

## Towards an Australian Chinese Catholic Spirituality

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**Abstract:** *Australia is a multi-cultural, multi-faith society and the Australian Catholic Church is a multi-ethnic organisation. The Chinese Catholic communities in Sydney began over five decades ago during the era of the White Australia Policy. They have grown in size and complexity with the rise in Chinese migration and the changing demography of the Australian Church. Asian Christianities now form a vibrant sector of global Christianity. Within China and in the Chinese Diaspora, Christianity is the fastest growing religion. Is there a spirituality of Australian Chinese Catholicism? We can catch a glimpse of it by seeing how the Chinese New Year is celebrated by Chinese Catholics in Sydney. Lex orandi, lex credendi: the liturgy is fundamental to the development of an authentically Australian, Chinese and Catholic spirituality.*

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**Key Words:** Australian Chinese; Chinese Catholicism; Chinese New Year Liturgy; Tradition; Asian theology; Australian Catholic Church.

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**I**N the last thirty years, Australian society has evolved into a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-faith society due to migration and the growing recognition of Australia's geo-political location in the Asia-Pacific region. At the same time, the axis of the global Church has slowly migrated from north to south, from west to east. Asian Christianities are no longer exotica but integral and rapidly growing sectors of world Christianity.<sup>1</sup> In 2007, the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference published *Graced by Migration* which recognised the benefits and challenges migration has brought to Australia.<sup>2</sup> The latest multi-cultural policy of the Sydney Archdiocese (October 2011) promotes the sharing of migrants' cultural traditions within the Church.<sup>3</sup> This paper will examine how Chinese Catholic migrants endeavour to preserve their cultural heritage, express their spirituality in worship, and contribute to the wider Australian Church. We begin with a brief history of Chinese Catholicism, the story of Chinese migration to Australia, and the development of Chinese Catholic communities in Sydney. Finally by

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<sup>1</sup> World or global Christianity is a recognised phenomenon. Asian theologians disagree about the terms Asian "Christianity" or "Christianities". The singular might "essentialise" or homogenise the rich diversity conveyed by the plural Peter C Phan, "Introduction: Asian Christianity/Christianities," In *Christianities in Asia*, ed. Peter C Phan. (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 1-5.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference, *Graced by Migration: Implementing a National Vision in Pastoral Care for a Multicultural Australian Church*, <http://www.acmro.catholic.org.au/documents/GracedbyMigrationPDF.pdf> Retrieved 18 March, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Migrants now make up 37% of the Sydney Archdiocese. See [http://www.sydney.catholic.org.au/news/latest\\_news/2011/20111013\\_1434.shtml](http://www.sydney.catholic.org.au/news/latest_news/2011/20111013_1434.shtml) Retrieved 20 October 2011

analysing the liturgy of the Chinese New Year Mass, we can catch a glimpse of an emerging Australian Chinese Catholic spirituality.<sup>4</sup>

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHINESE CATHOLICISM

### 1. Christianity in China (600 to 1400)

During the Tang Dynasty (618-907), Nestorian merchants and missionary monks brought Christianity to the capital, *Chang An*, the eastern end of the Silk Road. Known as *Jing Jiao* (Luminous Religion), it combined elements from Christianity, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. The famous stele, *Jing Jiao Bei* (781), documented this religion in Chinese and Syriac. Franciscan missionaries travelled to the Mongol capital in the 13<sup>th</sup> century but Christianity had disappeared by the end of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368).<sup>5</sup>

### 2. The Arrival of Catholicism in China (1552-1610)

In 1552 St Francis Xavier landed on Shangchuan Island off southern China but died on 2 December waiting for a boat to the mainland. Later Jesuit missionaries travelled with Portuguese merchants and established their bases in Goa in India and Macau in southern China. Matteo Ricci (*Li Ma Dou*) was arguably the most famous missionary in Chinese history. Born in Macerata, Italy, he entered the Society of Jesus in 1571 and trained with scientist Christopher Clavius and theologian Robert Bellarmine. In 1582, he was assigned to Macau, where he studied Chinese. Initially he dressed as a Buddhist monk to show his religious credentials. In 1589, he learned that scholars in China are more respected than monks; he then grew back his hair and beard, donned the silk robes of the Chinese *literati* and presented himself as a Confucian scholar. He translated Western texts into Chinese, introduced Western mathematics, science and technology, wrote treatises and catechisms in Chinese, and pioneered the use of Chinese philosophical categories to express Christian doctrines. In particular, he translated the word *Deus* into *Tien Zhu* (Lord of Heaven). From then on, Catholicism became *Tien Zhu Jiao* (religion of the Lord of Heaven).<sup>6</sup>

In 2010, celebrations and conferences were held in Macerata, Rome, Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Taipei to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Ricci's death. Benedict XVI considered his mission an example of the fruitful encounter between European and Chinese civilisations.<sup>7</sup> Adolfo Nicola, Father General of the Society of Jesus, said that Ricci's approach through friendly conversation and personal relationship allowed the Chinese to re-express the Gospel through their own culture. Ricci, said

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<sup>4</sup> This paper is based on a presentation at the *Indigenous Theology Symposium: Dreaming a New Earth: Indigenous Spiritualities and the Vision of Raimon Panikkar*, in Australian Catholic University, Brisbane, on 21 June 2010.

