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RESPONDING TO THE CALL: TOWARD A CHINESE CATHOLIC THEOLOGY IN DIALOGUE WITH THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

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Abstract

In light of the continuing development of theology in the local Church, the Chinese Catholic Church is called to draw from its rich spiritual and cultural treasures to articulate its own distinctive theological voice, so it can further its mission in China and contribute to the communal discernment of the universal Church. This article responds to this call by proposing a triple-engagement in doing Chinese Catholic theology and identifies its two unique Chinese characteristics. It argues that Chinese Catholic theology ought to be done by considering the sacramentality of the history of Chinese Catholicism, everyday encounters of faith and transformation of life through inculturation, and the lived experience of Chinese Catholics in all its complexity and diversity as three valid grounds for theological reflection, and with sustained attention to the contextual reality of mainland China and the ways in which Chinese Catholic identity is expressed in the Chinese

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language and popular pieties. This article concludes by noting that the task of doing Chinese Catholic theology is a vocational one and requires the collaborative creativity of Chinese Catholic theologians in dialogue with the universal Church.

Keywords: Catholic Theology, Chinese Catholic Church, Chinese Characteristics, Inculturation, Lived Experience, Marian Devotion, Sino-Vatican

Introduction

In his recent message to the Catholics of China and the universal Church, Pope Francis extols the Chinese Catholic Church in mainland China for the gift of their fidelity, constancy, and firm trust in divine providence and urges the universal Church,

Dear brothers and sisters of the universal Church, all of us are called to recognize as one of the signs of our times everything that is happening today in the life of the Church in China. We have an important duty: to accompany our brothers and sisters in China with fervent prayer and fraternal friendship... Each local Catholic community in every part of the world should make an effort to appreciate and integrate the spiritual and cultural treasures proper to Chinese Catholics. The time has come to taste together the genuine fruits of the Gospel sown in the ancient “Middle Kingdom” and to raise to the Lord Jesus Christ a hymn of faith and thanksgiving, enriched by authentically Chinese notes.¹

As the universal Church is called to turn its attention to the life of the Church in China and accompany its Chinese brothers and sisters in their journey of faith, the Chinese Catholic Church is facing an urgent need to further its mission in China and contribute to the communal discernment of the universal Church. While the “spiritual and cultural treasures” abound in the Chinese Catholic Church, they are yet to be fully explored and theologized in light of the lived reality of Chinese Catholics. Further, the Bishops’ Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC) and the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CCPA) have also called for the development of creative theology and expression of Chinese Catholicism and their integration with the lived experience of Chinese Catholics in the newly published *Five-Year Sinicization Plan (2018-22)* following the signing of the Provisional Agreement last

¹Francis, “Message of the Holy Father to the Catholics of China and to the Universal Church,” September 26, 2018, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180926_messaggio-cattolici-cinesi.html.

September.² Thus, the Chinese Catholic Church must draw from the rich well of its faithful witness to deepen its self-understanding and further its development by doing Chinese Catholic theology. It must find its own distinctive theological voice from the lived reality and experience of Chinese Catholic communities in dialogue with the deep theological tradition of the universal Church. This article seeks to respond this call by proposing a triple-engagement in doing Chinese Catholic theology with attention to its two unique Chinese characteristics. It argues that Chinese Catholic theology ought to engage with the sacramentality of the history of Chinese Catholicism, everyday encounters of faith and transformation of life through inculturation, and the lived experience of Chinese Catholics in all its complexity and diversity. It considers all these aspects valid and valuable grounds for theological reflection. This article also argues that the task of doing Chinese Catholic theology needs to grant sustained attention to its two unique Chinese characteristics – the contextual reality of mainland China with all its tensions and hopes and Chinese expressions constitutive to Chinese Catholic identity, including the Chinese language and popular pieties. It notes that Marian devotion is one of the most visible expressions of popular piety in China. Doing Chinese Catholic theology in mainland China is a creative and challenging task. It seeks to assist the self-understanding and self-articulation of Chinese Catholics' faithful witness to the presence of living Christ in their daily life and contribute to the mutual discernment of the universal Church. It is a vocational task for Chinese Catholic theologians in furthering the mission of the Catholic Church in China, not in isolation, but in dialogue with the universal Church.

