

A Tsunami of News

All along the first two quarters of this year 2011, important events have generated lingering tragedies that have shaken the world at large. It has been as if a tsunami of news was, wave after wave, jumping above defences in many countries, including China, focused on the day-to-day struggle against the social damages of the economic crisis. Just to mention a few, they were: from December 17 2010 till January 14, the Tunisian civil resistance; from January 25 till February 11, the popular demonstrations in Egypt against an old regime; then on February 20 began in Lybia an insurgency spreading from east to west and supported by one UNO resolution on March 17; popular protests in Syria that had started in late January have been exacerbated on March 15 in many cities. In such a turbulent context that is affecting the Arabic world, not a few observers and experts have presented some interpretative essays on what could be seen as a string of similar cultural mutations of the old Islamic civilisation entering modern times.

Meanwhile, China was going to celebrate the Centenary of the 1911 or Xinhai Revolution that had lead the country into a new era – it must be said not less turbulent all along the last century. But in the midst of younger revolutions of similar nature, prudence gave priority to the care of more urgent matters. As an example, there was first the 11th National People's Congress Consultative Conference which met on March 5 to 14 and had to approve the 12th Five Year Plan of the country. Then the sixth and decennial 2010 census, launched nation wide on November 1st 2010, had been concluded and its results, gathered by more than six million census workers visiting 400 million households, have been released on April 28 2011; they are now submitted to critical analysis and discussions. With an eye on the outside world, the attention was more towards the future than on commemorations.

All the more so that on Friday 11 March 2011, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake had struck off the east coast of Fukushima prefecture in Japan, triggering a very strong tsunami which inflicted important damage on nuclear reactors and many other destructions, and killing several thousand people. The far reaching impact of the natural catastrophe, not only in human lives in Japan but also through its economic and energetic consequences world wise, is just beginning now to be felt: Germany is the first country to have adopted on May 30 a new energy policy shifting from nuclear civil to renewable energy sources. So, with its 13 operating nuclear reactors producing nearly 2 percent of its total power output, and another 27 under construction, 50 more planned and around 100 others proposed, will China follow suit?

Such is in part the background of this present issue. In the midst of popular movements seen as possibly contagious, the spirit of the Xinhai epoch-making upheaval seems to have been adumbrated. Yet, that upheaval was also the case of a mutation in the culture of the old age Chinese civilisation. Hence the debates that it generated among intellectuals and in the ways to modernise education, as one of the essays that follow discusses. Democracy and science were then advocated by many, but how to impart nowadays their virtues in a nation of 1.37 or so billion citizens whose health protection, more precious than any other riches, remain a standing challenge among others to the reforms of any health system, as other contributions point out. Not undisturbed by the political scene of the past few months, arts and letters remain a rare expression of a memory that younger generations are exposed to be deprived of, not only themselves but their followers, hence its price.

Understanding events depends on the angle, wide or narrow, with which they are looked at. Revolutions are no exceptions; most of them could be viewed as structural shocks or after-shocks of cultural encounters. What was initiated in China at the European Renaissance time, as two contributions herewith illustrate, could be seen as a silent inner transformation that progressively manifested itself. Three hundred or so years later, would the Xinhai Revolution (1911) rather than the “China Trade” (1760-1860) be considered the beginning of the “rise of China”? The discussion remains open.

Yves Camus, Editor

1.—World

Commenting on the context in which the Centenary of the Xinhai Revolution of 1911 could be this year celebrated in China, the Editorial of this issue has already alluded to some cultural interpretation, among others, of its meaning : after decades of external humiliating pressure for opening its gates to foreign trade, internal pressure for reforms in China reached a breaking point that released turbulent renovating energies. Chinese and non Chinese historians have not finished to scrutinise the legacies of such an epoch-making event at least in China and East Asia. How its main actors and other influential persons have contributed to make of this spirit a common heritage? There is no simple answer to such a question. This section proposes two essays. In the first, Dr. 白莉民 Bai Limin, senior lecturer at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, examines “The 1911 Revolution and the Early-Republican Textbooks: a Historical Perspective”. Her research shows that the publishing houses of these textbooks were not only engaged in some commercial concurrence but also in part submitted to some ideological political pressures. The second contribution by Professor 林廣志 Lin Guangzhi, from the University of Macau, introduces the interesting biography of 盧怡若 Lu Yiruo (1848-1907), one of the followers of 孫中山 Sun Zhongshan.

The Editor

2.— Society

Geophysicists calculations based on data collected by satellites may have been able to measure the slight deformation of the terrestrial globe occurred by the recent Fukushima earthquake: no provisional conclusion or comment, it seems, has yet been published on any eventual future consequence. But for demographers, the capacity of the globe in its present form to “host” and “accommodate” an ever growing number of human population is becoming an ever more and more important object of research and statistics. Not all nations are similarly in the focus of attention. Nor are economic factors taken first into consideration. But “on the globe” China’s population rises also in importance: in 1953 (first census) its population was estimated at 594,350,000; according to the recent census of 2010, it has now grown to “1.37 billion, including 1.3397 billion on the mainland” (National Bureau of Statistics, April 28 2011). Such importance has more than doubled. This section is fortunate to present reflections on these data. Professor 趙中維 Zhao Zhongwei, from The Australian National University, in the first contribution, makes a analysis and comparison of the 2010 China Census general data with the projections given by the UNO Population Division in conducting its 2010 projections on the world population; he draws also some conclusions. In the second contribution, Professors Jens Leth Hougaard and Lars Peter Raahave Østerdal, both from the University of Copenhagen, reflect on the structure, problems and challenges of the health care system implemented by China on its huge population. The world is also concerned.