<sup>5</sup> For a detail history of Catholicism in China, see Jean-Pierre Charbonnier, *Christians in China: A.D. 600 to 2000* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> For a survey of Ricci's life, see Yves Camus, "Matteo Ricci's legacy: a loving patience", [http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20100511\\_1.htm](http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20100511_1.htm) Retrieved 12 July 2010. For a more detail portrait, see Jonathan D Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1984). For the theological debate among early Jesuits in China, see Paul Rule, *Kung-tzu or Confucius? The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucianism* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> See [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2010/may/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20100529\\_matteo-ricci\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2010/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100529_matteo-ricci_en.html). Province Express, "Father General celebrates Ricci anniversary with Pope" <http://www.express.org.au/article.aspx?aid=21820>. Retrieved 12 July 2010.

Cardinal Paul Shan, demonstrated principles of inter-religious dialogue: mutual respect, mutual understanding and sincere collaboration.<sup>8</sup> Fudan University in Shanghai launched the Xu-Ricci Institute, the first Chinese research institute in inter-religious dialogue. Ricci's friend, Xu Guangqi, native of Shanghai and senior imperial official, was one of the four famous early Chinese converts. The Shanghai diocese began canonisation procedures for both men to symbolise fruitful collaboration between clergy and laity.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. *The Chinese Rites Controversy (1630 to 1939)*

While the example of Ricci is now lauded as “what to do” in inter-religious dialogue, the next episode in Chinese Catholicism is the opposite: the Chinese Rites Controversy lasted three centuries and did irreparable damage to the evangelisation of China.<sup>10</sup>

#### *A. The Chinese Religious Climate in 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries*

In the Ming Dynasty, China had three flourishing religions:

- i. Confucianism was based on the philosophy of Confucius (551-479 BCE), a sage in the Zhou Dynasty. Its philosophy, rites, and rituals had dominated Chinese society since the Han Dynasty (136 BCE) and evolved into an elaborate civil religion centred on Emperor, nation, clan and family. Confucian classics were central to education, civil service examinations, and government employment.
- ii. Daoism (Taoism) was based on the philosophy of *Laozi* (6<sup>th</sup> century BCE). While its philosophy was embraced by educated *literati*, its rites and rituals containing elements from alchemy, legends and magical practices, were popular among the masses.
- iii. Buddhism arrived from India in the first century BCE. Radically different from the two indigenous religions, Buddhist practices were often criticised by Confucianists. By exchanging the Buddhist habit with a scholar's silk robe, Ricci famously rejected Buddhism in favour of Confucianism and promoted Christianity, another foreign import and so naturally under suspicion, as the “fulfilment” of Confucian ideals.

Jesuit missionaries in the Ming and Qing Dynasty developed four methodologies: accommodation or adaptation to Chinese culture, propagation and evangelisation from the top down, indirect propagation using science and technology, and finally openness and tolerance to Chinese values. These methodologies, according to sinologist Nicholas

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<sup>8</sup> David Strong, “Opening the Iron Door of the Ming Dynasty”, <http://www.express.org.au/article.aspx?aid=21821>. Retrieved 12 July 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Province Express “Xu-Ricci Institute launched in Shanghai” <http://www.express.org.au/article.aspx?aid=21822>. Retrieved 12 July 2010.

<sup>10</sup> The story of the Controversy is long and complex. For a short version, see Peter C Phan “Culture and Liturgy: Ancestor Veneration as a Test Case” *Worship* 76 (2002): 403-430. Paul Rule, *Kung-Tzu or Confucius?*, 124-149 discusses the dispute that led to Pope Benedict XIV's apostolic constitution *Ex quo singulari* (1742) which instituted the oath against the Chinese Rites and prohibited further discussion. George Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy: from its beginning to modern times* (Chicago: Loyola University Press: 1985), discusses the events in Japan and Manchuria. See Sungmu Lee, “The Eucharist and the Confucian Chesa (Ancestor Rite)” *Worship* 82 (2008): 323-338 for a Korean perspective.

Standaert, were constantly modified in response to their Chinese audience.<sup>11</sup> Some Jesuits in Beijing worked among the elite in the Court, hoping to obtain an “edict of toleration” from the Emperor which would protect Chinese Christians and missionaries. Their brethren in the capital and the provinces worked among the masses. Educated in Christian humanism, the Jesuits regarded Confucianism primarily as a civil religion.<sup>12</sup>

Later Dominicans and Franciscans arrived in the provinces, bringing with them mission practices from the New World and the Philippines. They experienced predominately popular religions practiced by the masses. Because of their different experiences, missionaries began criticising each other’s methodologies. Confucius was regarded as a “saint” by the Chinese.<sup>13</sup> Students, scholars and civil servants were obliged to perform rites in Confucian temples. Confucius advocated sacrificial rites to Heaven but not a personal God. A central tenet of Confucianism was xiao (filial piety), owed to parents and ancestors, dead or alive. There were elaborate funeral rituals and regular ceremonies to commemorate ancestors. The missionaries questioned whether these practices, civil or religious in nature, were compatible with Christian dogmas and doctrines. When they could not settle their argument, they took their case to Rome, where the dispute intensified. Eventually it involved several Popes, the Vatican bureaucracy (the newly formed Propaganda Fide), the University of Paris, numerous bishops, diplomats, missionaries, theologians, Emperor Kangxi and the Chinese bureaucracy.

