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Thomas Tien Keng-hsin, SVD: The historical greatness¹ of the first Cardinal of China and the Far East (Part one)

Introduction

Fifty years ago this year, Thomas Cardinal Tien Keng-hsin² died, the first cardinal of China and of the Far East as well as the only cardinal of the Society of the Divine Word.³ This anniversary provides an opportunity to inquire into his historical role and to ask about his historical greatness. This question prompts us to first ask, who deserves to be called great in history? History is most often written by the victors and they deliberately impose their heroes, erecting monuments to them and staging their popular veneration.

There is an ongoing debate on the decisive forces shaping the course of history: is history shaped by individual strength of character or by economic, political and social forces? Thomas Carlyle spoke about the impact of “great men”, heroes; highly influential individuals who, due to their personal charisma, intelligence, wisdom, or political skill use their power in a way that had a decisive historical impact.⁴ His opponent, Herbert Spencer believed instead that the “great men” were merely products of their social environment,

¹ Niniejszy artykuł w dużej części jest oparty na tekście opublikowanym jako „The historical significance of Thomas Tien Keng-hsin SVD – the first Cardinal of China.” *NURT SVD* 1 (2018): 167-187.

² Tien Keng-hsin in pinyin would be written Tian Gengxin. Tien himself always wrote his name as Tien Keng-hsin and for this reason I retain this spelling.

³ Thomas Tien (1946) along with Valerian Gracias from India (1953) were the first indigenous Catholics of two ancient and giant nations of Asia to sit in the College of Cardinals.

⁴ According to contemporary historian Edward Carr, the great man embodies on a larger than normal scale the wills and aspirations of his contemporaries or anticipates those of his successors.

products of favorable historical circumstances⁵. Moreover, it's possible to distinguish between those who helped shape the forces which carried them to historical greatness and those who rode on the back of forces over which they had little or no control (Evans 188).

In the Christian optic, the ultimate criterion of greatness is God Himself as He entered into human history and remains in it as an actor. Our human freedom enables us to collaborate with our Creator and the Lord of history in renewing the face of the earth and in creating the future. We are the subjects but also the actors of history and not merely objects acted upon. St. Augustin viewed our human greatness as coming in the light of humility,⁶ which places human efforts within the context of the divine economy of salvation. It seems to me that it is precisely the interaction between the individual in his self-transcendence and the given historical circumstances which makes the study of the people in the past so fascinating (Evans 190).

This study, based both on publications and archival sources, claims historical greatness for the otherwise relatively obscure figure of Thomas Cardinal Tien Keng-hsin, SVD, within the Universal Church, the Society of the Divine Word and the Catholic Church in China as he courageously dealt with extremely difficult historical circumstances.

Cardinal Tien and Universal Church

It was a great surprise when, on 18 February 1946, the name of the obscure Chinese Bishop Thomas Tien Keng-hsin, SVD, appeared on the list of 32 new cardinals created by Pope Pius XII. It was first red hat for China and for the Far East. The American SVD magazine "Christian Family" ran the headline: "Pagan Orphan becomes China's first Cardinal."⁷ There was amazement that

⁵ In Luther's words, "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise". For Leo Tolstoy, the author of an epic story of Russia during the Napoleonic Wars: "War and Peace", we are only history's slaves realizing the decree of Providence" (*Great man theory*).

⁶ "We are striving for great things, let us lay hold of little things, and we shall be great [...]. First catch hold of God's lowliness. Deign to be lowly, to be humble, because God has deigned to be lonely and humble on the same account, yours not his own. So, catch hold of Christ's humility, learn to be humble, don't be proud". Sermon on *Greatness of Humility* was delivered sometime after the year 420 AD (Augustine 220).

⁷ The SVD magazine, "The Christian Family and Our Missions", January 1946: 46. Thomas Tien born on 24 October 1890 (then, Tung Lai) was only nine years old (baptized at the age of 11 by Fr. Rudolf Pieper SVD) when his devout and humble father, Peter Tien, a teacher in the SVD Mission school in Puoli died of exhaustion at the age of 47 (1899). Thomas had three sisters. One died in young age. His two remaining sisters and his mother, Mary, embraced the Catholic faith. His mother had been baptized in 1915 and lived a zealous Christian life until her death in 1922. Thomas' only brother also died young (Brandewie 2007, 29).

this *homo simplex et rusticus* (Kraus 14), largely unknown to the great of the world and even to Chinese Catholics, the humblest of the native bishops of China, could rise to such dignity?

Last shall be the first

As the news arrived from New York, Tien himself couldn't believe in his appointment as cardinal. He only said "I am not worthy, it must be mistake [...] such a position belongs only to the learned, to men of culture and dignity."⁸

In fact, some Church authorities were rather critical about Tien's elevation to the dignity of the cardinalate. They thought that he did not have sufficient qualities – was not intellectual enough. He didn't possess a higher degree, hadn't write anything – finishing only the ordinary courses of the major seminary. Many of the priests of Peking were dissatisfied at his appointment. He rose from the lowest strata of Chinese society, had poor language skills and was politically inexperienced if not downright naïve.⁹

Rumors circulated in Peking that the bishop was a peasant, not at all equal to the dignity of the office of archbishop of Peking. But as Fr. Jac Kuepers, SVD, noted, Tien's peasant ancestry was at the same time his great asset:

"Being born the son of a farmer and his personal name being 'Keng-hsin' meaning 'cultivator of the land of Hsin', one could compare his whole life in the Church as working on a farm with deep attachment to the soil of faith and diligently caring for all that lives and grows in the Church. Everywhere in the dioceses entrusted to him, namely in Yanggu, Qingdao, Peking and Taipei, he stressed conscious attention to the life of faith, promoted education, cared for the poor and much more. His successor Paul Cardinal Yü Pin, Archbishop of Nanking, described him as a diligent missionary with a broad apostolic view, an advocate of a well-educated and pious clergy, and a humble and good-hearted person."¹⁰

⁸ Tien's reaction was reported by an eye-witness, Louis Maloof, an American Sergeant and former newspaperman for the New Orleans "Times-Picayune", who served in a liaison capacity in the bishop Tien's residence in Qingdao. He heard about his appointment by 8:00 A.M. on 29 December 1945, when Spellman's cablegram arrived from New York: "I congratulate you fraternally. I embrace you". Francis Spellman had also been appointed cardinal and was clearly addressing someone of equal rank. In the evening of that day another telegram from Rome resolved all doubts. Maloof immediately arranged Tien's trip to Rome. Full of admiration for first cardinal of China, he reports on the fact in his biography: *Adveniat Regnum Tuum: The History of China's First Cardinal*, Techny 1946, 11-12.