The Editor

3.—Arts & Letters

Although the cinema, both Chinese and Western, has been featured in past issues of the *Chinese Cross Currents* there has only been one leading article on the subject of photography (see, 丁东 Ding Dong, “Old Photos and Historical Memory”, CCC 3.2, pp. 90-105). Now there appears a second article devoted to the activities of Macao photographers in the Arts & Letters section. 薛力勤 Xue Liqin presents the many activities of the Photographic Society of Macao to readers. Sadly, the writer passed away a mere four months ago. Mr. Xue was one of Macao’s leading promoters of the art of photography in the city, and of the photographic exchange with the Chinese mainland and with Taiwan. He will, therefore, be sorely missed by the photographic community and by all lovers of the fine arts, in whatever medium.

The subject of poetry has received more attention in the pages of the CCC, and the essay by 楊敏 Yang Min discusses an important albeit controversial current of twentieth-century Chinese poetry. Yang Min captivates readers from the first with his lively account of the roots and his reading of *Menglong* poetry, a kind of poetry developed by the group popularly known as the “Misty Poets”. It is a post-revolutionary genre that emerged in the late 1970s under the influence of Western modernism and other literary currents, and which was hailed by some as a literary innovation, with the poets 顧城 Gu Cheng (1956-1993) and 北島 Bei Dao (born 1949), whose works are also mentioned in the essay, as main propagators.

César Guillen Nuñez

4.— History and Culture

Rare would probably be the occasions, for this section of ‘History and Culture’, to present two book reviews extended in the form of essays, but apparently disconnected. The first could be viewed as a conclusion of the ‘Ricci Year’ celebrated in 2010, four hundred years after Matteo Ricci’s death in Beijing: Professor Thierry Meynard, from Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, makes a reservedly critical appreciation of one of the best researched intellectual biography of the Italian Jesuit whose friendship opened China’s gates, and written by Professor Ronnie 夏伯嘉 Hsia Po-chia from Pennsylvania State University. In the second, 譚杰 Tan Jay, post-graduate student at Sun Yat-sen University, reviews how Professor Nicolas Standaert, from Leuven Catholic University, Belgium, has seen Chinese and Catholic funeral rituals mutually “interweaving” with each others in the first periods of the Catholic Church in China. By presenting both essays together and the studies they review, this section offers to the readers some food for thought: to bear fruit, cultural encounters do not go without much labour, intuitive empathy and deep respect. They are not matter of “tourism”. So, enjoy...

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5.— Thought and Humanism

Times may have changed, yet history tells us that Early Christians’ identity under Roman rule had already been the object of controversies and suspicions. Take for instance the *Epistle to Diognetos*, an apology of an unknown author dated back to the late second century of the Christian of common era; he writes: “Christians are distinguished from other people neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life marked out by any singularity. [...] They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share with others in all things, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their land of birth, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. [...] They obey the prescribed laws, and surpass the laws by their lives. They love all people, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and yet condemned; they are put to death, but restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they lack of all things, yet abound in all; they are dishonoured, in dishonour glorified. They are evil spoken of, but they are justified; they are reviled, and yet they bless; they are insulted, yet repay insult with honour; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life [...]. In one word to sum it all : what the soul is in the body, that are Christians in the world.” (*Diognetos*, 5,1-6,1). — As in many similar contemporary contexts, Christian identity deserves reflection. This section presents two different approaches. In the first, Professor 高师宁 Gao Shining, from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, analyses the evolution observed in the ways Christians in China assert their own identity as Christians, as Chinese, as Chinese Christians. Professor 谢文郁 Xie Wenyu, in the second, explores how Chinese and Christian ways of thought justify human freedom.

The Editor

6.—Debates and Features

The rise of China on the world stage is not any more a matter of debate, yet when did it start? Historians, economists, diplomats, philosophers, educators, Chinese and non Chinese alike, might have various opinions to offer about such an important aspect of world history. As François Jullien in a recent study has suggested: to grow up is to grow old. With time, great love can turn into indifference. And even the most earnest revolution can imperceptibly become its own system of privilege and corruption—just as global warming has slowly modified the climate by degrees. These are examples of the kind of quiet, unseen changes that Jullien examines in *The Silent Transformations*,¹ in which he compares Western and Eastern—specifically Chinese—ways of thinking about time and processes of change. The rise of China can be added as an example in recent history of these “silent transformations” the universe is made of. In a recent workshop (2-3 March 2011) the Macau Ricci Institute invited scholars to debate about the “‘China Trade’ — Merchants and Artists (1760-1860): New Historical and Cultural Perspectives”. This section offers one of the contributions to the debate, presented by Dr. 白芳 Bai Fang, research fellow at the Guangdong Provincial Museum and entitled “Hot in Europe and America: Export Art Works from the Qing Times. China Arts Exports Trade”. In the second contribution, an observer at the workshop, Richard M. 劉孟達 Liu Mengda, based on his extended banking and finance expertise, presents his reflections on the “silent transformations” effected by this trade. Among the difficult relations of the Chinese Empire with western powers of that time, the “China trade” might have lead, beyond the known conflicts, to the present rise of China.

The Editor

¹ François Jullien, *The Silent Transformations*, translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson, University of Chicago Press, August 2011, 168 pp., ISBN: 9781906497873.