### *B. The Aftermath of the Rites Controversy*

The Controversy was essentially an intra-mural dispute among missionaries and church administrators which escalated into diplomatic disasters. It was characterised by cultural misunderstanding, prejudice, xenophobia and rivalry among religious orders. In 1742, Pope Benedict XIV instructed all missionaries to take an oath against Chinese Rites and prohibited further discussion. Banning discussion did not settle the matter: ingenious pastoral practices were employed to get around the problem.<sup>14</sup> For the next two centuries, Christianity was regarded with fear, hatred and suspicion by many Chinese and deemed a threat to social order and family values. This attitude intensified in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when missionary activities were often linked to Western territorial and mercantile interests. Waves of persecution produced many beatified martyrs in the Chinese Church. The Controversy also affected missionary activities in Japan, Vietnam and Korea where Confucianism was also influential. The last episodes of the Controversy occurred in Japan and Japanese-occupied Manchuria which led to the abolition of papal prohibition in

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<sup>11</sup> Nicolas Standaert, “Matteo Ricci Shaped by the Chinese”, [http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20100521\\_1.htm](http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20100521_1.htm). Retrieved 12 July 2010.

<sup>12</sup> For a recent and comprehensive account, see Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China 1579-1724* (Cambridge MA, USA: Belknap Press, 2007), especially 47-48.

<sup>13</sup> Confucianism does not have concepts of life after death or miracles; the Catholic understanding of sainthood is irrelevant. It venerates as *sheng ren* (translated as “saint”) one who most conforms to the Confucian ideal of *junzi* (the perfect gentleman). For a discussion of this concept in Mencius and its appropriation in Christianity, see Jonathan Y Tan, “Jesus, the Crucified and Risen Sage: Constructing a Contemporary Confucian Christology,” in *The Chinese Face of Jesus Christ*, ed. Roman Malek. (Sankt Augustin, Germany: Institut Monumenta Serica and China-Zentrum, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> A crucifix was placed behind a “spirit tablet” (a plaque with the name of the deceased, representing the dead) during funerals so that Catholic family members could bow or *kowtow* before it, to satisfy the Chinese funeral rites without incurring a mortal sin.

1939.<sup>15</sup> On 10 October, 1911, republicans began a revolt in Wuhan, central China. The last Qing Emperor abdicated in 1912. The 3000 years old imperial system collapsed. Decades of turmoil and modernisation followed. Intimately linked to the old imperial order, Confucianism as civil religion and its rites rapidly disintegrated; nonetheless Confucianism as philosophy remained a vital cultural force, and some ancestor rites survived within clans and families.

### C. The Rites Controversy and its contemporary relevance

While the Rites Controversy is relegated to history, the issues behind it, reincarnated with modern terminology, are alive and well. Contemporary Asian Christians often find inspiration in Asian religions and philosophies, a phenomenon known as “multiple religious belonging”. Is this religious “relativism”?<sup>16</sup> How do Catholics approach religious otherness and the “spiritual and moral goods” of other religions?<sup>17</sup> What is the scope of inter-religious dialogue? Where does “inculturation” in worship end and “syncretism” begin?<sup>18</sup>

### 4. Chinese Christianity in the late 20th century and beyond

In 1949, Mao Ze Dong won the civil war, established the communist People’s Republic, and expelled foreigners, especially missionaries. In 1957, the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association was formed. The Catholic Church split into an official state-controlled church and an underground church loyal to Rome. All religions were severely persecuted during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). In 1978, however, Deng Xiao Ping came to power, opened China to economic reforms, and religions re-emerged.<sup>19</sup>

By 2011, the scene had further changed. “Today the religious desert has turned into something resembling a virgin forest teeming with a rich religious biodiversity, where living fossils coexist with unidentified new species. Most of this territory is still

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<sup>15</sup> Shinto was promoted as state religion by Japan’s nationalist government in the 1930’s. Young men had to pay homage at Tokyo’s *Yasukuni Shrine*. Catholic students from Sophia University objected. This dispute between Japan and Rome was diffused by a Japanese Catholic diplomat. *Manchukuo*, a Japanese puppet state in northeast China, was set up under the last Qing Emperor. *Wangduo* was invented as a quasi-Confucian state religion. Catholics were caught between church and state. In 1939, Pope Pius XII finally abolished the oath and prohibitions.

<sup>16</sup> Peter C Phan, “Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church” in *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 2004), 60-84. Interview with theologian Paul F Knitter in *National Catholic Reporter* (23 June 2010) <http://ncronline.org/news/double-belonging-buddhism-and-christian-faith>. Retrieved 12 July 2010. A dialogue with Benedict XVI’s Regensburg Speech, see Paul Rule, “Athens or Beijing? Some reflections on the Possibilities of a Chinese Theology” in *The Church in China*, Paul Rule, ed, Interface Vol 11 No.2/2008 (Adelaide: ATF Theology 2010) 57-70.

<sup>17</sup> Reminiscent of the Rites Controversy, theologians, missionaries and church administrators are embroiled in a contemporary dispute on the theology of religions. See Terrence Merrigan, “Jacques Dupuis and the Redefinition of Inclusivism” in *In Many and Diverse Ways: in Honour of Jacques Dupuis*, Daniel Kendall and Gerard O’Collins, eds, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 60-71.

<sup>18</sup> Peter C Phan, “Culture and Liturgy: Ancestor Veneration as a Test Case”. Peter C Phan, “Liturgical Inculturation: Unity in Diversity in the Postmodern Age” in *Liturgy in a Postmodern World*, Keith Pecklers, ed. (London, New York: Continuum, 2003), 55-86.

