had to keep up with this task. In fact, in 1936 in the social weeks of Versailles, the emphasis was placed on the Missions and on the task of the missionary Church with regard to the civilizations of peoples, setting limits and hoping for an intelligent collaboration between the Church and the colonizing State. It was claimed that civilization was a temporal function, which did not belong to the functions proper to the Church, it was a prerogative of the State. The President of the Social Weeks of France Prof. Eugène Duthoit (1869-1945) of the Catholic University of Lille, after emphasizing the conflicts between the different civilizations of the world, stressed the peaceful exchanges made possible by Christianity through the work of charity (Agenzia Fides 1936a, 252-3). New ways and methods of evangelization were envisaged for the changing times. The direct apostolate-built relations of good agreements, the so-called "friendship policy", which the missionaries could get with the entourage of the country. These ordinary relationships of good understanding, of civilization, were an effective way of preaching which had brought achievements in many areas of the world. The difficulty was to make this relationship practical, that is, how the missionary had to relate to this type of relationship. Cooperators were needed for the ever more pressing needs, to confront the country's entourage and these could only be the laics of the different social classes: catechists, teachers, doctors, capable and influential men and women to rely on; while the missionary was required to act according to the circumstances. All of this generally represented the Church's social action work in mission countries, even though large-scale social action had not yet been implemented in China (Costantini 1933, 907-24).

9 The Qing Empire vs Japan: The Mission Works During the War

The many and various works of charity and relief engaged during the war were a clear example of how many forces could come together for a noble purpose. The International Red Cross Committee, clearly of Christian inspiration, under the high patronage of the Anglican and Catholic bishops, had worked for the many victims. Charity cooperatives were created all over the country, such as the Emergency Work of the Catholic University of Fu Jen, the Social Service Department and the Peking International Women's Relief Committee, which had provided considerable financial assistance: women had been protagonists in this circumstance too (Agenzia Lumen 1941, 195).

In Shanghai, the International Relief Committee and the American Advisory Committee worked together for relief efforts, the synergy between Catholics and Protestants worked well. On the battlefield the various religious Institutes joined together: Benedictines, fathers of the Foreign Missions of Milan, Communities of Italian and American nuns, Protestant missionaries, all together contributed to the work of assistance and charity, and the cooperation among the various Vicariates was desirable as well, though they had been fighting with each other significantly in China. In fact, during the war the Holy See demanded the Superiors of the Missions through Propaganda and through intermediation of the Nunciatures and Apostolic Legations, to avoid difficulties, to remain united and extended these directives to Vicariates and Apostolic Prefectures (Bouquin 1944, 3-5).⁹

In 1940 Pope Pius XII (1876-1958), during the mission days, addressed James Edward Walsh (1891-1981), elected in 1936 as the new Superior of the Missionaries of the Society of American Catholic Foreign Missions better known as the Maryknoll missionaries, asking help to US Catholics:

To you in particular, generous citizens of the great Confederation of the United States of America, where nature was so generous with its gifts and where the sky stands above such an industrious and powerful people and Our word, from this Vatican hill, on the wing of a powerful human genius, it flies and crosses the Atlantic to satisfy your desire to listen to it, bearer of your missionary ardor. Your Society of Foreign Missions of Maryknoll, competing in the east of Asia with the Institutes of European religious families, to which many of your heroes and heroines also give their name, in the propagation of the faith. ("Notizie Missionarie" 1940)

⁹ See also Coenen 1944, 441-50.

This plea came when most of the countries of Europe were at war. The pope, no longer able to rely on the European support, during the missionary days of 1940, but also in October 1941 sought help from the Catholics of the United States, even if many care centres in China were funded by Protestant and secular organisations. The needs were so different that the missionaries' help was requested in different sectors.

In recent years the war had been one of the causes that had led to a social reconstruction programme. To understand the extent of the social work that the Church put in place, it was necessary to start from the problems that the Chinese population had to face in the post-war period; firstly that of refugees, then the destruction of homes and productive properties, and not least the overcrowding of cities that are now unhealthy and sources of disease since during the conflict many had left the countryside because of the crops destroyed by the bombing fire.

10 Conclusions

Meiling tried in every way to raise awareness of China's problems in the West, shaking public opinion. On April 23, 1942, in an article in the *New York Times*, she commented on how extraterritorial jurisdiction still existed in China, a matter involving the Legal Institute of the Protectorate that had allowed Western Powers to enter China and to remove protection from Chinese jurisdiction, both foreign and Chinese natural persons and their property; The United States responded to this declaration on October 9 of the same year when the American Government informed the Chinese ambassador that the United States were ready to negotiate the immediate renunciation of extraterritorial rights and to shortly draft a treaty for its end in 1943. This was followed by renunciations from other nations.

