A CHINESE CATHOLIC PHILOSOPHY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN REPUBLICAN CHINA

by Ruth Hayhoe

This article will focus on the contribution made to Chinese higher education by two distinguished Catholic thinkers during that period of political and economic turmoil which saw the collapse of the Qing dynasty and China's first steps toward establishing a modern political state. Both Ma Xiangbo and Ying Lianzhi shared a common vision of a modern university which might serve as a transforming agent in a society undergoing radical social change. What made their vision unique at the time was that it was not only rooted in a consummate love of Chinese, traditional culture, but also enlivened by their strong commitment to the Christian faith.

Ma Xiangbo was born of a family which had been Catholic since the 17th Century. He was one of the first students to be enrolled in the newly opened Jesuit College of St. Ignatius (Xu Hui Gongxue) in Shanghai in the year 1852. There, under the influence of the French Jesuits, he received a classical European education. This tradition followed a curriculum that viewed theology as the "Queen of the Sciences"...the sum and substance of a course of studies which included classical Latin and Greek, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, art and literature. (1) Ma entered the Jesuit Society in 1870 where he served the community in a variety of posts, including a brief term as principal of the college. But in 1876 he left both the Jesuits and the Church, and became associated with Li Hongzhang in his reforming efforts to modernize China. After 22 years of dedicated service in this secular cause, Ma returned to religious life in 1898. While he was received back into the Catholic community and the Jesuit Society, he did not resume his priestly ministry, but spent a time (some say a penitential year) in seclusion at the Jesuit college in Shanghai. (2) During this period he produced a new Chinese version of the New Testament. (3)

Unlike Ma, Ying Lianzhi did not come from a Christian background. His family was Manchu, and as a boy he received only a cursory education
in the Chinese classics. As a young man, however, his interest in philosophy led him to search with enthusiasm through the literature of Confucianism, Buddhism, Islam and Daoism. Along the way he also became increasingly familiar with Christian writings, both Protestant and Catholic. It was his association with the Sisters of Charity in Beijing that finally led to his conversion to the Catholic faith in 1895. He was then 25 years old. Ying’s Catholic faith served to stimulate further his already strong sense of social responsibility. Both are much in evidence in the pages of the Tianjin Da Gong Bao, which he founded in 1902. The newspaper was noted for its firm commitment to democratic ideals, public service, and language reform. While Ying, like his future collaborator Ma, was more of a reformer than a revolutionary, his newspaper became an outspoken critic of the domestic and foreign policies of the trouble-ridden imperial government throughout its final years. After the revolution, Ying sold the Da Gong Bao and turned his full attention to education, which he felt was the key to China’s future development. It was at this time that Ying and Ma joined forces, and together in 1912 petitioned Pope Pius X for the establishment of a Catholic university in the city of Beijing. (4)