Doing Chinese Catholic Theology through Triple Engagement

Engagement with the History of Chinese Catholicism

Human history is sacramental – a sign and instrument of the presence of God. The eternity, which is a fully eschatological mystery, is accomplished in our human history.³ The task of

²Yi Hui Yi Tuan 一会一团 [CCPA and BCCCC], “推进我国天主教坚持中国化方向五年工作规划 (2018 - 2022) [Five-Year Sinicization Plan (2018-2022)],” 中国天主教 [Catholic Church in China], October 8, 2018, <http://www.chinacatholic.cn/html1/report/1810/224-1.htm>. The translation of this document used in this article is my own.

³Edward Schillebeeckx et al., *Sacramentalizing Human History: In Honour of Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009)*, London: SCM Press, 2012, 29.

theology is to make visible this sacramentality of history.⁴ While still in its infancy, Chinese Catholic theology ought to heed this call to render apparent that the history of Chinese Catholicism is sacramental, in and through which the living Christ remains present in the Church.

The memory of the Chinese Catholic Church, remained in the history of Chinese Catholicism, continues to produce abundant fruits in contemporary Chinese society. Its enduring presence in local Chinese Catholic communities and the psyche of individual Chinese Catholics, though at times remote, lies beneath the life of the Church everyday and witnesses to the living Christ. The faith of the forerunners in the Chinese Catholic Church is a permanent blessing that sacramentalizes the history of Chinese Catholicism, offering it to God to be the dwelling place of the living Christ. The memory of their faith continues to shape the identity of Chinese Catholics today in various communities. Henrietta Harrison, who conducted research on oral history in a Catholic village in Shanxi, observes that “histories about Chinese Catholics in the past are always about Chinese Catholics in the present.”⁵ She notes that this is a history that continues to be present in the consciousness of Chinese Catholics and shapes their self-understanding and decision-making in their daily lives. The collective and individual memory of Chinese Catholics is a legacy and a heritage of the Chinese Church.⁶ The enduring faith of Chinese Catholics in today’s local communities continues this legacy and announces the living memory of Jesus Christ through the telling and retelling of historical narratives.

The commitment to history and memory in theology has been modelled by M. Shawn Copeland, a renowned African-American Catholic theologian. She stresses the need for theologians to critically engage and appropriate the historical, cultural, and religious past and the way in which the theologians are formed by that engagement. She insists that Catholic theologians have a responsibility to encounter the community of the historic dead to allow their living to be challenged by the suffering and hope of those who have gone before them, “in fateful, humbling encounter with our historic dead, the theologians’ self-understanding and

⁴Schillebeeckx et al., *Sacramentalizing Human History*, 23.

⁵Henrietta Harrison, *The Missionary’s Curse and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village*, University of California Press, 2013, xiv.

⁶Anthony E. Clark, ed., *China’s Christianity: From Missionary to Indigenous Church*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017, 264.

horizons are put to the test.”⁷ While Copeland is speaking about African-American Catholic theologians in particular, her words also ring true for Chinese Catholic theologians.

There should be no doubt that the history of Chinese Catholicism is a vital source for theological reflection. Chinese Catholic theology, when drawing from the living memory of past Chinese Catholics’ faithful witness, acknowledges the presence of God in the Chinese Catholic Church throughout the centuries. It announces the theological meaning of remembrance, which according to Peter Phan is “to proclaim the great works of God (the *magnolia Dei*) and to rejoice and give thanks to God for the deeds God has done.”⁸

Engagement with Inculturation

In the *Five-Year Sinicization Plan (2018-22)*, BCCCC and CCPA emphasized the need for the inculturation of Catholic theology and the construction of Catholic theology with Chinese Church characteristics. It calls for a deepened learning of inculturation – both theory and praxis – in the universal Church.⁹ It is evident that the ecclesiastical authority in China acknowledges the urgent need for the development of Chinese Catholic theology and its engagement with the ongoing inculturation in the Chinese Catholic Church.