⁹ "Monsignor speaks only broken German and equally English. His Latin is also not special, he can be understood with difficulty". About his character Grendel said: Mons. Tien is a calm, humble and very lovable. He seems only to suffer a bit of inferiority feeling". Sources/AG SVD 27 [a].

¹⁰ (Kuepers 11). The people who knew Card, Tien saw in him likeness to great pope Pius X. Father Henry Maas, SVD., wrote in 1948: "When I think of His Eminence I recall a judgment

Tien's shortcomings only served to strengthen his reputation for humility. Moreover, he was never an orator but a very simple speaker. His pronunciation and vocabulary, with their unpleasant nasal sounds, gave away his lowly Shantung origins (Fleckner 1975, 79). Karl Weber described Tien's uncomplicated nature in a few formulas: he was a nationalist¹¹; keenly aware of the value of money and searching to get the best value possible. In his spending habits, he seemed almost stingy.¹² With his mediocre disposition, he was not diplomatically skilled enough to curb the bad influence of these traits or to avoid their destructive effects.¹³

The dignity of the cardinalate and other honors didn't change Tien's basic attitude. He was still able to influence thousands of people as a sincere promoter of Truth. His excellent memory for people was paired with admirable communication skills.¹⁴ He was not a diplomat as the world understands such things, yet he brought tens of thousands of his fellow Chinese to conversion.¹⁵ Tien may have been mediocre in language skills but his charity drew all closer to Christ. He achieved several firsts: he was the first Chinese Cardinal, the first Cardinal in all the Far-East and the first Divine Word Missionary to be named a Cardinal. He shied away from photo ops, something which gave a hint to his sterling character. No without reason, Ernest Brandewie, in his biography of the Cardinal based largely on the meticulous research of German Fr. Johann Fleckner, SVD, captured the very essence of his life in the title of his book

passed on Pius X by Donald Attwater in his Dictionary of the Popes: "Thus there came to the chair of Peter a man of obscure birth, of no outstanding intellectual attainments and with no experience of ecclesiastical diplomacy, but one who if ever man did, radiated goodness: a man of God, who knew the unhappiness of the world and the hardships of life and in the greatness of his heart wanted to comfort everybody." (Schmitz 53).

¹¹ As a young priest, Tien could be quite nationalistic and demanding. This attitude is understandable in the context of colonial mentality of some missionaries and resulted from the desire to form a Chinese Church. Through his affiliation with the international Society SVD, he experienced and learned to appreciate the internationality (Brandewie 2007, 104).

¹² For Tien, the visit in the Mother House of the Society in Steyl, must have been a unique experience, since it was from Steyl that the first two missionaries set out for China, one of whom was his great spiritual example Fr. Freinademetz. Through his simple and friendly manner he won the hearts of all, with the effect that he got plenty of money and gifts. Even one of the confreres in Steyl noted a word play of Tien and Tientjes (Dutch coins) means to fetch Ten-guilders, and even more so that the bishop Tien could return to us with many Tientjes" (Kraus 71).

¹³ Sources/AG SVD 29 [a].

¹⁴ Tien's assistant in the parish Yutai, Fr. Albert Czech recalled Tien's lessons and sermons which were clear and concrete so that the people could easily follow and understand him: "I noticed that the people enjoyed listening to him. A religious warmth seemed to flow from him" (Brandewie 2007, 48).

¹⁵ Mission Procurator of Steyl, Fr. Meyer underlined that Tien during his touring in Holland exhibited great networking capacities. In the letter to the Superior General he wrote on 12 January 1940: "By his modest unpretentious and unassuming manner and approach he was able to win for himself all hearts". Sources/AG SVD 27 [b].

“The Last shall be First.”¹⁶ Brandewie’s biography expresses deep appreciation of the way in which God used this most unlikely person to accomplish His great ends.

Clear option in favor of Internationalization

Unlike some of his critics, the Vatican had quite a different opinion of Bishop Tien. For the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide he was the right person for that point in time, harmonizing well with the Vatican’s long desire to reform its mission strategy. In naming him a cardinal, the Holy See expressed first of all its high esteem for the Chinese people but also its recognition for the missionary work done in the Middle Kingdom until then.¹⁷ Shortly after the consistory, when Cardinal Tien was invited to the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, the Dean of the theological faculty, Fr. Jean de Menasce, concluded his introductory remarks with the words:

“It’s the Church of China, militant and crucified, which we welcome in the person of his Eminence.”¹⁸ It was also a recognition of China “[...] the greatest nation of the world, of the Celestial Empire, which was civilized long before our Western world and to which the centuries taught the wisdom and the philosophy, from which we drifted away.”¹⁹

¹⁶ The author, an ex-SVD born in 1931, emeritus of sociology and anthropology of Indiana University, South Bend, did scientific field work in New Guinea on kinship and marriage patterns (1962-1965) and was employed at San Carlos University (1967) as an associate professor, the year after he received his Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Chicago. In the introduction to the Tien biography he wrote: “One day, Fr. Thomas Krosnicki, then the mission treasurer at Techny, asked me if I would be interested in writing a biography of Cardinal Tien “not too long and no footnotes”. It was to be something popular but it turned out to be the most extensive biography of cardinal Tien written in impeccable English. Sources/AG SVD Obituaries 1970-1974 [a].

