

CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHINA UPDATE

FEBRUARY 2014

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1.

The Year of the Horse with Giuseppe Castiglione, a Jesuit painter at the court of Emperor Qianlong

31st January 2014

AsiaNews - www.asianews.it

TAIWAN

by Xin Yage

The Year of the Horse with Giuseppe Castiglione, a Jesuit painter at the court of Emperor Qianlong

A digital and animated exhibition in Taipei, a movie about his life (1688-1766) . He painted pictures of emperors, concubines and especially horses. His gifts of spiritual and cultural dialogue also appreciated by actors and directors. DVD soon to be released in Chinese, English and Italian. Taipei (AsiaNews) - Today is the Chinese New Year and a new year of the Horse begins, one of the 12 zodiac animals . And today there is also a special relationship between China, Milan and the entire West through an artist who lived in the imperial palace for 51 years. He specialized not only in portraits of emperors and their concubines, but also in painting the imperial horses. The artist in question was Giuseppe Castiglione (Lan Shining), a Jesuit who lived between 1688 and 1766, who was born in Milan and died in Beijing, honored by the great Emperor Qianlong with an imperial funeral. Not surprisingly, Qianlong was a very great open-minded man, passionate about art and culture.

The Castiglione masterpieces are treasured in the museums of the Imperial Palace in Taipei and Beijing. On the occasion of the Year of the Horse, the museum in Taipei prepared a giant animated

digital version of his 100 Horses painted entirely on one long scroll, Castiglione's absolute masterpiece. The exhibition was inaugurated last October in the presence of the two directors of the museums in Beijing and Taipei and representatives of several foreign delegations invited for the occasion.

Commemorations of Castiglione's artistic talents do not stop there. Just two days ago the production of the docu-drama about him wrapped. The film is produced by Kuangchi Program Service in Taipei in cooperation with Jiangsu TV in Nanjing. The last part of the shoot took place in the huge film studios of Hengdian - which completely rebuilt the Forbidden City in Beijing and Wuxi - where the major Chinese film productions are filmed and edited with digital post-production. This has been possible thanks to collaboration between Jiangsu Broadcasting Corporation, the biggest television company in China in terms of investment in original drama and third most important Chinese television network. For the ten days of shooting, the film crew included more than 50 people, and everything was filmed with Sony F55 and Epic One Red in 4K format, for more than 20 TB of recorded material.

The main actors involved included four 'emperors' (Kangxi , Yongzheng , a young Qianlong and older Qianlong), six 'concubines' , three 'eunuchs', various foreign artists including Jean C., French actor who has played the part of Michel Benoist, the architect specialized in the realization of the fountains of the old summer palace in Beijing, and the Martinson brothers who represent two other artists in the wake of Castiglione.

The main actor, Ashok Zaman, an Australian currently living in Shanghai, who played Castiglione, was chosen last month after a meticulous casting, and said he was honored to interpret the Milanese artist : " I knew nothing of Castiglione - he says - I did not know who he was until the day of casting. It's my first time to act in a historical documentary and I find it extremely fascinating. It's the story of a foreign artist who completely immersed himself in a different culture, at a time when very few foreigners were present in China. Especially when we shot in the studios of Hengdian , where the Imperial Palace in Beijing is rebuilt to scale and of such amazing detail, it helps you to feel completely in context to put yourself in the shoes of an artist who had left Italy forever, not an easy choice, with a great mission in his mind".

Ashok started his career as a photo model and, passionate about film, studied acting, his great love along with the daily practice of meditation: " For me, the spiritual dimension of life is important, from the standpoint of philosophical and transcendent, something that is often dismissed by our modern lifestyle .I used to model, then my work in Shanghai is often in commercials where everything is so well built and ' false ' in a sense , because in the end you have to sell a When speaking about the artistic qualities of Giuseppe Castiglione, Ashok's eyes light up " I just worked in a scene where I was looking at a copy of the one hundred horses, the details are spectacular, just think that Castiglione took four years to complete it and that he could not.

The television crew that was responsible for the shooting in other places, went to the museum in Taipei at the end of December.