<sup>19</sup> See Georg Evers, “Christianity in China – a Case of Missed Opportunities?” in *China and Christianity: A New Phase of Encounter?* Felix Wilfred, Edmond Tang & Georg Evers eds, (London: SCM, 2008), 24-35.



uncharted.”<sup>20</sup> Christianity is the fastest growing religion in China.<sup>21</sup> Although underground churches make accurate statistics impossible, sinologists estimate there are 12 to 20 million Catholics and 60 to 90 million Protestants. China is experiencing a “Christianity Fever” and might become the country with the largest Christian population by 2050.<sup>22</sup> In 2007, Benedict XVI advocated reconciliation between official and underground Catholic churches.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, vibrant Chinese churches have developed in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia: many Australian Chinese Christians came from these countries.<sup>24</sup>

## THE STORY OF CHINESE MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA<sup>25</sup>

### 1. The White Australia Policy

The Chinese presence in New South Wales began with convict settlement in Sydney. With the discovery of gold in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the number of Chinese miners increased and Melbourne became known as the “New Gold Mountain” in Chinese.<sup>26</sup> Chinese migrants worked as farm hands, indentured labours, miners and market gardeners. The conflict between Chinese gold miners and European settlers resulted in the notorious Lambing Flat Riots (1860 to 1861). The Chinese Immigration Regulation and Restriction Act (1861) and the Influx of Chinese Restriction Act (1881) were enacted to exclude Chinese migration from the colony. An English dictation test was introduced in 1898 to exclude non-Europeans. After Federation, this test was retained in the Federal Immigration Restriction Act (1901) and became the foundation of the White Australia Policy.<sup>27</sup> Similar legislations followed: the Naturalisation Act (1903), Nationality Act (1920), Nationality

<sup>20</sup> Edmund Tang, “The Changing Landscape of Chinese Christianity” in *China and Christianity*, 13. The “unidentified new species” include Pentecostal miraculous healing and speaking in tongues, the “Shouters”, “cultural Christian” (Sino-theology of Liu Xiaofeng, Sino-Christian theology of Shu Shangyang). Christianity research centres, as distinct from theology colleges, have sprung up in secular universities in China and Hong Kong.

<sup>21</sup> China recognises five official religions: Protestant Christianity, Roman Catholicism, Daoism, Buddhism and Islam. For historical reasons, Protestant and Catholic Christianities are seen as separate religions with different transliteration, translation and terminologies in theology and Biblical studies. See the BBC documentary by Tim Gardem, Principal of St Anne’s College, Oxford: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p002vsn4> and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-14838749>. Retrieved 17 October 2011.

<sup>22</sup> John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *God is Back: How the Global Rise of Faith is Changing the World* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin, 2009) 4-5. European and diasporic Chinese commentators are optimistic about the prospect of Christianity in China; resident Chinese scholars are more guarded. See Fuk-tsang Ying, “Mainland China,” in *Christianities in Asia*, 148-170.

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20070527\\_china\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070527_china_en.html). Retrieved 12 July 2010. The key themes are dialogue, reconciliation and unity.

<sup>24</sup> Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, “Malaysia and Singapore,” and Lung-kwong Lo, “Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau,” in *Christianities in Asia* 77-94, 173-195.

<sup>25</sup> The following two sections are taken from a longer paper in a forthcoming book. Margaret Tam, “The Evolution of Chinese Catholic Communities in Sydney 1954 to 2010” in *Catholics and Catholicism in Australia*, ed. Abe Ata (Melbourne: David Lovell, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> The Gold Rush had already begun in the United States. San Francisco was the gateway to America and became known in Chinese as the “Gold Mountain”, later the “Old Gold Mountain”, when Melbourne came on the scene.

<sup>27</sup> Julie Staker and Peri Stewart, “Chinese Immigrants and Chinese-Australians in New South Wales” [http://www.naa.gov.au/naaresources/publications/research\\_guides/pdf/chinese\\_guide.pdf](http://www.naa.gov.au/naaresources/publications/research_guides/pdf/chinese_guide.pdf) Retrieved March 9, 2009.

and Citizenship Act (1948), Aliens Registration Act (1916-1947), the Immigration and Restriction Act (1901-1949), the Migration Act (1958). Non-Europeans were virtually excluded from naturalisation and citizenship, required to be registered, and liable to be deported at the discretion of the minister.<sup>28</sup>

In 1945, Arthur Calwell, Minister for Immigration in the Chifley government, began the post-war policy of mass migration from Britain and Europe under the slogan of “populate or perish” which shaped contemporary Australia. At the same time, following the White Australia Policy, he deported wartime refugees from China and Southeast Asia. The unfortunate quip “two Wongs do not make a White”, which he delivered in Federal Parliament on 2 December 1947, became identified with him and his policy; although he later denied any racist motive in his 1972 memoirs.<sup>29</sup> Between 1958 and 1966, barriers against entry of non-Europeans were slowly relaxed. The Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific was introduced in 1950 by Commonwealth countries.<sup>30</sup> This program enabled Chinese students from Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore to study in Australian universities. The Migration Act (1966), introduced by the Holt government, formally abandoned the White Australia Policy. In 1973, the Whitlam government amended the Migration Act to outlaw discrimination by race in the selection of migrants and eligibility to citizenship.<sup>31</sup> The Racial Discrimination Act (1975) made racial discrimination illegal in government policies. The demise of the White Australia Policy did not eliminate xenophobia or racism against non-white Australians. Pauline Hanson’s maiden speech in Federal Parliament on 10 September 1996, especially her remark about “being swamped by Asians”, caused enormous upheavals. Acts of violence against non-white Australians still occurred: firebombing of Chinese restaurants in Perth (2004), the Cronulla riots in Sydney (2005) and attacks against Indian students in Melbourne (2009).