¹⁷ The Catholic mission in China experienced a steady growth in the numbers of Catholics, about 2 million in 1918 and mission territories: 1923: 66, 1926:76, 1932: 118 and 1948:146. The National Council in Shanghai (1924) encouraged the creation of native bishops and regional seminaries, which increased from 12 in 1933 to 22 in 1939. Costantini founded the first local congregation: *Discipuli Domini* (1931). Also, the Catholic laity gave their best – mainly in the areas of charity, education and medical care. They were drawn to the Catholic Action movement and to the *Legio Mariae*. The Legion of Mary, in particular, was treasured very much by Cardinal Tien in Peking. He zealously encouraged it also in Taiwan where the *Legio Mariae* was giving worthwhile help in a diocesan Bible crusade. Tien met the members of *Legio* during his visit in Ireland in 1961 (Miotk, 189-195).

¹⁸ “C’est cette Église de Chine, militante et crucifiée ; que nous saluons en vous, Éminence, en nous réjouissant du fond du Cœur de l’honneur, que le Saint Père vient de faire à votre personne et à votre grand pays”. Henninger to Grendel. Sources/AG SVD 29 [b].

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Tien was a Chinese cardinal with a native son's pride in the five-thousand-year history of his country. But at the same time he was taking a step towards a universal greatness. It must be remembered that it was the Society of the Divine Word which had helped to mold his spirit with its universal and international interests.

Pope Pius XII, in his first consistory, held seven years into his long pontificate (1939-1958), took a historic step toward internationalizing the central government of the Church. With one stroke, he almost doubled the number of cardinals without exceeding the sixteenth century limit of 70 cardinals in the college. Though there were only four Italians among the new cardinals, there was one Armenian, Agagianian; one Chinese, Tien; three Germans, Frings, von Gallen, von Preysing; one Hungarian, Mindszenty; one Pole, Sapieha as well as several Americans from the USA.²⁰ In an unprecedented move, the pope named so many cardinals that Rome appeared as the Universal City – *Caput Mundi*, par excellence – with the gaze of the whole Catholic world turned toward it (Traniello 807). Pius XII shook the traditional Catholic bastion of Europe in a move to underscore the supranational character and universal unity of the Catholic Church. There was, however, one embarrassing side effect.²¹ He emphasized the Church's global nature as well as the mission of the Church aimed at preserving and promoting the dignity of the human person from what he called "modern imperialism", focused on expansion for its own sake and the exploitation of peoples. Shocked by the disasters of the recently ended Second World War, Pius XII wanted to stress that it is only the universal Church which can fully guarantee a meaningful and durable peace among nation-states and within societies (Ventresca 285). In this general context, the figure of Tien was closely tied to the pope's strong push for the internationalization of the Catholic Church. His figure acquired iconic significance as he highlighted the universality of the Church in which the Chinese nation found visible representation at the highest level of the Catholic Church's government.

²⁰ The consistory Pius XII the opportunity to reward American Catholics for their strong moral and material support of his policies during the time of the World War II. The pope appointed Francis Spellman of New York, Edward Mooney of Detroit, Samuel Stritch of Chicago and John Glennon of St. Louis to the *Collegium Cardinalitium* (Ventresca, 284).

²¹ "For the first time in history, a contingent of cardinals designate, including Bishop Tien of China, travelled by air to receive the customary red hat. In a telling sign of the state of affairs in Italy at war's end, Vatican tailors did not have enough material to outfit all of the new cardinals with the robes proper to their new offices, leaving the American designates and Bishop Tien to borrow from the wardrobes of several deceased American cardinals". Ibid.

Recognition of missionary Church in China

Nearly a half century into the twentieth century, the Catholic presence in China had increased dramatically. Between 1900 and 1946, the number of Catholics had grown from 741,562 to 4 million. Unfortunately, however, the mission in China grew up “in the shadow of colonialism” and by the beginning of the twentieth century was suffering greatly under the impact of the anti-foreign and anti-Christian storm of 1900 in China, led by the Boxer rebels. To the Chinese, the activity of the missionaries bore the stamp of territorial feudalism and of strongly westernized missionary methods lacking deeper roots in Chinese soil. Local mission personnel were considered auxiliaries strengthening the European missionary presence. This eventually produced tensions and a sense of dualism.

Tien’s elevation was the fruit of concentrated efforts aimed at reforming earlier mission practices in China. In compliance with the guidelines of apostolic letter *Maximum illud* (1919) and later of the encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* (1926), the Holy See strongly supported the struggle against the plague of nationalism and promoted native priests and bishops without exercising any colonial style control. Archbishop Celso Costantini,²² the new Apostolic Delegate for China (1922), aimed at establishing a self-governing and self-reliant local Chinese Church with its own well-trained clergy, sisters and laity (Bevans and Schroeder 246). These directives met significant resistance from some religious orders but also found courageous protagonists.²³ The Apostolic Delegate encouraged the major orders of the urgent need to give more space to the local bishops in the management of the Chinese Church. Costantini presided over the first council of the Catholic Church in Shanghai (1924) and champi-

²² Celso Costantini, born in Zoppola in northern Italy in 1876 and ordained a priest in 1899, had enormous impact on the Catholic Church’s attitude toward mission. He was appointed by Pius XI as Apostolic Delegate to China (1922-1933) and afterwards served as Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith in Rome (1935-1953). He was elevated to the college of cardinals in 1953 and died on 17 October 1958 on the eve of the election of his friend, Angelo Roncalli, as Pope John XXIII. He was a prolific writer, author of 5 volumes of personal reflections covering all the events of his long and eventful life. During his sojourn in China he dealt with the tension existing between the Chinese clergy and the foreign priests, the renewal of the apostolate among Chinese intellectuals and the liberation of the Church from the political influence of the French protectorate. He possessed a natural talent for selecting gifted and well-informed advisors (Camps 170).