In his fascinating study of the differing attitudes of littoral and inland based Christian missionaries at the turn of the century, Paul Cohen makes the comment that the Christian commitment of most of the Chinese Christian reformers travelling between the port cities of Shanghai and Hong Kong was highly personal, and little evidence of it surfaced in their published writings on contemporary issues. As a result, their published works show few visible signs of a desire to bring a Christian perspective to bear on the Chinese social reform movement. (5) Such was not the case with Ma Xiangbo. While he published little in the 19th century, his extensive writings during the first four decades of the 20th century made no attempt to hide his strong commitment to the Catholic faith. In fact, his avowed Catholicism served as the integrating force in his social thinking as he addressed himself to a wide range of social and literary issues. The same might be said of Ying Lianzhi. While his approach may have been less scholarly, his Christian faith was very much in evidence not only in his personal life but in the editorial pages of the Da Gong Bao. During that period of hope and chaos which followed in the wake of the revolution’s sudden success, both men continued to maintain that the best prospect for the fulfillment of republican ambitions for a new society lay in the reform of China’s educational structures. Both appealed to the Catholic community to make a collective commitment to higher education in an effort to realize republican democratic aspirations and transform Chinese culture as it entered a new age.
In their petition for the establishment of a Chinese Catholic university, Ma and Ying reminded the Pope of the scholarly tradition initiated by such early Jesuit missionaries to China as Ricci, Aleni, Schall and Verbiest. These men had introduced, along with their Christian teachings, the latest advances in such sciences as astronomy and hydrology. But, they said, in recent years, this tradition had become dormant. Few missionaries now saw scholarship as an integral part of their Christian ministry. As a result, the vast number of Chinese converts came from the lower levels of society and there were few scholars among them. Thus, when the Qing reformers sought Catholic assistance in modernizing educational structures, they had to turn instead to the Protestants. While Protestant missionaries dedicated much time and effort to establishing institutions of higher learning, Catholic missionaries seemed less inclined to follow in the footsteps of the early Jesuits. With China now desperately attempting to organize itself into republican political structures, the need for an educated body of citizens to play leadership roles in the political struggle was of paramount importance. They saw an urgent need for a university that would recruit students from both within and outside the Church, to enable "those within to deploy their scholarly resources in the service of society" and "those without to find through scholarship the true light."(7)

Ma Xiangbo and the Creation of Zhendan and Fudan Universities

The collapse of the reform movement of 1898 was a turning point in Ma's life. When his plan for a school of translators, which was to be located under Qing sponsorship in Shanghai, failed to materialize, Ma left the secular sphere to return to his roots in the Catholic faith. There he sought to find a deeper foundation for his commitment to social reform. One day, during his period of quiet study and reflection in Xu Jia Hui, a young lecturer of the newly opened Nanyang Gongxue, Cai Yuanpei, approached him asking him to teach him Latin. This encounter eventually resulted in a lively study group which attracted many young scholars from all parts of China, as Ma widened his curriculum to include not only Latin, but also philosophy, mathematics and French.(8) From such a nucleus Ma drew the impetus to found "a new style Chinese university that would keep pace with modern western universities."(9) While he already had as a base a group of highly qualified students and also the financial resources of his own family property, his spiritual ties with the Church led him to seek a firmer Catholic base on which to establish his university. As a result, he handed over all his property to the Jesuit Society as an endowment for the new institution.(10)
While Ma's great admiration for the Jesuit scholarly tradition and its earlier contribution to Chinese society may have influenced his decision, it was one he would live to regret. Within two years of the opening of L'Université Aurore (Zhendan) in temporary quarters at the Jesuit observatory in Xu Jia Hui, an irreconcilable conflict arose between Ma and the French Jesuits. It was Ma's conviction that the university should place primary emphasis on modern sciences, assign equal importance to the study of both Chinese and western cultures, and above all, avoid all religious controversies. (11) His curriculum reflected this philosophy. A student began by building a solid foundation in classical Chinese and Latin; he then moved on to the study of modern Chinese and western literature, finishing off with studies in philosophy, mathematics and the natural sciences. Ma also had an innovative approach to university administration. He experimented with student self-government, giving them a representative role in the authority structure. (12) The university's style of teaching and learning was to be informal, with much emphasis on self-study. Material was to be selected by the faculty members, and student papers were subject to their critical comment and analysis. Formal lectures were to be kept to a minimum. In many ways this pattern of learning mirrored that of China's traditional academies (shuyuan).