BCCCC and CCPA’s call for an inculturated theology is not an isolated phenomenon in the universal Church, given the continuing effort to develop theology in the local Church since the Second Vatican Council. Copeland urges African-American Catholic theologians to articulate theological understanding “from within and for the compound-complexity of black or African American culture” and hold theology answerable to the three-fold criteria of orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy.¹⁰ Diego Irarrázaval, writing in the Latin American context, mentions the need for theology to take seriously the process of inculturation and learn from the good work done in Asia and Africa.¹¹ Thus, the development of an inculturated theology in the Chinese Catholic Church is not only a response to the call of

⁷Jamie T. Phelps, ed., *Black and Catholic: The Challenge and Gift of Black Folk: Contributions of African American Experience and Thought to Catholic Theology*, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1997, 110.

⁸Peter C. Phan, *Asian Christianities: History, Theology, Practice*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2018, 277.

⁹CCPA and BCCCC, “Five-Year Sinicization Plan (2018-2022).”

¹⁰Phelps, *Black and Catholic*, 138–39.

¹¹Diego Irarrázaval, *Inculturation: New Dawn of the Church in Latin America*, Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2008, 1, 5.

ecclesiastical authority in China, but is also part of the communal theological discernment on inculturation in the universal Church. It is imperative that Chinese Catholic theologians draw from the profound wisdom and insights of theologians in the universal Church.

Chinese Catholic theological engagement with inculturation requires a renewed understanding of culture and the inculturation process. Gerald Arbuckle, an anthropologist from New Zealand, cautions against a static view of culture and stresses that theologians ought to start with an empirical approach that pays attention to the ways in which people live and search for meaning “in the midst of constant change, inner tensions, fragmentation, and struggles over resources and power.”¹² Thus, culture is better understood as the everyday life and is lived in the meaning of everyday things and happenings.¹³ When understood in this way, inculturation also takes place in the everyday life “in the unfolding of history.”¹⁴ It is the work of each community and encompasses all aspects of life in faith, having to do with everything done, believed, and celebrated by God’s people.¹⁵ It is a process that involves the entire people of God and is carried out by each ecclesial community that accepts the Spirit who challenges its cultural processes.¹⁶ True inculturation of faith requires people to encounter faith in their everyday cultural reality, so faith becomes embedded in their lives and experience.¹⁷ The transforming effect of this encounter in people’s lives and cultures is the key test of inculturation.¹⁸

Thus, through this understanding of culture and inculturation, theology becomes “an ongoing process.”¹⁹ If the process of inculturation is a journey in faith by which humankind responds to God’s initiative of salvation,²⁰ theological reflection on this process renders visible the transcendent presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit in every human community, for Christ is “the first foundation for inculturation”²¹ while the Holy Spirit is the “the true author of

¹²Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians: A Postmodern Critique*, Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2010, 139.

¹³Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 37.

¹⁴Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 3.

¹⁵Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 5, 117.

¹⁶Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 69.

¹⁷Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians*, xii.

¹⁸Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians*, 168.

¹⁹Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians*, xii.

²⁰Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 31.

²¹Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 29.

inculturation.”²² On this ground, Chinese Catholic theology must engage with the ways in which inculturation is guided by “the paschal salvation for the end of transformation and liberation”²³ evident in everyday life of the Church in China.

Engagement with Experience of Chinese Catholics

Human experience is one of the primary ways through which the presence of God is known and felt. It is a valid source for theological reflection and an indispensable one if the local Church is to contribute to the mutual theological discernment of the universal Church and respond to the everyday life of the people in any tangible way. The revelation of God throughout human history is alive and most evident in the lived experience of people. If left unexplored, theologians risk a “distorted perspective of half-knowledge and partial truth”²⁴ when doing theology. Thus, it is imperative for theology to engage with the lived experience of people of the local Church in various communities with all its complexity and diversity to render visible the unique aspects of God’s revelation.

Theologians and ecclesiastical authority have increasingly stressed the important role of lived experience in theological reflection and have proposed various theological and methodological approaches. Recent developments in liberation and feminist theology have turned much attention to the lived experience of the poor, the marginalized, and women in various local contexts. The Federation of Asian Bishops Conference has also elevated the living Asian contextual realities as resources of Asian theology and urged a “triple-dialogue,”²⁵ which includes dialogue with the experience of the poor and women together with Asian cultures and Asian religions. Pope Francis has called for theology to be done “in dialogue with other sciences and human experiences” in *Evangelii Gaudium*.²⁶ The recent theological and ethical “turn” to ethnographic fieldwork is a result of this commitment to the lived experience of the faithful, given it is considered an invaluable tool in revealing the profound and complex

²²Irrarázaval, *Inculturation*, 15.