²³ Even though all the congregations (Lazarists, Spanish Dominicans) had not taken Vatican guidelines seriously, they nonetheless felt obliged to correct their course. Some enlightened foreign missionaries pursued radical renewal, e.g. Fr. Vincent Lebbe (1879-1940), who didn’t hesitate to leave the Lazarists, to structurally confirm his prophetic vision of an entirely Chinese Church (Lazzarotto 45).

oned the consecration of six Chinese bishops in Rome (1926).²⁴ Attempts were made to unify mission methods and to adapt the Christian message to the Chinese context with a decree that allowed Chinese Catholics to observe their ancestral rites and to participate in ceremonies honoring Confucius (1939). Cardinal Tien fully supported the new attempts while addressing all priests and seminarians in China in his “A Leaf from my Missionary Handbook” (1949):

“What the Church teaches is the constant and unchanging Truth. It remains always the same in spite of the change in time and circumstances. It is the Eternal Truth. But the method and the times and the people; they should vary or be adjusted accordingly, or otherwise they fail to answer the prevailing needs, and fail consequently, to win the hearts of the people. The single key to missionary success is the adaptation to the people and circumstances. It is the maxim to be followed by every zealous missionary.”²⁵

In line with Pius XI’s advocacy of the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy, Bishop Tien had been propagating Catholic Action on Chinese soil. All these reforms were accompanied under favorable circumstances in China itself. In Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the Kuomintang and of the Chinese government, the Catholic Church found a surprising ally. After embracing Christianity (he was baptized in 1930) under the influence of his second Christian wife known as Madame Chiang, he personally favored Christianity.²⁶ Catholics were on good terms with the central national government. Chiang Kai-Shek and Madame Song were very well-disposed toward Cardinal Tien.

²⁴ In 1924, the first mission territories of Puchi and of Lihsian were assigned to the Chinese clergy. Later, the number increased from 20 in 1933 to 35 in 1948. In 1918 China had 834 Chinese priests, i.e., 35 % of all priests in China. In 1926 the number was 1,184 or 41 % of the total of 1,723 priests. There was a gradual increase in seminarians as well: 1918 (576), 1927 (783), 1932 (1,069) and 1946 (1,212). Also the correlation between foreign missionaries and local priests shifted favorably: 1900: 900 foreigners to 471 Chinese; 1920: 1,365 to 966; 1934: 2,443 to 1,559; 1948: 3,015 to 2,676 (Miotk 195).

²⁵ Cited after (Clarke 198).

²⁶ Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) – leader of the Chinese Nationalist Party Kuomintang (1912) after death of its founder Sun Yat-sen in 1925, broke with the Communist Party (1927) and decided to annihilate the Communists. This entailed deep polarization in Chinese society and a series of upheavals. It was only with the Japanese invasion in North China in 1937, did Chiang Kai-shek agree to form a common anti-Japanese front with Mao Tse-tung’s Communists. The Communists seized power in 1949 and forced Chiang Kai-shek’s government and army to retreat to Taiwan, where he ruled with American backing as President of the Republic of China and General of the Kuomintang until his death in 1975, one year before Mao’s own death.

J. Chiang Kai-shek believed that the spiritual power of Christianity and the propriety of ancient Chinese traditions, could together succeed in solving China’s psychological and spiritual problems (Powell 111-114).

After World War II, the prospects for the Catholic Church in China were very promising. Despite material losses, the church emerged spiritually stronger, especially through the services it had rendered to the country. Christians across China showed their patriotism by sheltering refugees in their buildings and caring for the wounded in their hospitals.²⁷ The creation of Bishop Tien²⁸ as a cardinal and the institution of a Chinese hierarchy drew greater attention of educated people to the presence of the Catholic Church in China.

At the suggestion of Pope Pius XII, China's new cardinal presented to Rome a memorandum on the state and the problems of the Church in China. His positive assessments led to the establishment of the Chinese Hierarchy with the decree *Quotidie Nos* on 11 April 1946 and Tien's appointment as Archbishop of Peking.²⁹ Now, all three of China's metropolitan areas: Nanking (Yü Pin), Peking (Tien) and Nanchang (Zhou Jishi) were in Chinese hands (*ex gremio suae gentis*) and Tien was to assume the leadership of the Catholic Church of China. Initially, following the war with Japanese, the Communists in 1945 gave hope to Christians for peaceful symbiosis. But, shortly after, the situation deteriorated and grew more complicated. The implacable dislike of Communism and Rome's support for the Kuomintang closed the doors on any agreement with the Communist Party. The Communists organized anti-Christian rallies, knocked down mission stations and accused missionaries of various crimes. They painted Christianity as the main enemy of the new order which they aimed to introduce after seizing power in China. They openly organized campaigns of hatred against Christians throughout the country. Their systematic persecution of Christians started with the proclamation in 1950 of a decree on combating anti-revolutionary activities.³⁰

²⁷ Additionally, the positive role of the Church was enhanced in 1947 by the screening in many Chinese cities of a documentary on the commitment of Catholic missionaries during the Japanese invasion (Bornemann 285).

²⁸ Tien was among 12 missionary bishops from different nationalities consecrated personally by pope Pius XII in St. Peter Basilica on the feast of Christ the King, 29 October 1939. His appointment was influenced by Fr. Superior General Grendel, SVD. During the papal audience, Pius XII encouraged the bishops to encourage the growth of the native church (Fleckner 1975, 49-50).

²⁹ Thomas Tien was appointed archbishop of Peking on 11 May 1946 and took possession of his see on 29 June. The Chinese Church was made up of 20 ecclesiastical provinces, 137 vicariates and prefectures apostolic with over 4 million Chinese Catholics. 28 of these 137 ecclesiastical circumscriptions were led by Chinese, of whom 21 were bishops. Among the native clergy there were 28 Chinese ordinaries, including 21 bishops, as well as 2,008 priests (out of a total of 5,005), 4,405 nuns and sisters and 735 brothers. The Chinese hierarchy was just emerging from its infant stages and the following years would decimate these numbers (Chong 148; Maloof 13).

³⁰ Some representatives of Christian churches signed the *Christian Manifesto* (1950) a pledge of loyalty to the new Chinese Government, which accepted the so-called "three principles of autonomy: self-support (the rejection of any aid from abroad), self-propagation (proclamation of the Gospel without any help of foreign missionaries), and self-government (management of the Church

Self-actualization of the Catholic World Church

In 1950, Thomas Tien, as the first Chinese cardinal and a great promoter of the devotion to Our Lady of China, was present in Rome for the proclamation of the Dogma of the Assumption of Mary. Thus, in cardinal Tien, Chinese Catholics made their presence felt for the first time at the highest levels of the Church's doctrinal authority and governance. Later, Cardinal Tien was in Rome for the two conclaves of 1958 and 1963 which gave to the church two great popes of the Catholic *Aggiornamento*: John XXIII and Paul VI. He was the first Chinese ever to participate in the election of a new pope in 1958 just two months after his tragic automobile accident in Germany in which he almost died. Encouraged from many sides, he set out for Rome by special plane and was warmly welcomed in Rome as a hero by all the members of the Sacred College of Cardinals. Pierre-Marie Cardinal Gerlier, Archbishop of Lyons, reported: "We had the good fortune to see among us, in spite of his infirmities, the venerable Cardinal Tien, the Cardinal of China, whom the applause, very rare in such an enclosure, saluted when he entered sick in the room of the conclave..."³¹.