If much is known about Meiling for her diplomatic activity especially with the United States, little is known of her activity in the Catholic Missions, therefore this contribution wants to be a piece to be added to the many merits of this woman. She sought and eventually managed to have Catholic and Protestant missions working together, both engaged in the "New Life" movement, for a political and moral rebirth of China.

Bibliography

- Bays, H.D. (2005). "The Soong Family and the Chinese Protestant Christian Community". Chu, S.C. (ed.), *Madame Chiang Kaishek and her China*. Norwalk (CT): Eastbridge, 22-32.
- Bays, H.D. (2012). *A New History of Christianity in China*. Malden (MA): John Wiley & Sons by Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Beaupin, E. (1935). *La Conférence Internationale du Travail de 1935 e les problèmes intérêt missionnaire à l'examen devant elle*. Lion: Les Mission Catholiques.
- Bouquin, A. (1944). *Le Saint-Siège et es Missions pédant la guerre*. Lion: Les Mission Catholiques.
- Brown, G.T. (1997). *Earthen Vessels and Transcendent Power, American Presbyterians in China, 1837-1952*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Capristo, V.C. (2000). *Fondare la Chiesa in Estremo Oriente, Le Missioni cattoliche in Cina dal 1928 al 1946*. Catanzaro: Ursini Editore.
- Caroll, D.T. (1944). *Il buon Samaritano: l'opera attuale della Chiesa in Cina*. Milano: Le Missioni Cattoliche, PIME, 2-3; 14-15; 18-19.
- Chiu Chia-hua (Zhu Jiahua) (1934). "Le mouvent de la nouvelle vie par le Dr. Chiu Chia-hua Ministre de Comunications". *La Politique de Pékin*, 500-1.
- Charbonnier, J. (2007). *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000*. Transl. by M.N.L. Couve de Murville. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. Original French edition, Paris, 2002.
- Costantini, C. (1933). *L'Action Catholique en Chine Mobiliser les chinois pour convertir les chinois par Mgr. Celso Costantini, Archevêque tit. De Théodosiopolis, Délégué Ap. en Chine*. Pekin: Dossier Commission Sinodalis, 907-24.
- General and Madame Chiang Kai-Shek (1937). *China at the Crossroads (An Account of the Fortnight in Sian, When the Fate of China Hung in the Balance)*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Chiang Kai-shek and Madame (1940). *This is Our China*. New York; London: Harper & Brothers.
- Clark, E.T. (1943). *The Chiangs of China*. New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press.
- Coenen, J. (1944). "La predication directe et l'Apostolat laïc". *Le Bulletin Catholique de Pekin*, 441-50.
- Chen T.Y. 陈廷一 (1992). *Guomu yu 'di yi furen', Song Qingling yu Song Meiling de yiduan Zhuanshi* 国母与“第一夫人”,宋庆龄与宋美龄的一段转事 (Mother's China and the First Lady, a Part of Song Qingling and Song Meiling deal). Guo Xin Shijie.
- Deyrieux, L. (1949). *Ou vont la Chine et ses Missions?* Lion: Les Missions Catholique.
- De Jaegher, R. (1947). "Les Relations des Missionnaires catholiques avec les autorités chinois". *Collectanea Commissionis Synodalis* [保教]教育叢刊, 17(1/2), 171-7.
- Dirlik, A. (1975). "The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution". *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 34(4), August, 945-80. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2054509>.
- Donovan, S. (2007). *Madame Chiang Kai-shek Face of Modern China*. Minneapolis: Compass Point Books.
- Furuya, K. (1981). *Abridged English Edition by Chun-Ming Chang Chiang Kai-shek his life and Times*. New York: St. John's University New York.