²³Irrarázaval, *Inculturation*, 31.

²⁴Phelps, *Black and Catholic*, 160.

²⁵Yiu Sing Lúcas Chan et al., ed., *Doing Asian Theological Ethics in a Cross-Cultural and an Interreligious Context*, Bengaluru, India: Dharmaram Publications, Dharmaram College, 2016, 26.

²⁶Francis, “*Evangelii Gaudium: Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World*,” November 24, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

wisdom of human experience.²⁷ An interdisciplinary methodology that integrates ethnographic fieldwork into theological reflection makes the theological and ethical commitment to “love one another as one’s self” concrete.²⁸

With an immense potential contribution to the mutual discernment of the universal Church, the lived experience of Chinese Catholics and their faith and witnesses await to be further explored and theologized. Incorporation of ethnographic fieldwork in theological reflection and theological engagement with the lived experience of the faithful are two key insights that can be drawn from the recent theological development in the universal Church, relevant to the development of Chinese Catholic theology for the fulfilment of Church’s mission in China.

Engaging with the experience of Chinese Catholics in the work of doing Chinese Catholic theology implies that the three aspects of the triple-engagement proposed in this paper are intimately intertwined. It is already rendered evident that the process of inculturation is not only ongoing but is also an inherent part of the history of Chinese Catholicism by the effort of both early missionaries and local Chinese Catholics. Moreover, it is impossible to speak of the lived experience of Chinese Catholics without noting the history of Chinese Catholicism and the memory of the forebearers of the Catholic faith in China. They are alive and present in the psyche of Chinese Catholics today and continue to shape how the presence of God in their life is experienced and understood. With the understanding of inculturation as taking place in the everyday encounter of the Gospel, to engage with lived experience of Chinese Catholics is to engage with the process of inculturation happening in and transforming their daily life. Thus, the unrelenting existence and “the deeply-felt witness of faithfulness”²⁹ of the Chinese Catholic community are lived and experienced in everyday life of Chinese Catholics throughout the history of Chinese Catholicism in light of the ongoing process of inculturation. They are valuable sources of theological reflection not just for the Church in China, but also for the universal Church, as the presence of the universal Church – the Church of

²⁷Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, ed., *Ethnography As Christian Theology and Ethics*, London; New York: Continuum, 2011, 61.

²⁸Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography As Christian Theology and Ethics*, 68.

²⁹Benedict XVI, “Letter to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People’s Republic of China,” May 27, 2007, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070527_china.html.

Christ, though less visible at times, has never ceased to exist in the Catholic Church in China.³⁰

The “Chinese” Characteristics of Doing Chinese Catholic Theology

The Chinese Catholic Church in China is unique from the rest of the world. Joseph Youguo Jiang stresses in a respected Rome-based periodical *La Civiltà Cattolica* that “while keeping its Catholic identity, the Church has to establish a ‘Chinese Catholic Church with Chinese Characteristics.’”³¹ The continued presence of millions of Catholics in China and the ongoing growth of Catholic communities attests to the fact that being Catholic and Chinese is a real possibility.³² Thus, to reflect on the lived realities and faith of Chinese Catholics, the articulation of Chinese Catholic theology will also undoubtedly be marked by characteristics that are distinctively Chinese.

Chinese Contexts

The *Five-Year Sinicization Plan (2018-22)* addresses the need for a creative theological articulation of inculturation within and from the social and cultural context of contemporary China.³³ This call for doing Chinese Catholic theology in and from the contemporary Chinese context by taking into account the lived social, political, and cultural realities of the Chinese Catholic communities is not in conflict with Church teaching, but a recurring theme in the universal Church as it seeks to fulfil its mission in local contexts. Since Vatican II, various Catholic thinkers have affirmed that the Church has a real and important responsibility with regard to the socio-political order.³⁴ Avery Dulles points out that “the requisite and courageous safeguarding of the deposit of faith and of sacramental and hierarchical communion is not of itself opposed to dialogue with the authorities concerning those aspects of the life of the ecclesial community that fall within the civil sphere.”³⁵

If the Chinese Catholic Church is to offer both the Church and Chinese people hope, faith and a promising future and to make a

³⁰Benedict XVI, “Letter to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People’s Republic of China.”