The French Jesuits, however, had a different view of what should constitute a modern university, and they used the opportunity afforded by Ma's illness in the spring of 1905 "to bring order out of chaos." (13) They suspended the student committees, replacing them with an hierarchical authority structure under a Jesuit dean of studies. (14) They also introduced French educational patterns, abolishing the study of English and de-emphasizing Chinese. They also refused asylum to those students who fell out of favour with the Qing government (the most famous of these was Yu Youren, who had enrolled under a pseudonym in order to protect himself from imperial harassment), and they declared their intention to recruit young students from among the more pliant and submissive. The resultant "student storm" led to a walk-out by Ma and the students, who proceeded to set up a rival institution, Fudan Gongxue, in 1905. (15) Ironically, neither of these two institutions
ever came to fulfill Ma's original vision of a Chinese Catholic university. Zhendan was to become a Catholic University more French in style than Chinese, and Fudan, while Chinese, became more secular in content than Catholic. (16)

In Zhendan's subsequent evolution as a university, there can be little doubt that from 1905 to 1949 its high professional standards made a significant contribution to China's modernization. Most teaching was done in French, with special attention given to lectures and laboratory work. Its students received a thorough professional formation, most notably in engineering, law and medicine. While basic courses in the arts and sciences were part of the curriculum, the emphasis was on the aims and goals of the French educational tradition, where students were prepared for a life in the professions, and not, as Ma had envisaged, for developing an integration of Chinese and western learning. Aurore graduates went on to serve the Nationalist government with distinction in many professional areas, yet this government's weakness and final demise served to demonstrate the limitations of this purely western approach, especially when placed at the service of a Chinese society. (17) Nevertheless, Ma remained on the Board of Governors for many years to come, and he was paid a monthly salary by the Jesuits in recognition of his original endowment. When the question arose of moving the university to another country in Southeast Asia during the 1930's, Ma insisted that it remain on Chinese soil. That his wishes were respected in this matter gives ample evidence of how much Aurore could still be called 'his university'. (18)

As for Fudan University, Ma also retained close ties right into the 1930's, donating part of his salary to its support. Fudan became renowned for its militant patriotism. But, while Fudan was innovative in its curriculum and in its dedication to radical reform, its standards were never high. Practical service to society's needs took precedence over the building up of a sound scholarly tradition. While Ma was quick to appreciate Fudan's patriotic zeal, its prevailing secularism and pragmatic philosophy must have come as a personal disappointment. From Ma's point of view Fudan had lost the opportunity to contribute on the deeper level of melding Chinese and western scholarship into a unified force that would transform, rather than negate, traditional Chinese culture.

**Fu Jen She and the Idea of a Chinese Academy**

Rather than wait for a response to his petition to the Pope in 1911, Ying Lianzhi, while convalescing from an illness outside of
Beijing, moved to create a Catholic study group. He recruited about 40 young Catholic students from various parts of China. This group was quite similar to that of Ma's in Shanghai which he gathered together in the years preceding the founding of Aurore. Its main difference lay in its explicit Catholic identity. Ying's purpose was to give Catholic youth an in-depth exposure to early Chinese Christian scholarship that it might inspire them with the same intellectual zeal which had been so notable a feature of 16th and 17th century Chinese Catholic scholars. The approach to study was the same informal shuyuan style, with each student selecting a theme and pursuing his own course of research. While much attention was given to scholarly work of the early Jesuit scholar-missionaries, Ying also fostered a lively interest in discovering earlier Chinese Christian roots through study of the works of the Nestorians and the Franciscans during the Yuan period.

Such research into Velikowen, the Mongol term for Christianity, attracted Chen Yuan'an, a young and promising historian, who had already become interested in the history of religion and who was delighted to find in Ying's library many volumes of early Chinese Christian literature. An article Chen wrote at that time concerning Christianity during the Mongol period was published serially in the Dongfang Zazhi in 1918, with a forward by Ma and an epilogue by Ying. This launched Chen on what was to be a distinguished career as a social historian. Although Chen never became a Catholic, his sympathy for the work of Ying and Ma led him into a close association with Fu Jen She and, later, to a life-time commitment to Fu Jen University.