These days every Chinese repeats the wish: "Ma Dao Cheng Gong," may the year of the horse be one of opportunity for success and a better life. Castiglione not only "arrived" on a horse but painted it in its most beautiful, realistic and fascinating details for the emperors Kangxi , Yongzheng and Qianlong . With the hope of a new year for all the huge Chinese population and those who are passionate about art, to build bridges between peoples, to understand deeply the spirituality and desires hidden in the dreams of millions of people. Gao Wei, Jiangsu TV director, supervisor of the entire docu-drama now in his third collaboration with Kuangchi Program Service , says that "commemorating Castiglione the humble artist and at the same time one of extraordinary depth is a

priceless human and spiritual experience. We filmed in Beijing , Milan, here in these studies, interviewed artists and experts from different backgrounds, all somehow fascinated by Lang Shining (Castiglione's name in China)".

Post production should be completed before the summer. The final version will be in Chinese, for airing on national television, as well as in English and Italian.

2.

Bishop Ma Daqin: "Praise God for the graces of 2013, peace and joy for the Year of the Horse"

30th January 2014

AsiaNews - www.asianews.it
CHINA

by Lorenzo Li

Bishop Ma Daqin: "Praise God for the graces of 2013, peace and joy for the Year of the Horse"

The Bishop of Shanghai, under house arrest, publishes a prayer on the occasion of the last day of the Year of Snake. The Church celebrates the Chinese New Year by wishing "wisdom" to national leaders and "good health" for Pope Benedict XVI and retired to his successor Francis. A Catholic wishes bishop Ma may be released in the year that bears his name.

Shanghai (AsiaNews) -"Lord, today is the last day of the Lunar New Year in 2013. Thank you Lord for the countless graces in the past year. Please lead us with peace and joy to leap into the new year," says Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin of Shanghai in his weibo, miniblog in China, this morning of Jan. 30, the eve of Lunar New Year, which is the Year of Horse.

Over the past year, Bishop Ma has been restricted in his activities.

In his prayer today, Bishop Ma quoted Jesus' words to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16:24-25).

Bishop Ma's supporters responded by sending him Chinese New Year greetings.

In mainland China, parish priests are now busy preparing for faith formation programs for Catholics who worked or studied afar would return home once a year.

In Xianxian (Cangzhou) diocese, about 50 Catholics who have returned home for their New Year vacation jointly repaired a road happily in their neighborhood amid a chilling weather on Jan. 25, according to a report in Faith Press.

Chinese Catholics are greeting each other in chat groups, by phones and at gatherings "Peace at Year of the Horse" (????) and many wishes. A Catholic said he hoped Bishop Thaddeus Ma will be freed in the coming year. "Ma" literally means "horse".

Today, Jan 30, in Shjiazhuang-based Faith Press website, an article by Zhang Guanglai thanked God for the past year as China was changing and for a stable relation between China and the Vatican, and he looked forward to the new year.

Reviewing the year 2013, Zhang praised Chinese President Xi Jinping's "reforms" on anti-corruptions, and the "humility" of the emeritus Pope Benedict XVI who broke the Church's thousand years' tradition to retire and keep praying with us silently. Zhang appreciated Pope Francis' "freshness" for his love for the poor and living a simple life.

In his article, Zhang "remembers" several elderly bishops who passed away in 2013, who were of Ningxia, Shandong, Shanghai and Hebei. He recalled the Catholics in different parts of China were filled with "enthusiasm" to support the Year of Faith during which they studied hard Bible, catechism and Church teaching.

The writer Zhang looked forward to the 2014, and prayed for the Chinese leaders' wisdom and strength and justice be shown among the Chinese people. He also prays for good health of Pope Benedict XVI and the incumbent Pope Francis.

3.

More study needed on religious life in China

25th January 2014

Hong Kong Sunday Examiner
<http://sundayex.catholic.org.hk/>

More study needed on religious life in China

HONG KONG (SE): Researchers at the Purdue Centre on Religion and Chinese Society are getting together with the China Data Centre at the University of Michigan to conduct a Spatial Study of Chinese Religions in Society.

The research will focus on Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Taoism and will be funded by the Henry Luce Foundation to the tune of US\$400,000 (\$3.1 million), the Imperial Valley News reported from California, the United States of America (US), on January 14.