Only after the election of John XXIII was Tien brought into the Sistine chapel where, instead of him going up to pay homage to the new pope, John XXIII rose from his throne and came down to embrace Cardinal Tien in a kind and cordial manner, a gesture that moved him profoundly. The Cardinal's trip aroused liveliest interest in the press, not only due the curiosity but also due to his amiability and courage.³²

Cardinal Tien also attracted attention at the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council where he participated in two sessions. He was named one of the 36 cardinal members of the Council's Central Preparatory Commission (1960) and was also appointed to the Commission on Missions (1962). Although he participated in two of that commission's general sessions, he had little if any influence on the final document *Ad gentes*. He chaired the 59 Chinese voting

independent of the Holy See.). The internuncio Riberi was expelled from China along with more than 1,000 priests, brothers and nuns (Myers 139).

³¹ During the conclave, Cardinal Tien remained in bed, accompanied by his two doctors. At each vote, Cardinal Feltrin, the Archbishop of Paris, entered Tien's little room in Vatican to collect his vote in a special urn (25-28 October 1958).

³² On the return flight from Rome Cardinal Tien was accompanied by the German Minister of the Exterior, von Brentano and the Mayor of Siegburg, who gave transported the Cardinal in his private car from the airport to the hospital in Siegburg. The head physician was moved by the words of Cardinal Tien: "I want to go back to those who saved my life in Siegburg". Tien survived the critical moments after his accident due to the exemplary and unselfish care from the physicians who accompanied him to Rome. In gratitude for their service, they were awarded the Cross of St. Gregory (*His Eminence Cardinal Tien, 4; Cardinal Tien's Trip to and from Rome, 84*).

members at the council. By his mere presence he promoted mission interest for China and advertised the great needs of the Church of China through press conferences, numberless receptions and talks in many countries. After the election of Giovanni Battista Montini as Paul VI, Tien addressed the pope in the name of all Asian bishops (June 1963) asking for the creation of a Secretariat for Non-Christians, which became a reality on 19 May 1964.³³ Tien personally visualized the first official self-actualization of Catholicism as a World Church as claimed later by Karl Rahner.³⁴ But his real influence on Vatican II was limited since Tien was above all a praxis-oriented man, with little aptitude for theological or sociological analysis.³⁵ Cardinal Tien fully supported the liturgical reform with the liturgy in Chinese vesture. The liturgy was his passion. From the very beginning, he was convinced for pastoral reasons that it should be celebrated in Chinese, that is in the language of the people. His efforts as well of the later chinese hierarchs led to the establishment of the Liturgical Commission of bishops of Taiwan, Makao and Hongkong. This commissions prepared the Missal in Chinese language in 1965.

³³ Tien felt that, since the major non-Christian religions were concentrated in Asia, the idea should not be launched by an Indian bishop, as planned, but by a European. "In the East we have a saying," he said, "that you should not invite yourself." Cardinal Tien also believed that the Vatican would more readily accept the proposal if it were made by a European, and he agreed to make a statement to the press in support of the secretariat, once a Council Father had come out publicly in favor of it (Wiltgen 74).

³⁴ The Council "admitted the vernacular into the liturgy, provided for the establishment of the international Synod of Bishops, gave new status to regional and national bishops' conferences, and endorsed the principle of missionary accommodation. Since the council the trend has been carried further by the trend away from the Latin liturgy, the increased vitality of the Church in the Third World, and the global travels of Paul VI and John Paul II" (Dulles 1-2).

³⁵ (Fleckner 1975, 119). In the first major biography of the Cardinal, Fr. Johannes Fleckner, SVD (1911-2003) wrote that as a child he had dreamt to be a missionary in China. He reached China on the Trans Siberian railway in 1940 after studies at the Jesuit run Gregorian University and his ordination in Rome. He served in China for 15 years until his expulsion in 1955. He accompanied the first Chinese cardinal to the conclave of 1958. To preserve the memory of the cardinal, Fr. Fleckner embarked on the difficult task of writing his biography, privileged to know him personally for many years but restricted by his inability to access the bishops' archives of Kangku, Qingdao and Peking due to the political situation. His substantial biography was based mainly on reports and interviews of eye-witnesses and on accessible publications. He visited Taiwan and consulted the SVD Generalate Archives in Rome. This basic biography is fact oriented without taking the larger context into consideration (Rivinius 7-14).

Cardinal Tien and the Divine Word Missionaries

Tien as keystone of the SVD China-Mission

For the Society of the Divine Word, mission work in China was of the utmost importance. It was the first mission of the Society and one of the missionaries, Fr. Johann Schütte, SVD, largely responsible for the Council Decree *Ad gentes*, was elected Superior General of the Society (1958-1967). The European missionaries also made a visible contribution for the establishment of native Church with some 150 Chinese priests, of whom four became bishops (Bornemann 279). Of all the SVDs missioned to China, about 120 were buried in Chinese soil. Ten died for the faith and many others eventually spent months and years in communist prisons. Their total dedication is beyond question and Chinese Catholics today display a heroic spirit inherited from them. Tens of thousands of Chinese Catholics persevered for dozens of years without priests and sacraments, carried solely by their unquenchable faith, hope and love. Over the years, many of them endured forced labor, imprisonment and even martyrdom. Tien's appointment as Cardinal was a great tribute to the work accomplished by the Society of the Divine Word in China, especially within the areas of the formation of the native Church and local clergy. Archbishop Paul Yü Pin³⁶ sincerely admitted late that "He would not be a cardinal were it not for the SVD" (Brandewie 2007, 15). Tien's promotion was a token of things to come, of the changing times where the missionaries were to give way and take on more of an auxiliary role as the love of the SVDs for China would become "less self-centered (Bornemann 320).