As the years passed, Ma became very active in China's political life. He headed the Department of Foreign Affairs in Nanjing in 1923, and was a high level political advisor to Yuan Shikai. While Yuan was president, Ma also served as a member of his constitutional committee. One of Ma's long-standing political interests had been in constitutional government and how republican political structures might be instituted in China. However, his disappointment with Yuan and his inability to prevent Yuan's bid to restore imperial rule, brought about his return to Shanghai in 1917.
Upon his return, Ma began work on what was, perhaps, his most ambitious and significant project. He initiated, together with Zhang Taiyuan and Liang Qichao, a plan to establish a Chinese National Academy (Hanxia Kaowenyuan). While the three men had sharp differences in their political views and came from diverse backgrounds, they all shared an urgent concern for the need of an independent institution, free of government interference, that would establish national standards for contemporary Chinese scholarship. From his early years, Ma was a great admirer of the Académie Française, and had often suggested ideas for a Chinese version to be established along the same lines. One of its main purposes would be to organize and prepare the works of Chinese classical literature for scientific textual study. The Academy would also take up the task of language reform, developing both logical categories and consistent terminology for the reordering of Chinese classical learning. The Academy would, in addition, be responsible for the translation of foreign scholarly and scientific materials into modern Chinese.

Zhang Taiyuan and Liang Qichao entrusted Ma with the task of preparing a plan in detail which he did, and published in an article "Hanxia kaowen yuan yi" in the Dongfang Zazhi in 1913. Ma proposed that the Academy be divided into separate units, including seven research centers for the study of philosophy, mathematics, physics, fine arts, archaeology, zoology and botany, and five departments devoted to the standardization of terminology, the preservation of antiquities, the publication of ancient texts, the reform of the Chinese language, and the conferral of academic awards. Ma, Zhang and Liang personally selected the first nineteen members of the Academy, who represented a cross-section of academic disciplines. They also established procedures for the election of new members, with a suggested maximum membership of 40 at any given time. Financing would come from the Provincial Governments, with Ma calling attention to the kind of support once given to the traditional shuyuan as evidence of a willingness of local people to support such scholarly institutions.

Ma's elaborate plan was never realized, even in a modified version. Yuan Shikai was not about to countenance the establishment of such an independent institution, especially one demanding such high levels of government financing. It was left to Cai Yuanpei to develop at least some of the ideas which Ma had envisaged when he opened the Central Research Academy in 1928.

Ma's efforts for the Academy revealed the depth and scope of his scholarship, as well as demonstrating his ability to integrate secular
learning with modern Catholic scholarship in a Chinese context. His efforts anticipated the scientific reappraisal of Chinese classical culture, and the development of a linguistic facility that made its transition into modern Chinese society possible. He also laid the groundwork for a synthesis of Chinese and Catholic philosophy that modeled itself after St. Thomas Aquinas, whose synthesis of Catholicism and ancient western thought had laid a foundation for the development of modern western civilization. Ma believed that cultural transformation needed a spiritual dimension, and saw religion as an essential component of man's search for meaning. (23) His vision of a Chinese Catholic university was not based on the parochial or doctrinal interests of western missionaries, but rather on the possible interfusing of Chinese and western cultures through the mediation of the Catholic Church.

Fu Jen: A University both Catholic and Chinese

In a pamphlet that appeared in 1916, which he had written to publicize the founding principles of the new Catholic university, Ma expressed satisfaction with Rome's choice of the American Benedictines to oversee its beginnings. (24) He felt them to be well suited for the task. Not only did they have a reputation for scholarly appreciation of traditional European culture, but they also had a lively interest in modern American scientific achievement as well. He was confident that the Benedictines would not seek to create another foreign enclave on Chinese soil, and would work along with China to develop the new university as an integral part of Chinese society. (25)

Most important, Ma felt the Benedictines would appreciate and incorporate Chinese traditional cultural values in a Chinese Catholic effort to modernize society. He hoped this could be done by avoiding the pitfalls of western industrialization, which led to the gradual erosion of its traditional moral and spiritual values. In his view, the foundation stones of the new curriculum should be theology and philosophy, with cultural and scientific studies providing a context in which the applied sciences could be introduced. With equal emphasis on both cultures, speculative knowledge would be able to share the industrialization process through an authentic East-West dialogue.