“The religious landscape in China is still limited as we rely on government-provided data, so collecting additional data can help expand what we know about religious groups,” Yang Fenggang, from the Purdue Centre, said.

Yang said that much attention is currently being focussed on the explosive growth of Christianity, but he believes that it is necessary to study the reality of all religions in order to gain a balanced

view and appreciation of what is happening on the religious field in China today.

“China is destined to become the largest Christian country in the world in less than two decades, which is astounding considering religion was banned just a few decades ago and is still restricted today,” Yang, a professor of sociology and director of the Centre on Religion and Chinese Society at Purdue, said.

“But, how the country’s religious scene is changing beyond Christianity needs to be understood as well, as these changes can affect the economical, cultural and political landscape of the world’s largest country,” he explained.

He said that the topic is especially topical at present, because the new leadership on China of Xi Jinping has not set out a clear policy on religion at this stage.

He added that outside of the six religious faiths approved by the government—Buddhism, Catholicism, Taoism, Islam and Protestantism—there are many other faiths that are thriving, despite not having government approval.

“There are still many other faiths not approved by the government, but they exist and some are thriving,” Yang, who is also the author of *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule*, told the Imperial Valley News.

“It will be interesting to see what tone this government sets, or doesn’t, regarding tolerance or support that could influence religious groups,” he commented.

He added that although the government does provide basic data on religious activity, it is unreliable and often coloured for political reasons, so it cannot be relied upon.

Yang says that more demographic information is needed in order to identify which religions are embraced by various economic or urban and rural groups in China.

He wants to rally well-known scholars from around the US, Europe and China, as well as train new ones, in developing a social scientific study of religion in China.

Yang said that all information gained in the study will be available for public use, as the goal is to build a platform for people to learn more about religion in China.

The Imperial Valley News says that Yang, whose research focuses on immigrant religion in the US, Chinese Christianity around the world, and religious change and Church-state relations in China, is also the author of *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities*.

4.

Historic Christian site found in China

17th January 2014

Historic Christian site found in China
Nestorian Christian site dates back at least 1,200 years

ucanews.com reporter, Hong Kong
China

A recently discovered site may shed new light on historical research into the Nestorian Church, which is believed to be the earliest Christian movement to spread the Gospel in China.

A niche in a stone wall with a cross carved above it has now been verified by experts as a repository for the ashes and bones of Christians. The experts also confirmed that this is the earliest Nestorian burial place discovered so far in China.

The discovery at the Longmen Grottoes, a UNESCO World Heritage site in central Henan province, was made in 2009. Its verification was announced to the public this week.

Precise dating has yet to be carried out, but it would have been created at some time during China's Ming and Tang dynasties of 316-907 AD. It has yet to be established if it is older than the well known Nestorian Stele, an inscribed limestone tablet found in Xi'an, Shaanxi, which dates back to 781 AD and is currently considered the most ancient Nestorian artefact.

The discovery was made by Jiao Jianhui, a researcher at the Longmen Grottoes Research Institute. The grottoes contain thousands of Buddhist and Daoist statues and carvings, But Jiao told ucanews.com that "this is the first discovery of a religious relic other than that of Buddhism and Daoism".

Jiao recalled the moment when he discovered the site by chance. "I felt instantly that it was different from other niches and grottoes," he said.

"There are many similar niches at the grottoes, carved with Buddha statues as well as inscriptions to say that the deceased are buried there. So it is certain that the Nestorian site was also for burials," he said.

Originating in the Middle East in the fifth century AD, the Nestorian Christian Church was initially recognized by the Tang Emperor Taizong but suppressed by his successors.

As Jiao pointed out, the discovery of the site puts a different perspective on historians' beliefs about those early days in China. "Historical records shows Buddhist suppression of the Nestorian Church in the Tang Dynasty," he said. "But the niche shows some religious tolerance, as the two religions could coexist harmoniously at the Grottoes."

Now known as the Assyrian Church of the East, the Nestorian Church was regarded by the Catholic Church as schismatic. But in 1994, the two Churches signed a common declaration of doctrine.