- Gasperment, Al. (1935). *Le Mouvement de la Vie nouvelle*. Lion: Les Missions Catholique.
- Hahn, E. (1941). *The Soong Sisters*. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. Chinese transl.: *Songshi jiazuo*. Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1985.
- Hershatter, G. (2004). "State of the Field: Women in China Long Twentieth Century". *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 63(4), 991-1065. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911804002396>.
- Hoffman, J. (1995). *Theodore H. White and Journalism as Illusion*. Columbia; London: University of Missouri Press.
- J.L. (1933). "Une visite au Souverain Pontife-Kog Siang-hi". *La Politique de Pékin*, 830-1.
- Ladany, L. (1988). *The Communist Party of China and Marxism 1921-1985*. H Self-Portrait with a Foreword by R. Elegant. London: C. Hurst & Company.
- Légrand, F. (1944). *Enquête sur les Mouvements d'idées dans la Chine moderne*, Le Bulletin Catholique de Pékin, 621-4.
- Légrand, F. (1945). *Apostolat intellectuel en Chine, quelque suggestions pour l'après-guerre*. *Collectanea Commissionis Synodalis*, [公教教育叢刊, 18(1/6), 22-65.
- Lesourd, P. (1933). *Le devoir d'assistance morale aux indigènes*. Lion: Les Missions Catholique, 438-9.
- Li, L.T. (2007). *Madame Chiang Kai-shek China's Eternal First Lady*. New York: Grove/Atlantic, University of Michigan.
- Liang, E. (1946). "Femmes Chinoises, Regard sur la Chine". *Chaiers des Auxiliares laiques des Mission*, 2 (Numéro spécial), 38-43.
- Lutz, J.G. (1971). *China and the Christian Colleges, 1850-1950*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Chinese transl.: *Luci Zhongguo jiaohui daxue shi*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 1988.
- Messmer, M. (2012). *Jewish Wayfarers in Modern China Tragedy and Splendor*. Lanham (MD): Lexington book.
- Morel, L. (1934). "Les Missions de Chine, Vic. Ap. de Suiyuan (Mongolie) Le Généralissime à Suiyuan". *Le Bulletin Catholique de Pékin*, 627-30.
- "Notizie Missionarie" (1940). *Appello di S.S. Pio XII ai cattolici degli Stati Uniti alla vigilia della giornata missionaria*. Milano: Le Missioni Cattoliche PIME.
- O'Connor, P. (2010). *The English-Language Press Networks of East Asia, 1918-1945*. Folkestone: Global Oriental.
- Perkins, D. (2013). *Encyclopedia of China The Essential Reference to China, Its History and Culture*. London; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Tregella, G.B. (1935). *L'attualità in Cina Il Movimento della "Nuova Vita"*. Milano: Le Missioni Cattoliche PIME, 81-5.
- Wang, T.H. (1947). "Hygiène et santé publique, Interview de M.T. Hsiang Wang, Directeur du Département de la Santé publique à la Municipalité de Nanking". *Chaiers des Auxiliares laiques des Mission*, 38-41.
- Wieger, L. (1927). *Histoire des croyances religieuses et des opinions philosophiques en Chine depuis l'origine jusqu'à nos jours*. 3e éd. Hsien-Hsien: Imprimerie de Hien-hien.
- Wieger, L. (1932). "Protestantisme chinoise émancipé". *Chine Moderne*, t. 10, *ismes divers*. *Syllabus*. Hsien-hsien: Impri. Hien-hien.
- Xi, L. (2004). "The Search for Chinese Christianity in the Republican Period (1912-1949)". *Modern Asian Studies*, 38(4), 851-98. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X04001283>.

Xiao, L.L.H. (2002). *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women: The Twentieth Century 1912-2000*. London; New York: Taylor & Francis Group.

Press Agency

- Sokolsky, G.E. (1933). *Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury*. New York, May, no. 4.
- Agenzia Fides (1933a). *La visita di un alto funzionario cinese al S. Padre Pio XI*. Milano: Le Missioni Cattoliche, PIME.
- Agenzia Fides (1933b). *Le Christianisme en Chine*. Lion: Les Missions Catholiques.
- Agenzia Fides (1934). *Motus, qui a 'Nova vita' nomen accepit*. Pekin, 397. Dossiers de la Commission Synodalis,
- Agenzia Fides (1936a). *Francia, Parigi La settimana sociale di Versailles e le Missioni*. Milano: Le Missioni Cattoliche PIME.
- Agenzia Fides (1936b). "Les Missions de Chine Le Œuvres des Filles de la Charité (1935-1936)". *Le Bulletin Catholique de Pekin*, 591-2.
- Agenzia Fides (1936c). *Shanghai (Cina) Onorificenze a due Istitutrici dell'Azione Cattolica*. Milano: Le Missioni Cattoliche, PIME.
- Agenzia Fides (1936d). "Vic. Ap. De Shanghai, Les Missions de Chine". *Le Bulletin Catholique de Pekin*, 318-19.
- Agenzia Fides (1938). *L'enseignement religieux obligatoire est autorisé dans les écoles privée de Chine*. Lion: Les Mission Catholiques.
- Agenzia Fides (1939). "À travers le Monde Catholique (Rome), Les Missions au Congrès international de la Jeunesse Catholique Féminine". *Le Bulletin Catholique de Pekin*, 329-30.
- Agenzia Lumen (1941). "L'Œuvre de Secours a Fu-Jen Vicariat Apostolique de Pékin". *Le Bulletin Catholique de Pekin*, 195.