In actuality, Fu Jen's curriculum followed most of Ma's suggestions, with two notable exceptions: neither theology nor engineering was offered as a formal subject. To prepare for the university's opening, Ying Lianzhi revived the Fu Jen She. Ying taught Chinese literature, philosophy, history, mathematics and English to an initial group of 23 students, all of whom were Catholic. By the time Fu Jen opened its
doors in 1927, its number of students had grown to 150. Fu Jen continued to grow and expand throughout the years into a full-fledged university, with colleges specializing in all areas of arts and sciences. By 1951 it could boast of an alumni numbering close to 6,000 members. (26)

Fu Jen's curriculum did have the potential for fulfilling Ma's vision of the meeting of East and West which could lay a sound cultural and spiritual foundation for China's modernization. Much detailed research is needed before any judgement can be made on how far it succeeded. The university did encourage a lively atmosphere of research and critical discussion through informal research groups. Outside specialists were invited to speak and there was close affiliation and cooperation with other Beijing universities. In addition, there were the many university publications. The Fu Jen Xuezhi, edited by Chen Yuan'an was published semiannually and carried scholarly articles with special emphasis on cross-cultural themes in the fields of history, linguistics, literature, religion, philosophy and fine arts. There was a Fu Jen Congshu, which published among other items several of Chen Yuan'an's important historical books. Other publications included the Huayi xuezhi, published in English, French and German, whose articles were aimed at the Chinese diaspora overseas. The Minzu Zazhi (Folkways) was an anthropological journal. The informal publications included the Fu Jen Shenghua Yuekan, which was edited jointly by faculty and students. Its intent was to encourage a lively intellectual and cultural atmosphere within the university itself. The Fu Jen Wenyuan, a literary journal started in 1929 by Fu Jen students in cooperation with their Yanjing counterparts, continued publication under difficult conditions up until 1941. All other literary journals had been shut down by the Japanese. (27)

How far did Fu Jen go in meeting its founder's original expectations for student government? It is hard to tell. There is little recorded material available from either the mainland or Taiwan, where the university is now operating. (28) While we know that Fu Jen followed the administrative guidelines laid down by the Nationalist government for all private educational institutions, which meant that a governing board supervised all aspects of university life, there is no evidence of the heavy hand of a tight hierarchical control. Student government seems to have been limited to campus life and intellectual pursuits, and not to policy making on the higher levels of administration. (29) It is also a matter of record that Fu Jen students had a limited involvement in the radical student activities of the 1930's and 1940's, in contrast to students in other Beijing universities.
However, they did participate in the massive student demonstrations against the government in the late 30's and again in the late 40's.

Fu Jen seems to have had a more democratic administration than that of Zhendan. The university became co-educational in 1938, (30) much later than most other Chinese universities. Administrative patterns followed closely Nationalist guidelines: an academic affairs committee made up of faculty representatives, a dean of studies (jiaowuchu) and dean of discipline (shunyu chu). The leadership style of Chen Yuan'an, who became its president, and the confidence placed in his judgement gave Fu Jen a more liberal reputation than that of Aurore. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that in the area of administration it fell short of Ma's original vision in its curriculum and research orientation.

When in 1933 the Great Depression forced the American Benedictines to relinquish control, Fu Jen passed into the capable hands of the German Society of the Divine Word. This move made it possible for the university to remain open in Beijing throughout the Sino-Japanese war, and allowed it to maintain its administrative independence, its commitment to academic freedom, and its policy of non-recognition of the Japanese political authority. During the war years, it attracted a student body of high academic quality, as well as taking in many well-known scholars from other universities that were forced to close or move away. Chen Yuan'an consistently supported the freedom of his faculty and students against both Japanese harassment and the pressures of a beleaguered Nationalist government during the post-war years. And on several different occasions, he succeeded in gaining the release of those who were imprisoned on grounds of political suspicion.