5.

The Bishop of San Yuan illustrates the Pope's message for World Day of Peace to the lay pastoral workers

10th January 2014

Agenzia Fides - www.fides.org
ASIA/CHINA

The Bishop of San Yuan illustrates the Pope's message for World Day of Peace to the lay pastoral workers

San Yuan (Agenzia Fides) - The Holy Father's Message for the XLVII World Day of Peace on January 1, 2014, titled "Fraternity, the foundation and the Pathway to Peace", was the theme of the meeting led by His Exc. Mgr. Han Ying Jin, Bishop of the diocese of San Yuan in Shaan Xi Province in mainland China. According to information sent to Fides Agency by Faith of He Bei, the meeting is part of the "Formation course of the disciples", organized by the diocese from the 1st to 8th January at the Formation center of the province, which saw the participation of 96 active lay people in 37 parishes. During the course the participants studied, among other subjects, also the Gospel of St. Matthew and his deep spiritual meaning. Mgr. Han, despite his various commitments at the beginning of the year, wanted to meet his pastoral workers and missionaries, and urged them to literally follow the teaching of the Pope and "to live brotherhood" by being salt and light of the world and messengers of God's peace. (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 10/01/2014)

6.

Phases of Chinese House Church Development

7th January 2014

China Source - China Church Voices

Phases of Chinese House Church Development

The mainland think-tank Pacific Institute for Social Sciences recently translated an article by Professor Liu Peng, titled "Three Issues Concerning Chinese House Churches". This article provides an excellent overview of the history and current situation for house churches in China.

In one section of the article, he identifies several phases of house church development in China:

1. From 1949 to 1958, the government policy was to crack down on and reform Christianity. From 1958 to 1978, it tried to exterminate Christianity. During the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, the government even tried to exterminate the Three-Self Church. From 1978 to 1988, house churches emerged amidst ongoing crackdowns. They have developed rapidly as a counter-reaction to the state crackdown.

2. From 1988 to 1998, with social transition and urbanization, the focus of various social forces has shifted from villages to cities. The government's religious policy changed from conducting overall crackdowns to focused governance. From 1998 to 2004, the rapid development of Christianity slowed. Falun Gong was banned in 1998, and, after a few campaigns to sort out house churches, the government stopped launching large-scaled crackdowns on house churches. Except for individual

incidents in some regions, the relationship between the state and house churches entered a phase of standoff without serious clashes. During this time period, the focus of the house churches shifted to the cities. Many intellectuals, people returning to China from abroad, white-collar workers in cities and professionals joined the burgeoning house churches in the cities. This phenomenon continues to today and as a result the characteristics of house church members have fundamentally changed.

3. From 2004, after numerous attempts at cracking down on and cleaning up the house churches, the government had a better understanding of the house churches. As long as foreign forces have not joined house churches, and house churches do not act aggressively, the government neither interferes with nor recognizes them. The stance adopted by the house churches has been that they will continue their activities as long as the government does not crack down on them. If the government interferes with house churches, they will move to another place and organize small-scaled activities, but they will not cease their operations. In 2004, the State Council promulgated the Regulation on Religious Affairs. Since then, the government and house churches have paid attention to the registration of house churches. However, as both parties have opposite stances and objectives, and the Regulation on Religious Affairs is hard to implement, house churches quickly gave up their hope of registration.

4. At present, the development of house churches has been quite stable throughout China. They maintain a "standoffish" relationship with the government. However, more and more house churches in cities now meet in office buildings and have become more open. These house churches no longer try to remain hidden. They have started paying attention to internal governance, regular management, financial supervision, and institutional integration. They also value theological training, preaching, and church documents.

5. In 2008, the most important change that house churches underwent was their entrance into the public sphere and participation in public interests. Among the one million volunteers for the Wenchuan earthquake, reportedly half a million were Christians, 80% of whom came from house churches. It is hard to know whether the numbers are accurate. However, I believe that even if the number of Christian volunteers is only 50,000, this number has symbolic significance. Moreover, in my research on NGOs in China, I found that many are not religious organizations, but many NGO members are Christians. Christianity plays a great role in the public service provided by social organizations.

END
