

On Weather Changes and Signs of the Time

As this year is nearing its end, it is worth remembering some of its important events. The first that come to mind are happy ones. The 2010 Shanghai Universal Exhibition will easily keep its place in world history. Much shorter in time length but equally significant was the first World Soccer Cup held in South Africa and broadcasted live in all nations. Both have been entertainment magnets for tourism industries.

Sadly, the year begun with a tragedy: on January 12, late in the evening, a massive earthquake of magnitude 7 shook Haiti. Extensive destruction was caused in Port-au-Prince and its region. Due to the proximity of the epi-centre (25 kilometres), more than 222,000 people lost their lives, 300,000 were injured, 1.3 million were displaced, nearly 100,000 houses flattened and about 100,000 damaged. Rescue and help, both physical and financial, have been slow to be organised and up to recently, many families are still crowded under shoddy tents in refugee camps of poor conditions.

Later in May, in China floods and landslides began to affect several provinces, bringing the death toll to 1,072. A deadly mudslide in Zhouqu county, Gansu, occurred on August 8, around midnight. The mud-rock flow of about 5 km long, 300 meters wide and 5 meters deep, leveled the area severely disrupting power, telecommunication and water supply facilities. As of August 22, more than 1,045 deaths are deplored; at least 330 persons still missing. Elsewhere, more than 140 million people in 28 provinces, municipalities and regions had to endure other downpours. To avoid the risk of flooding and landslides, by early August, 10.42 million people had been evacuated.

In Pakistan floods began in July after heavy monsoon rains submerged the Sindh, Punjab as well as parts of Balochistan regions. An estimated 2,000 people have died so far with close to a million homes badly damaged or destroyed. Authorities estimate over 20 million people are suffering; over 160,000 square kilometers are affected, exceeding the combined total of the affected people by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the 2005 Kashmir earthquake and the 2010 Haiti earthquake, although the death toll in Pakistan is much lower.

These huge natural disasters have been particularly destructive of human lives. In comparison, man made disasters were less important. In the Gulf of Mexico, on April 20, the Deepwater Horizon's explosion that killed 11 technicians and the oil spill it caused, in this respect have left their marks only on lasting ecological damages estimated in billions of US dollars. In Russia, in the 500 or so wildfires of the hottest summer in Russian history and the intense drought of the western provinces in late July, only one fire fighter lost his life. But in the Gulf or in Russia or in Gansu, administrative negligence for years might have hindered better prevention against occurring catastrophes.

Specialists say that climate change is not directly involved in these major and recent tragedies. Yet the attention will naturally focus on other issues. In Haiti first, in Pakistan later, the media have reported how slow the international community has been in gathering financial resources and in organizing the urgently needed relief. It took nearly two months for the United Nations Secretary Ban Ki-moon to finally receive, on August 20, some 500 million US\$ —one half only of one billion dollars! — coming from many national governments, NGOs and corporations. Among the 40 multi-billionaires who made the "Giving Pledge" to philanthropy, initiated in June 2010 by two of them very well known, any one could have alone easily met the challenge! (See Wikipedia, "2010 Pakistan floods" and "The Giving Pledge").

The fact is that free "generosity" is hindered by the fear of bad organisation opened to creeping corruption. All this can generate political inertia (see for instance the climate change debates) or social apathy (where working conditions are at stake). In the global economic crisis, both attitudes are counter-productive. As Matthew relates in his Gospel: "You know to foresee weather changes, but you ignore the signs of the time" [Matt., 16, 2-3]. By not heeding what is happening, no way to heed what has to come: a better world.

Yves Camus

World

Some observers will probably note that this Summer season 2010 has been marked by two important “premières”, as the world of art uses to speak for unprecedented performances. China, for the first time in Asia, organised the Shanghai World Exhibition, that has been one of the largest in the genre. Some weeks later, South Africa has hosted, also for the first time on that continent, the Soccer World Cup, similarly the largest in the Cups history when a record 204 countries entered qualification! Both events are perhaps signs of the time: in this world which is more and more interconnected, it is understandable that new configurations are taking form. News media reflect on them, and in this case, on the new relations between China and African countries. In this section, V. Maurice Gountin, from the Chinese Cultural Centre in the Republic of Benin, presents first an analysis of the important role played by the Republic of South Africa in the recent history of the continent. He is followed by Mundebe Beya Wa Beya, a Ph.D candidate on World Economy at the Beijing University, who examines the relations of Africa with China and their future challenges.

Society

Occasionally, it does not seem farfetched to suggest comparison between global issues of different nature. Take for instance the climate change question. After the unproductive results of the Copenhagen Conference (December 6-18 2009) and in preparation for the following conference to be held in Cancun, Mexico (November 29 through December 10 2010), comments begin to appear in the media: scientific data and models have been amended and conclusions certified, yet they are met on a world scale with political inertia for economic reasons. This inertia is counter-productive. Similarly, the financial and economic crisis that has engulfed the world since 2008 has been met with financial and economic reforms which, to a large extent, have been lingering with social apathy. Economically speaking, this apathy is counter-productive. Two contributions in this section focus on related topics. Liu Kaiming, founder and Executive Director of The Institute of Contemporary Observation (ICO —深圳當代社會觀察研究所, Shenzhen, China), in the first, describes the predicament in China of the third generation of “migrant workers” to underline, in the search for a solution, the co-responsibilities of the employers, the authorities and the society. In the second, Austen Ivereigh, a campaigner and community organiser in London since 2006, in an essay entitled “Building Civil Society” comments on several issues related not only to development, in the midst of this present economic global crisis, but also to social action.