Fu Jen's history as a Chinese Catholic university of some distinction deserves more than the cursory assessment offered here. However, this paper has been primarily concerned with the contributions made by two of China's outstanding Catholic educators, Ma Xiangbo and Ying Lianzhi. The philosophy developed by Ma, with its integration of political, intellectual, educational and religious ideas, provides us with a model example of the fusion of some of the finest qualities of Chinese and Catholic thought. And, in his association with Ying Lianzhi, we can see how together they were able to bring to fruition the ideals that both men cherished.

Notes

(1) Zhang Tiansong, Ma Xiangbo xuexi shenghuo (Shanghai: Shangzhi dianyi guan, 1951.)
(2) Zhang Ruogu, Ma Xiangbo xiansheng nianpu (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshua guan, 1939.)


(6) This is clearly a reference to the work of such men as W.A.P. Martin and John Fryer in the Tong Wen Guan.

(7) The original letter of petition can be found in Fang Hao (ed.), Ma Xiangbo xiansheng wenji (Shanghai: Shangzhi bianyi guan, 1947), Vol 1, pp. 21-23.

(8) Ma's own lively description of this group is found in the compilation of talks with him made by Wang Ruiling, Yi ri yi tan (Shanghai: Fuxing Shuju, 1926), pp. 74-76.

(9) Zhang Ruogu, Ma Xiangbo xiansheng nianpu, p. 209.

(10) Some have interpreted this move as a return to his earlier vow of poverty and a further step in the penance undertaken. However, his family felt that both he and they had been unfairly treated by the Jesuits and later tried unsuccessfully to recover the property.


(12) Zhang Ruogu, Ma Xiangbo xiansheng nianpu, p. 213.


(14) Ibid. p. 7.


(17) For some details on the role of Aurora graduates in the Nationalist government, see R. Hayhoe, "Catholics and Socialists: The Paradox of French Educational Interaction with China" in R. Hayhoe and M. Bastid (eds.) China's Education and the Industrialized World: Studies in Cultural Transver (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Toronto: OISE Press 1987), pp. 105-107. (18) In an interview with Ma Yuzhang, the granddaughter of Ma Xiangbo, Dec. 8,
1980, she provided a copy of a document he wrote by hand in 1926, relating how he had endowed the university and insisting that it remain in Shanghai.

(19) Its name, Fu Jen She, was drawn from the Confucian Analects "Yiwen hui you, yi you furen" (Use scholarship as a basis for friendship, use friends to promote benevolent activity.) See "Fu Ren daxue xiaoshi," in Beijing shifan daxue bianyi hui (ed.), Beijing shifan daxue fan daxue 1902-1982 (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 1982), p. 218.


(22) Fang Hao, "Ma Xiangbo xiansheng chuoshe Hanxia kaowenyuan shimo" Dalu zazhi, Vol 21, Nos 1 and 2, in Zhu Chuanyu (ed.), Ma Xiangbo chuanji ziliao (Taiwan: Tianyi chubanshe, 1979), Vol. 2, pp. 53-58.


(25) This may well be a veiled allusion to Zhendan’s service of French interests.

(26) "Fu Ren daxue jianshi", pp. 220-265.

(27) Ibid. pp. 243-245.

(28) The main Taiwan histories are Liu Zhiying (ed.), Sili Fu Ren daxue (Taipei: Nanjing chuban youxian gongsI, 1982 and Sili Fu Ren daxue gaifang 60th anniversary memorial published by Sili Fu Ren daxue chubanshe, 1971; See also Anthony C. Li, The History of Privately Controlled Higher Education in the People’s Republic of China (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1954.)

(29) The names of successive members of the Board of Governors are listed in "Fu Ren daxue jianshi", pp. 221, 225-6, 231.

(30) This is something that would have pleased Ma, as he had a strong concern for the education of girls. He had contributed generously to Qi Ming Girls School in Shanghai and Pei Gen and Jing Yi Girls Schools in Beijing.