## 2. Chinese Migration to Australia 1973-2010

The Chinese population grew rapidly in the following three decades. This coincided with the emergence of education as an export industry, now third in monetary term behind coal and iron ore. After the fall of South Vietnam (1975), many Vietnamese Chinese arrived as refugees. After the Tiananmen Massacre (1989), some Chinese students were granted residency on humanitarian grounds. In recent years, many overseas students also obtained permanent residency after completing their studies. The Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 and 2006 census data show that Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin) is now the second most spoken language in Australia. By 2008-9, China became fourth in the list of source country for migrants.<sup>32</sup> Today the Chinese population is over 300,000, around

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<sup>28</sup> Staker and Stewart. For a more detail study of Chinese migration to Australia, see Eric C. Rolls, *Sojourners* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1992) and *Citizens* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1996).

<sup>29</sup> Arthur Augustus Calwell, *Be Just and Fear Not*, (Hawthorn, Vic.: Lloyd O’Neil in Association with Rigby, 1972) 116-117.

<sup>30</sup> See <http://www.colombo-plan.org> Retrieved 9 March, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> See <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/08abolition.htm>. Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Retrieved 17 October 2011.

<sup>32</sup> See Australian Social Trends, 2007, Australian Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/928AF7A0CB6F969FCA25732C00207852?openDocument#CHARACTERISTICS%20OF%20MIGRANTS> Retrieved 9 March, 2009. Department of Immigration

1.5% of the total population. It is extremely diverse in origin, language and culture. There are second-, third- or fourth-generation Australian-born Chinese who speak only English, Chinese from Hong Kong and Macau who speak Cantonese, Chinese from Taiwan and mainland China who speak Mandarin, Chinese from Pacific Islands and Southeast Asia who speak English, Mandarin, Cantonese or another Chinese dialect. There were around 66,000 overseas students from China in 2008.<sup>33</sup> China was the top country for student visa approval and the second country for residence visa approval in 2009.<sup>34</sup> By January 2010, the number of students for all education sectors from China and Hong Kong was 88,488. Including intake from Taiwan and Southeast Asia, this number would exceed 100,000.<sup>35</sup> In recent years, new modes of migration developed: migrants live in Australia for some years and return to their home countries either permanently or for extended stay (reverse migration); or they live part-time in both countries. Temporary Chinese residents include short-stay business and skilled workers (456 visa holders), tourists and overseas students who return home after their studies. Today China is Australia's biggest trading partner and the second largest economy in the world. Migration and reverse migration is set to increase and the Australian Chinese community will play an important role in the partnership between the two nations.

## CHINESE CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES IN SYDNEY

### 1. Early History

In 1954 Cardinal Norman Gilroy of Sydney invited two Chinese Franciscan priests, Pachal Chang and Leonard Hsu, to minister to 38 local Chinese Catholics and overseas students. As more overseas students arrived with the Colombo Plan, Cyril Hally, a Columban missionary, set up a hostel for them with the help of St Vincent de Paul Society. They met regularly in the Crypt of St Mary's Cathedral and formed the Catholic Asian Students Society which organised community and devotional activities. In 1963, the Asiana Centre, a pastoral centre, was founded in Ashfield in suburban Sydney. Some students settled in Sydney after graduation and pastoral work was extended to their children and families. The end of the White Australia Policy heralded the arrival of more Chinese Catholics. In the 1980's, Chinese religious sisters came from Taiwan and Hong Kong to minister to the growing community. To preserve their heritage, the communities started Chinese language classes, using local Catholic schools on Sundays. These classes were staffed by the laity and partially funded by the State government. In 1985, they began a ministry in Chinatown for Cantonese speakers and later in Flemington for Mandarin speakers. In 1984 St Paul de Chartres Sisters from Hong Kong established a boarding school near

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and Citizenship, <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/statistics/country-profiles/textversion/china.htm>. Retrieved 9 March, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> See Australian Social Trend 2009, Australian Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features10Sep+2009>. Retrieved 9 March, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.immi.gov.au/about/reports/annual/2008-09/html/outcome1/output1-1-4.htm#table18>  
<http://www.immi.gov.au/about/reports/annual/2008-09/html/outcome1/output1-1-4.htm#table111>. Retrieved 12 March 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Australian Education International at [http://aei.gov.au/AEI/MIP/Statistics/StudentEnrolmentAndVisaStatistics/2010/2010Jan\\_0712\\_pdf.pdf](http://aei.gov.au/AEI/MIP/Statistics/StudentEnrolmentAndVisaStatistics/2010/2010Jan_0712_pdf.pdf). Retrieved 18 March 2009.



Wollongong for overseas and Australian students. Over the years, other independent Chinese Catholic communities developed in Sydney's expanding suburbs.

## 2. Chinese Catholic Communities in Sydney Today

In 2011, there are multiple Chinese Catholic communities in Greater Sydney scattered within four dioceses: Sydney, Broken Bay, Wollongong and Parramatta. The languages spoken include English, Cantonese and Mandarin, other Chinese dialects and Vietnamese. The actual number of Chinese Catholics is unknown because accurate statistics are not available. Anecdotally, some activities attract hundreds of people.<sup>36</sup> Some communities are incorporated into a parish or a diocese. Many are independent of parishes, run entirely by the laity. Some are partly funded by a diocese but more often are self-funded. They conduct sacramental, pastoral, devotional, catechetical, educational and missionary activities. In recent years, Parramatta Diocese experimented with a bilingual parish, St Monica, where a Cantonese speaking Mexican missionary ministers to a large Chinese congregation.<sup>37</sup> What is the identity of these communities: are they Chinese churches in Australia or Australian churches with Chinese characteristics? How can these communities be integrated into the wider Australian Church and contribute to its mission?