Tien's elevation crowned the many efforts and sacrifices of the Divine Word Missionaries during the almost 70 years of their presence in China. In him "a humble outgrowth of the Divine Word, catechetical schools and seminaries testified before the world to the maturity of faith of the Chinese Catholics."³⁷

³⁶ Like Tien, Paul Yü Pin (1901-1978) from Manchuria was orphaned age seven. He was baptized in 1914 after getting to know missionary priests near Lanshi, where he lived with his grandfather. After studies at the Jesuit Aurora University in Shanghai, Yü Pin continued his education in Rome at the Urbanianum and S. Apollinare (doctorate in Theology) as well in Perugia's Royal University, where he earned doctorate in political science. After his 1928 ordination in Rome, he taught at the Urbanianum. At age 35, he was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Nanking (1936). With the entry of Japanese in 1937 he left China, went to USA and returned in 1946 to be Archbishop of Nanking – but only for three years. After Chiang Kai-shek, he was the second most wanted „war criminal“. After a stay in the USA, by the order of the pope he moved in Taiwan (1960), where he became the Rector of Fu Jen Catholic University. In Taiwan, Yü Pin supported Cardinal Tien in his activities (De Jaegher).

³⁷ (Schmitz 51); Bartley Schmitz, Cardinal's Tien's secretary published his biography based on his personal experiences of the Cardinal: *His Eminence Thomas Cardinal Tien (1890-1967) = Tian Gengxin Shuji*. Bilingual: Chinese and English, China Province, Taipei 1990, 102 pp. Schmitz,

In his reply to the letter of Dom Pierre Celestin, OSB, (Lou Tseng-Tsiang – 陸徵祥), Abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of Sint Andries in Bruges, Belgium, in which the abbot congratulated the Society on Tien's appointment, the Superior General, Fr. Joseph Grendel, SVD, replied: "China is our first mission which has and will have the first place in our hearts. Cardinal Tien's elevation is for us a cause of great joy and an honor to the Church's missionary efforts in China."³⁸

Tien's work was in line with the Society's great contribution in the field of education, especially after taking over the direction of Fu Jen Catholic University in Peking in 1933. By 1949, Fu Jen had more than 16,000 students. This university, with its particular emphasis on the thorough study of the Chinese cultural heritage, had three faculties – liberal arts, natural sciences, and education – divided into twelve departments. In connection with the University, the Society opened the *Collegium Sinicum Ecclesiasticum* (1938), meant for the formation of local clergy, which offered to young, gifted Chinese priests the possibility of a good preparation for special tasks through higher studies.³⁹ These priests and Fu Jen's catholic students had access to what was best in the Chinese cultural heritage. The university published three reviews of Chinese studies (*Fu Jen University Studies*, *Monumenta Serica*, *Folklore*) and opened an ethological museum. A Department of Chinese Art was also created, which produced some valuable pieces of Christian Art: *Ars Sacra Pekinensis* (Charbonnier 408). Cardinal Tien continued as a keystone of the Society's missionary and educational work in China when it was later transferred to the island of Taiwan.

Finally, Cardinal Tien developed out of the Society of the Divine Word's pedagogical and spiritual legacy incarnated in his missionary work. He matured in the apostolic school of Bishop Augustin Henninghaus, SVD, (1862-1939) of Southern Shantung, an excellent administrator who favored Chinese bishops and was deeply involved in the formation of catechists. His true spiritual master was Fr. Joseph Freinademetz, SVD, who personally instructed him in the faith. They conversed often at Puoli. Tien admired Freinademetz for his open-mindedness, understanding and personal warmth:

"I could not help but love him for he was so meek and kind. [...] Whether he was with men or women, high or low, learned or ignorant, he was all things to all men ... He was the servant of all... I may truthfully say that I have never seen a more perfect priest than Father Freinademetz" (Schmitz 50).

a former China missionary, was asked by the Cardinal in 1959 to be his English secretary. Following the cardinal's death, Fr. Schmitz promoted his cause for canonization.

³⁸ Grendel to Lou Tsang-Tsiang. Sources/AG SVD 27 [c].

³⁹ During World War II some 40-50 priests studied at the *Collegium Sinicum*, two thirds of them were studying Chinese Language and Literature. A few also went to Europe for higher studies (Beckmann 12).

He was deeply impressed by the always happy man, by his eloquence, naturalness, simplicity and humility. Fr. Joseph was his model during all the years of his seminary training.⁴⁰ “Among the missionaries in China I know of no one more holy than Fr. Freinademetz, who was all to all”, said the Cardinal in Sankt Gabriel during celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of Freinademetz’ death.⁴¹ His affinity to St. Joseph Freinademetz explains his spirituality of heart, full of compassionate warmth which finds its opposite pole and completion in the more theological and rational spirituality of the Founder, St. Arnold Janssen.

Enlightened and overexerted Pastor of Peking

As priest and bishop, Thomas Tien embodied all the concerns of the Society of the Divine Word in the field of education and in the thorough formation of the Chinese clergy. In the very complex and confused reality of Peking, he found his way – to the surprise of many – as a good organizer.⁴² As Archbishop of Peking, Tien was opened to people of all walks of life and accessible to meet all people, in fact he was the warm-hearted pastor of people.⁴³ He appointed some of his priests to care for refugees fleeing from the advancing

⁴⁰ On 15 April 1952, centenary of Freinademetz’ birth, Cardinal Tien shared his impressions of Joseph Freinademetz with the Techny community (*Arnoldus Nota*, 1952: 169-170).

⁴¹ The celebration took place on 28 January 1958 (*The celebration of the 50th anniversary*, 14). He wrote “While I was a seminarian, I noticed how Joseph always knelt in the sanctuary in church. It was a powerful experience to see him in prayer before the tabernacle. Other missionaries were no less zealous than he was, but for us Chinese, their manner was somewhat too aggressive and often too inconsiderate. This was not the case with Joseph. He was always available to others and sacrificed himself to the utmost limit of self-forgetfulness. His piety was natural and attractive. He always remained his friendly self. He was indeed a perfect man”. See webpage Of the Society of the Divine Word – China Province (*Thomas Cardinal Tien, SVD*).