Arts & Letters

In this epoch of change, when the international gatherings have grown through many “G” or Groups, that meet on world affairs — from G2 to G27 and more, who knows? — similarly there are debates on what makes of a country a “leading power”, not to speak of a possibly “super-power”. Specialists unfortunately let their scrutiny focus primarily on economic output and military might. But history tells abundantly that the survival of cultures and civilisations has never been warranted by these factors, on the contrary. Cultural influence is really at stake first and foremost, and it does not easily enter into statistics. Speaking of cultural influence, the following interesting contributions open some perspectives. As it is normal, not long after the Shanghai World Expo closes its gates, comments on its legacy will be published in China and elsewhere. Xu Jilin, Professor of History at East China Normal University, Shanghai, reflects on what is known of the city that was a cultural hub and what now remains for later generations. The second writer, Zhou Hailin, from Shanghai, presents the great influence on Chinese leftist literature of the twentieth century exerted by the American writer Upton Sinclair, but first through the Japanese translations of his novels.

History & Culture

In the year 2010, now closer to its end, four hundred years after his death in Beijing, the memory of Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), Jesuit Catholic missionary in China at the end of the Ming dynasty, has been celebrated in many places and institutions in China and around the world. Publications, lectures, conferences, exhibitions (Macerata, Rome, Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Macau) — all these academic manifestations have focused on the many aspects of the life of this European Renaissance's humanist and on the natural social gifts blended with his scientific expertise in several fields that have contributed to the friendly esteem he received from Chinese officials and literati. — Except perhaps one tenet: his training as a lawyer (in “Roman law, which was the source for both civil law [governing secular affairs] and canon law [governing the affairs of the Catholic Church]”). This competence might have helped him, with prudent patience, in facing and solving not a few difficulties along the quite twisted road that lead him from Zhaoqing to Beijing, as his memoirs have testified, later published under the title *History of the Christian Expedition in China*. To supplement, as it were, this lack of information, Roderick O'Brien, an Australian lawyer who taught Law in several universities in China, presents here the juridical formation Matteo Ricci had received in Rome during his years (1568-1571) at the Sapienza University (that is before entering the Jesuit novitiate). But the commemoration of Matteo Ricci would not be complete if nothing was said about the reception of his legacy in present day China. Thierry Meynard, from the Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, presents two different and contrasted cases among contemporary scholars.

Thought & Humanism

People in the field of Christian missionary history know well that a non exclusive shift of emphasis and focus has in the past decades generated new standards for deeper inquiries. Instead of researches on missionary exemplary figures or paradigmatic methods and institutions, these historical studies have now entered into new fields of discovery, so to say. These are not concerned first of all with the history of the “propagation” but more and more with the history of the “reception”. There is no doubt that, if “discoveries” there are, these will certainly complement hidden loopholes in earlier accepted standards. Having this background in mind, this section presents two different contributions. Gu Weimin, from the Shanghai Normal University, in the first introduces “Professor Chen Weiping's Studies on Paul Xu Guangqi and the Chinese-Western Cultural Interactions in the Late Ming and Early Qing Period” as “A Meeting Point between Sino-Western Ideas at the Turn of the Ming and Qing Dynasties”. Through these critical inquiries, a new light places in some better perspective how and why ‘Western’ and ‘Heavenly’ learnings have met, particularly in the celebrated academic and political carrier of Xu Guangqi, the great friend of Matteo Ricci. Letting history follow its course, the second article examines the strategies employed, in modern China, in the translation of biblical terms. The author, Ma Lemei, from the Shaanxi Normal University, focuses the present inquiry on the Chinese Union Version of the Bible and critically evaluates the strategies of the translators to be equally faithful to the original text and to the target language.

Debates & Features

One of the new tenets of the world we live in is no doubt the pervasive influence exerted by the information technologies. Depending on the generation one belongs to, nearly every where nearly everybody has now acquired some habit to make use of some of the many tools of communication produced by these technologies in always greater varieties. Barriers of time and space seem to have disappear... So much so that the easiness, the quantity and the speed with which “information” reaches us in real time that it progressively leaves in human mind its mark : unknowingly, people are used to live in some “virtual reality” surroundings, as some movies, like the famed *Avatar*, have made crowds dream of... Would such a result be called “information” or “deformation”? The following two contributions of this section can help explore what is at stake. In the first, Wang Chengbing, from Beijing Normal University, notes that “The rapid development of computer and Internet leads us into a “virtual space”. And in this “virtual society”, humankind's life style is represented as falsity, freedom and simultaneity, which constitute a great threat to the contemporary identity.” At an other level of observation, Geert Lovinck, founding director of the Institute of Network Cultures at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, “examines the colonization of real-time, comment culture and the rise of extreme opinions; and the emergence of 'national webs'.”