## IN SEARCH OF AN AUSTRALIAN IDENTITY IN LITURGY

Australia is a unique geographical and cultural phenomenon. This remote Great South Land was once blessed with diverse indigenous cultures which had been sadly decimated after European settlement. Australia had also been enriched by migrants from all continents bringing their cultural heritage, a treasure they want to pass on to the next generation. For Chinese Australian, this is an immense task. They have to synthesise an immense Chinese civilisation, a complex language system with many dialects and two written scripts, into a rapidly changing modern Australia with its dominant Anglo-Saxon European culture.

Inculturating Christianity is even more problematic. How can Australian Catholics express their culture and identity through worship in the Great South Land?<sup>38</sup> Carmel Pilcher identifies the problems in reconciling the Catholic liturgy, born in the Northern Hemisphere, with different symbols, seasons, climate and environment in Australia.<sup>39</sup> To honour cultural diversity, she advocates the use of a mosaic liturgy. This is one of the strategies developed by Anscar Chupungco, a Filipino Benedictine liturgist, to enrich

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<sup>36</sup> In 2001 Australian Bureau of Statistic Census shows the country of origin of Australian Catholics and their percentage in the total ethnic group: Hong Kong was ranked 24<sup>th</sup> and China 27<sup>th</sup> with 16.87% and 5.03% respectively. In the 2006 National Church Life Survey, Chinese is the seventh most spoken language at home. Hong Kong was 24<sup>th</sup> country of origin. Some Chinese speakers are counted under other countries of origin like Vietnam or Malaysia. This study excludes parishioners who do not participate in the survey or register with the parish and non-English speakers who only attend extra-parochial activities.

<sup>37</sup> See <http://stmonicanp.org.au>, <http://www.cass.asn.au>; <http://www.ccc-inc.org.au>; [http://www.chinese.sydney.catholic.org.au/E\\_Accc.htm](http://www.chinese.sydney.catholic.org.au/E_Accc.htm); <http://www.srspcaustralia.org.au>.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen Burns and Anita Monro, Ed, *Christian Worship in Australia: Inculturating the Liturgical Tradition* (Strathfield: St Paul's Publications, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> Carmel Pilcher, "Poinsettia: Christmas or Pentecost – Celebrating Liturgy in the Great South Land that is Australia" *Worship* 81 (2007): 508-520 and "Marking liturgical time in Australia: pastoral considerations" in *Christian Worship in Australia*, 47-58. See also Clare V Johnson, "Relating liturgical time to place-time: the spatiotemporal dislocation of the liturgical year in Australia" in *Christian Worship in Australia*, 33-45.

Christian worship in a multi-ethnic assembly.<sup>40</sup> Vatican II teaches that the liturgy is the “fount and summit of the Church’s life and activities”.<sup>41</sup> How does one celebrate the liturgy most fruitfully in a multi-ethnic setting, often found in suburban Australian parishes?<sup>42</sup> Chunpungco developed a few principles to preserve unity amidst diversity. Firstly, the local parish represents the visible church established throughout the world. It is the *domus ecclesiae* where all who share the same faith are welcome, irrespective of cultures, ethnicity or origin. Secondly, liturgical pluralism is premised on unity, for example by using the Roman rites. Finally, the role of the liturgical form is to render the theological content of the liturgy visible and tangible. One strategy is to use a mosaic liturgy, a composite liturgy made of different cultural expressions. It is not a novelty: the Roman liturgy was bilingual (Greek and Latin) until the 7th century and many Papal Masses today are multi-lingual. Another strategy is to introduce a special pluri-ethnic liturgy to reflect the cultures of ethnic groups. The following description is an attempt to implement Chunpungco’s strategies in a suburban multi-cultural parish in Sydney with a significant Asian minority.

## CELEBRATING THE CHINESE NEW YEAR MASS IN SYDNEY

### 1. The Chinese New Year Celebration

The Lunar New Year is regarded by Chinese and Vietnamese as their most important cultural event of the year. There are special symbols, rites, rituals and foods which celebrate the passing of the old and dawn of the new, the hope of prosperity, health and happiness. The family is central to the celebration and ancestors are commemorated with special rites. Red is the colour of festivity and good fortune and the ideogram “fu” (blessing) is a key symbol in the celebration. Gifts are exchanged, particularly in the forms of red packets: hong bao (Mandarin), lai see (Cantonese), ang pow (Hokkien).

### 2. The Chinese New Year Liturgy

Catholic Churches in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam celebrate the Lunar New Year. Australian Vietnamese Catholics celebrate their Tết Nguyên Đán or Tết with solemn liturgies. While the Lunar New Year is celebrated in Chinese Protestant churches and extra-parochial Catholic communities in Sydney, few multi-ethnic Catholic parishes do so. Since 2008, our Lady of the Way Parish in North Sydney, a multi-cultural parish with a significant Asian minority, has hosted a Chinese New Year Mass for

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<sup>40</sup> “Liturgical Pluralism in Multi-ethnic Communities” in Anscar Chupungco, *Worship: Beyond Inculturation*, (Washington DC: The Pastoral Press, 1994), 187-176.

<sup>41</sup> “The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows. From the liturgy, particularly the Eucharist, grace is poured forth upon us as from a fountain; the liturgy is the source for achieving in the most effective way possible human sanctification and God’s glorification, the end to which all the Church’s other activities are directed.” ( *Sacrosanctum concilium* n. 10) See also “The Celebration of the Christian Mystery” (no 1066-1075) *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Strathfield: St Paul’s Publication, 2004), 277-2.