⁴² When Thomas Tien succeeded his one-time seminary rector, Bishop Georg Weig, SVD, as Vicar Apostolic of Tsingtao, Fr. Karl Hentrich, SVD, announced the new bishop as follows: “If God gives His graces to persons of great humility, and He does so, then Bishop Tien will have God’s graces in abundance. You could often see two persons dashing on their bicycles (a bicycle in China is the missionary’s best friend!) through their mission territory, to the North and South, to the East and West. They are simple and poor; they are dressed in the ordinary long Chinese clothes – without any sign of dignity. But if they enter a large church, the choir will sing the *Ecce Sacerdos*. The one is Bishop Tien, the other his servant boy. The Bishop lives the simple, ordinary life of the Chinese. The Christians are glad to see him – and they love him. He belongs to them. He has a kind word or a smile for everyone. He is the spiritual father of his children” (Fleckner 1975, 74-78 and Brandewie 2007, 99-105).

⁴³ Bishop Tien led a very sober lifestyle and was very parsimonious. “He never had a car or even a horse to get around with, though he might hitch a ride on a wagon going in his direction.” (Maloof 8).

Communists and some 1,400 refugees were given shelter in his *Beitang* Cathedral (Chinese: 北堂; literally: “the North Church”).

Giving priority to the formation of human hearts of his future priests, Tien wanted to meet each student of his major seminary once a week.⁴⁴ Instead of the historic four parishes, within two years he had created 15 new parishes and entrusted them to various religious orders and congregations. He also asked all mission houses to open their internal chapels for pastoral activities. He organized monthly pastoral conferences for priests in his residence and invited his collaborators to regular spiritual recollections at the Cathedral. In him, spirituality blended harmoniously with pastoral activities.⁴⁵

During his various visitations, he emphasized the importance of priestly example while repeating: “one must be warm oneself before one can warm others.”⁴⁶ His main priority was the school apostolate and long-term programs of intellectual formation. Cardinal Tien supported the organization of all catholic students in Peking and created “Institutum Thomae”, a twice-monthly magazine with articles of scientific and literary merit. Tien asked all religious congregations to promote the school apostolate and to follow the example of the Salesians by opening a professional school in each main mission station.⁴⁷

When he was introduced to priests and clergy in Peking, the speeches during the festive act were in Latin and French but he himself spoke in Chinese:

“I am amazed that the seminarians here have so much time to spend learning French. Do they intend to go to France and be missionaries there? We in Yen-chowfu also learned some German, a few of us quite well but we always had lectures in Chinese since we were to be missionaries in China. We had to study the Chinese classics besides preparing and delivering sermons in Chinese” (Bornemann, 82).

⁴⁴ Tien cared a lot for the thorough formation of the native clergy and for new vocations. He built up a minor seminary, which in a short time was recognized as an institute of the middle school class due to the high respect in which Cardinal Tien was held all over China (Bornemann 277).

⁴⁵ Cardinal Tien was deeply immersed in the life of prayer. His spirituality centered mainly on his hour’s meditation and the Eucharist followed by thanksgiving. His Marian devotion was marked by the Rosary and the imitation of her humble attitude of listening to the Word of God.

⁴⁶ When in Taiwan, Cardinal Tien was against priests “doing business” for their living. He personally visited any priests that were sick, even if that meant a three 3 hour trip to Lotung on the east coast. He kept strict accounts of his own Mass stipends and expected others to do so as well. He dismissed his trusted procurator for his unwise investment of some church funds. He observed poverty in his private life. His food, clothing and housing were all simple. When he visited a parish, he usually went unannounced in order to get a true impression of how his priests lived.

⁴⁷ Protestants in China, though less than one third the number of Catholics, were far ahead of the Catholics with 18 colleges and universities (Catholics had 3) and with 280 secondary schools. Catholics had less than 100 (Brandewie 2007, 102).

This speech was indirectly a severe reproach of the former administration of the Peking diocese. At the same time, he praised the atmosphere at the Yen-chowfu seminary – directed by non-Chinese SVD missionaries.⁴⁸ His vision laid solid foundations for the Chinese Catholic Church.

Example of mutual collaboration *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*

Cardinal Tien also set an example of good collaboration and mutual support between the bishops who came out of the Society and the Society's superiors. The Society of the Divine Word continually assisted its first cardinal and was concerned that he had good advisers. This was an especially great preoccupation during the difficult time after Tien was forced to leave his episcopal see in Peking. The Superior General didn't want him to give any reason for acting against the directives of the Holy See. On the other hand, Cardinal Tien always maintained close connections with the Society, even though he had entered the society as diocesan priest at the age of 39 (1929).⁴⁹ SVD communities received him with great kindness and hospitality and he himself liked to stay in the Society houses. His recollected and prayerful attitude as well as his always genuine gratitude for what anybody did for him endeared him to all and gained him sympathy. Cardinal Tien was continually in touch with the Society and there exists a regular correspondence between the Cardinal and the Society's superiors that testifies to mutual harmonious collaboration "*Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*".

Cardinal Tien's personality and fame as the first Chinese cardinal helped him to win support for his projects. His visit to England, Scotland, with a reception in Glasgow, and Ireland in September of 1961, was a successful event filled with meetings, receptions with the highest authorities and with Chinese students. A reception held in his honor in St. George's Hall at Liverpool was attended by over 2,000 people. In Ireland all his movements were regularly reported in media. In Dublin, he was received by Irish president Éamon de

⁴⁸ In his archdiocese, within two years Tien had increased the number of parishes from four to 19. He handed them over to religious congregations (thus doing away with the exclusiveness of the Lazarists). He also created the SVD parish of Fu Jen, which was the second largest of the 19 parishes with 2,500 Catholics in a population of 70,000 unbelievers. The parish had a very active *Legio Marie* (Bornemann 312).

⁴⁹ Tien joined the Society inspired by the example of Joseph Freinademetz and SVD missionaries. He was familiar with and appreciated the SVD way even if he had to give up smoking and to take the awful German classes. He also saw the advantages of being a member of an international Society. He could count on both spiritual and material support for his work. He entered the novitiate in Taikia, guided by the younger Fr. Theodor Schu, SVD, future bishop of Yanzhou and took his first vows in 1931 and his perpetual vows in 1935 (Brandewie 2007, 44). In all, 40 Chinese were accepted into SVD novitiate between 1924 and 1950 and 11 were ordained to priesthood.