<sup>42</sup> “Liturgical inculturation ... may be defined as the process of inserting the texts and rites of the liturgy into the framework of the local culture.” Anscar J Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, religiosity and catechesis* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 30. For a short version of Chupungco’s thoughts on this issue, see Anscar J Chupungco, “Mission and Inculturation: East Asia and the Pacific” in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker eds, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 661-677.

both its parishioners and visiting Chinese Catholics.<sup>43</sup> The liturgy attempts to integrate the Chinese and the Catholic Traditions in a Eucharistic celebration.<sup>44</sup> Chinese symbols and art were used to temporarily transform the liturgical space: a Chinese painting of Mary, a ceremonial lion's head used in lion dancing, red lanterns, paired calligraphy and ceremonial objects. The altar was decorated with "fu", the Chinese ideogram which denotes health, prosperity and harmony. The Chinese Bible uses the same ideogram to translate the word "beatitudes" in Matthew and Luke and the word "blessed" for beatified saints and martyrs. The Mass was multi-lingual, using English, Mandarin and Cantonese Chinese in the proclamation of the Word, in music and hymns. To accommodate a multi-ethnic assembly, English translation was shown on audiovisual screen and available in Mass bulletins. Red and gold were the predominant colours: red candles and vestments were used to commemorate the ancestors and martyrs in faith. The offertory was made up of festive foods, along with bread and wine. The assembly was given red packets, traditional New Year gifts. Like all Chinese New Year celebrations, the Mass was followed by a festive feast. Ancestor veneration and the use of incense have so far not been adopted in this multi-ethnic setting. However, they are used in this celebration by other Chinese Catholic Communities with a Chinese congregation and where the Chinese language is used exclusively.<sup>45</sup>

### 3. Liturgy and Faith

The close relationship between worship and belief was first developed by Prosper of Aquitaine (390-455). His famous dictum *legem credenda lex statuat supplicandi* was later shortened to *lex orandi, lex credendi*. The Catechism of the Catholic Church translates it into: "the law of prayer is the law of faith: the Church believes as she prays."<sup>46</sup> So what does this liturgy tell us about Chinese Catholics? First and foremost, the Eucharist is the ultimate expression of their faith. Christ is the highest "fu" (blessing). To celebrate the Eucharist in the New Year, the most important Chinese festival, is the fullest expression of their culture and religion. Secondly, the commemoration of ancestors is an important part of the celebration. The ancestors are not just the biological family, clan or ethnic group, but the Church, the family in faith, represented by the worshipping congregation and saints (especially the Chinese martyrs and saints, ancestors in faith). The red vestments and candles also recall the sacrifice of Chinese martyrs. Thirdly, festive foods, normally offered in gratitude to Heaven, Earth, ancestors and gods, are offered to God (*Tien Zhu*, Lord of Heaven), along with the gifts of bread and wine. Here the fruit of the earth and work of human hands are blessed and transformed for the assembled, the deceased ancestors, absent family members (often living overseas and sorely missed at this annual festivity), the people of China and the Chinese Diaspora, Australia and the world. Hospitality as a Christian and Chinese virtue is exemplified by the generous Chinese New

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<sup>43</sup> For photographs of the liturgy, see the parish web site <http://www.northsydneycatholics.com/events/events/gallery>

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of the Chinese New Year celebration in an Australian Chinese Protestant context: Betty O S Tan, "The Contextualization of the Chinese New Year Festival" in *Asia Journal of Theology*, 15 (2001): 115-132.

<sup>45</sup> As this liturgy is designed for worship with a non-Chinese majority, ancestor rites are not used. For a Christian interpretation of ancestor rites: Jonathan Tan Yun-Ks, "The Ancestor Veneration Rites of the Contemporary Malaysian Chinese Community and Inculturation" in *East Asian Pastoral Review* 35, no 3 & 4 (1998): 320-355.

<sup>46</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1124.

Year feast which follows The Mass. The focus on family, gratitude to Heaven or God and the emphasis on harmony are not just Confucian or Chinese but Christian, indeed universal, values. The giving and receiving of gifts is celebrated in the ritual of exchanging red packets: for Catholics, the ultimate gift is Christ received in the Eucharist.<sup>47</sup>

## TOWARDS AN AUSTRALIAN CHINESE SPIRITUALITY

### 1. *Spirituality as Lived Christian Experience*

Veronica Brady writes, “spirituality, the self’s experience before God, occurs in history...in the forms and ways of seeing of a given culture.”<sup>48</sup> If spirituality is defined as a way of living the Christian faith fully and meaningfully in one’s cultural context, then we have just witnessed an emerging spirituality, which seeks to combine three quite disparate elements: Australian (a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-faith society), Chinese (5000 years of civilisation imbued with Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism) and Catholic (2000 years of civilisation incorporating many cultures, Jewish, Greco-Roman, Franco-Germanic, Anglo-Celtic, with increasing contributions from indigenous cultures, Middle Eastern, North and Latin American, African, Asian, and Pacific Island cultures). These elements are not static but organic, constantly evolving and morphing into new exciting entities.

Michael Gallagher points out that the crucial battle zone for faith and unbelief in a postmodern 21st century is located not in creeds but in sensibility and imagination. He cites Cardinal Newman in *Grammar of Assent*, “the heart is commonly reached not through the reason, but through the imagination...no man will be a martyr for a conclusion”.<sup>49</sup> The religious imagination is most abundantly expressed in worship where art, music, words and actions fuse into a single liturgy. The liturgy, unlike formal theology, is much more accessible to believers but, as previously stated, also conveys the content of faith.

### 2. *Longing for Traditions: Old and New*

British sociologist Anthony Giddens argues that traditions are constantly being invented and re-invented; there is no “pure” tradition as often claimed by fundamentalists.<sup>50</sup> Many cherished traditions might, in reality, be recent innovations.<sup>51</sup> Originally used in Roman property law, “*tradere*”, the Latin root of “tradition”, means to pass on an inheritance to future generations in trust. While de-traditionalisation is occurring in some traditional societies as a result of globalisation, new traditions are invented in an increasingly global cosmopolitan society.

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<sup>47</sup> James H Kroeger, “The Gift of Mission” *Tripod* 28 (2008): 250: the Asian art of gift giving is symbolic of a “gift missiology” which recognises, receives and reciprocates the supreme gift of God.  
[http://www.hsstudyc.org.hk/en/tripod\\_en/en\\_tripod\\_150\\_08.html](http://www.hsstudyc.org.hk/en/tripod_en/en_tripod_150_08.html) Retrieved 16 Jan 2009.

<sup>48</sup> Veronica Brady, “Postmodernism and the spiritual life”, *The Way* 36 (1996), 179, cited in Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), 157.

<sup>49</sup> Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 134.

<sup>50</sup> 1999 BBC Reith lectures: Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalisation Is Reshaping Our Lives*, 2nd ed. (London: Profile Books, 2002), 36-50.

<sup>51</sup> Giddens gives the example of the short kilt. It was invented by Thomas Rawlinson, an English industrialist from Lancashire, in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, to replace older Highland dress, so that Highlanders could work in factories.

In the Christian context, church historian Jaroslav Pelikan, expressed a similar view:

Tradition is not fixed for all time ... It is the perpetuation of a changing, developing identity. Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Tradition lives in conversation with the past, while remembering where we are and when we are and that it is we who have to decide. Traditionalism supposes that nothing should ever be done for the first time, so all that is needed to solve any problem is to arrive at the supposedly unanimous testimony of this homogenised tradition.<sup>52</sup>

The Australian Catholic identity is in flux: the old is passing away but the new is yet to emerge.<sup>53</sup> The Anglo-Irish Church of the last two centuries is slowly replaced by a multi-cultural one with Asians, Africans, Arabs and Pacific Islanders among the clergy and laity. The certainty of the past is challenged by secularisation, demographic changes, collapse of vocations and church attendance, the changing role of the laity, sex abuse scandals and polarisation within church and society. Rebranding or reviving a homogenised identity of the past is less fruitful or effective than re-inventing the future: the otherness of non-European Christians is a gift rather than a threat to the Australian Catholic identity.<sup>54</sup> They bring with them the vitality and charism of the Christianities of their homelands. We have just seen how Chinese Catholics tried to develop a new tradition in an Australian context to honour their cultural heritage and their faith. Nearly 30 years ago, the late Cardinal Avery Dulles encapsulated the richness of the Catholic principle in four dimensions: the fullness of God in Christ (from above), the aspirations of nature (from below), mission and communion (in breadth), tradition and development (in length).<sup>55</sup> Australian Catholics should expect nothing less.

### 3. A Future Australian Chinese Theology?

Bernard Lonergan wrote that theology “mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix.”<sup>56</sup> As Australia changes, Australian theology, too, must evolve. Peter Phan recognises the daunting challenge faced by Asian Catholics in articulating their faith in the United States. “Culture is not a pre-existing organic whole to be discovered or preserved, but something constructed amidst struggle and violence.”<sup>57</sup> In a globalised world, Asian Christians must construct a viable identity amidst a complex mixture of pre-modern, modern and postmodern cultures. They dwell in the interstice between their own indigenous cultures and that of the host country. Paradoxically, being neither this nor that allows one to be both; to carve out a hybrid space between cultures. Phan urges Vietnamese Americans to develop a contextual

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with Joseph Carey, June 26, 1989, U. S. News & World Report, cited in Tan, *Introducing Asian American Theologies*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 171-172.

<sup>53</sup> See the 2009 Aquinas Memorial Lectures given by Tony Kelly entitled “Catholic Identity: lost and found” [http://library.acu.edu.au/other\\_collections\\_and\\_catalogues/aquinas\\_memorial\\_lectures](http://library.acu.edu.au/other_collections_and_catalogues/aquinas_memorial_lectures).

<sup>54</sup> Contrasts two ABC documentaries on Australian Catholicism from 2010: the four part series *The Mission and Challenge, Change, Faith: Catholic Australia and the Second Vatican Council*. The former shows the challenges faced by a multi-cultural Church. The latter shows how Anglo-Irish Catholics respond to the passing of the Australian Church of their youth and conflicting attitudes to the present and the future. For transcript: <http://www.abc.net.au/compass>.

<sup>55</sup> Avery Cardinal Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

<sup>56</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: The Seabury Press), xi.

<sup>57</sup> Peter C Phan, “Asian Catholics in the United States: Challenges and Opportunities for the Church”, <http://members.cox.net/vientrietao/phancho/asiancat.html> Retrieved 4 April 2010, originally published in *Mission Studies* 16 (1999), 151-174.



“dragon-eagle theology”: the dragon, the symbol for Vietnam and the eagle for America.<sup>58</sup> Third-generation Asian American theologians are now constructing their theologies through social commitment, critiquing their socio-cultural milieu, constructing new traditions to live the Christian Gospel in their own contexts.<sup>59</sup> Surely, Australian theology must include an Asian dimension in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As more and more Australian Chinese participate in theological education, Australian Chinese Christians, like their American cousins, will one day articulate their unique experiences in their own voices.

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<sup>58</sup> Peter C Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), 228-247.

<sup>59</sup> Tan, *Introducing Asian American Theologies*, 162-176.