Valera at a state dinner for 140 guests.⁵⁰ His stay in the United States was also filled with meetings in SVD seminaries and accolades at Fordham and Creighton universities. Also his trip to Portugal (Fatima) and Spain in April of 1963, with stops in all the SVD communities, was successful in every respect. “Daily newspapers kept the countries regularly informed about the cardinal’s movements and messages about China and Taiwan”. It was also great publicity for the SVDs (*Ambassador of Good Will*, 215-219). Cardinal Tien was grateful to the Society for its continuous support and for the goodness which he experienced during his time of exile in America and Germany. He admitted: “Every good thing came to me from the Society” (*His Eminence in Rome*, 3).

Bridge between old and new times

Cardinal Tien’s onetime secretary, Fr. Clifford King, SVD, reported to the Superior General from Good Samaritan Hospital in Cincinnati in 1951 that the Cardinal “plans on returning to the Far East before the end of this year, if conditions at all permit such transfer.”⁵¹ He intends to go back to Hong Kong, or possibly, to Formosa, in order to take up quasi-residence until he can return to his see in Peking.”⁵² But, there was no assignment to Cardinal Tien after leaving China that could be viewed as a reaction of Pope Pius XII to the abandonment of his post in Peking. He lived the uncertainty of his exile in a spirit of resignation to God’s providence: “I do not know what is in store for me, but I am fully resigned to whatever God in His mercy may permit to befall me”⁵³. His attitude wasn’t passive waiting because he actively sought to help the cause of the Church in China. He was repeatedly urged by the National government of Chiang Kai-shek to live in Formosa. Accordingly, he decided to communicate his desire to Propaganda Fide. The answer was negative and he accepted it: “*Roma locuta, causa finite.*”⁵⁴

⁵⁰ The report on these visits is found in *Arnoldus Nota*, July-August 1962: 139-142. Speaking at the dinner, the Cardinal thanked the Government and people of Ireland for the wonderful hospitality he had received during his visit. China looked to Ireland as an example, since Ireland had suffered so much in the past and had grown strong in the Faith. Tien expressed hope that the same thing would also happen with China.

⁵¹ At times he was “acutely homesick” for China without knowing if he would ever be able to return to his See in Peking. There was constant fear he would lose his eyesight. “I have no guarantee that this will not be the case. Hence, you see I must resign myself to the prospect of becoming blind, if such should be God’s holy will. However, I am not yet losing hope of retaining at least partial eyesight”. Tien to Anthony May. Sources/AG SVD 27 [d].

⁵² Fr. King to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [e].

⁵³ Tien to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [f].

⁵⁴ Tien to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [g].

Deeply concerned over the Chinese communists' efforts to establish a tame "national" Catholic Church in schism from Rome, Pius XII's successor John XXIII thought differently.⁵⁵ Roncalli felt that Cardinal Tien could serve on Formosa as a rallying point for Asian Catholicism and as a symbol of papal interest in the Far East.⁵⁶ With the resignation of Joseph Guo, Archbishop of Taipei, the Holy See seized the opportunity and appointed Cardinal Tien Apostolic Administrator of Taipei on 20 December 1959. He served with great success in this capacity in Taiwan for five years, despite his steadily worsening health. After years of exile he confessed to the Superior General: "Of course, of course, I realize that my acceptance of that heavy burden of responsibility may have had the result of rapidly sapping the remainder of the energy that remains to me, but it makes me feel very happy to be able to make that sacrifice for the benefit of the persecuted Church of China."⁵⁷ Shortly thereafter, he added: "I welcome the chance to suffer a little for the Catholic cause among my fellow Chinese, knowing that my fellow bishops in China proper are suffering such bitter persecution for the faith."⁵⁸ At his invitation, about 100 Chinese priests returned to Taiwan to support his work.⁵⁹ He built a good number of parish churches, along with a major seminary and a sizeable clinic (Tien Medical Center) and was also active in the reopening of the Fu Jen Catholic University in 1963 (*Your Kingdom Come*, 124).

ABSTRACT

That fact that Thomas Tien became the first cardinal of China and the Far East surpassed the wildest dreams of Fr. Arnold Janssen, the founder of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), who had sent the first two missionaries to China in 1879. He was one fruit of Janssen's decision and subsequent concentrated involvement of the Society in evangelizing China. This study gives an insight into historical greatness of

⁵⁵ One could notice Tian's likeness to the pope John XXIII: extraordinary personality, his charitable attitude, friendliness and attention regardless of the race and color.

⁵⁶ Fr. Konrad Keller states that the appointment of Cardinal Tien surfaced a farsighted vision of the Church, so that nothing is eternal on earth and that the political systems – which for a moment seem to be omnipotent – change and tumble over time. The situation will also change in China and then the figure of the cardinal could form a bridge between the past and the new times to come. Sometimes, the patience and the strategy of small steps pay off (36).

⁵⁷ Tien to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [h].

⁵⁸ Tien to Superior General. Sources/AG SVD 27 [i].

⁵⁹ He invited them personally to be missionaries of free China in Taiwan. They were mostly from America and Europe and, according the mission magazine ASIA for March 1960, formed a significant group out of total 454 priests living outside of China (Brandewie 169).

Thomas Cardinal Tien Keng-hsin for the Universal Church, the Society of the Divine Word and local Church in China. He emerges mainly as an iconic figure reflecting the developments in the Chinese Church and played a symbolical role for the universal Church as an important link in the process of internationalization of the Church and her subsequent self-actualization as a World Church at Vatican II. The study aims at making us aware that Tien's figure should have an integral place in the systematic and comprehensive research on the as yet little explored mission of the Society of the Divine Word in China.

Keywords: Cardinal Thomas Tien Keng-hsin; Church in China; The Second Vatican Council; Divine Word Missionaries in China

Słowa kluczowe: kardynał Thomas Tien Keng-hsin; Kościół w Chinach; Sobór Watykański II; werbiści w Chinach

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