³¹Joseph You Guo Jiang, “Catholicism in 21st Century China,” *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 2017, 14.

³²Jeremy Clarke, *The Virgin Mary and Catholic Identities in Chinese History*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, HKU, 2013, 6.

³³CCPA and BCCCC, “Five-Year Sinicization Plan (2018-2022).”

³⁴Avery Dulles, *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of Church*, 1st ed., San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988, 154.

³⁵Dulles, *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of Church*.

significant contribution to the cultural, spiritual and social development of Chinese society, it must embrace and appreciate other aspects of human life in the Chinese context.³⁶ Jiang stresses that “the Chinese Catholic Church will need to heed the needs of others, discern the signs of time and respond to them more promptly and efficiently,” which means that it must find flexible and effective ways to continue its mission and ministry in the Chinese context.³⁷ The constant effort of the Catholic Church to improve Sino-Vatican relationship attests to this commitment of dialogue, collaboration, and mission,³⁸ which needs to be carried out in the articulation of Chinese Catholic theology.

Thus, when taking on the characteristic of the unique Chinese context, Chinese Catholic theology contributes to the self-understanding of Chinese Catholics in light of their enduring faithful witness to the presence of God throughout a long history of cross-cultural exchange, interactions, and conflicts.³⁹ Given that the painful suffering of the Chinese Catholic Church amid its division is not a result of conflicting doctrinal position,⁴⁰ the development of Chinese Catholic theology finds no difficulty to articulate from the foundation of Scripture, Church Tradition, and the teaching of the Second Vatican Council – a starting point affirmed and embraced by ecclesiastical authority in China.⁴¹

Chinese Expression

For Chinese Catholic theology to fully reflect the faithful witness of Chinese Catholics and tend their self-understanding, it must first and foremost be expressed through language accessible to Chinese Catholic communities and in harmony with that of the universal Church,⁴² – that is, it must be articulated in Chinese language and expressed through Chinese literary form. Linguist John Joseph points out that the historical identification of the Chinese language has always been closely connected with the establishment of a national,

³⁶Jiang, “Catholicism in 21st Century China.”

³⁷Jiang, “Catholicism in 21st Century China.”

³⁸Francis, “Message of the Holy Father to the Catholics of China and to the Universal Church.”

³⁹Cindy Yik-yi Chu, *Catholic Church in China: 1978 to the Present*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 13.

⁴⁰Benedict XVI, “Explanatory Note – Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to Chinese Catholics,” May 27, 2007, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070527_china-note.html.

⁴¹CCPA and BCCCC, “Five-Year Sincization Plan (2018-2022).”

⁴²Chu, *Catholic Church in China*, 17.

ethnic or religious identity.⁴³ Only when Catholic theology is delivered through the language accessible to Chinese Catholics, it obtains its Chinese characteristic and becomes Chinese Catholic theology.

The intimate connection between Chinese theology and Chinese literary expression has been adequately stressed by Chloë Starr.⁴⁴ Textual context is just as important as social, political and cultural contexts in doing Chinese theology, precisely because the text is bound with assumptions about “its role in pedagogy, in society, in worship, and in friendship that were to shape the creation and meaning of the theology as printed.”⁴⁵ Starr writes, “just as the social, religious, and philosophical backgrounds that comprise ‘China’ imbue its theology, so broader reading histories and patterns of literary and textual construction inform the theological writings produced.”⁴⁶ However, this importance of Chinese textual forms has been too often underplayed in reading and understanding Chinese Christian writing.⁴⁷ The Chinese literary form brings new things of God, “which could not be theorized from within an attachment to Latin (or English) and universal meaning it stood for.”⁴⁸ Thus, doing Catholic theology through Chinese linguistic and literary expression, while staying faithful to Scripture and Tradition in harmony with the universal Church, presents “an exciting tale of creativity and a challenge.”⁴⁹ It is nonetheless an indispensable task, for the Chinese text is “a defining aspect of Chinese theology” and the textual context is “an important base in reading any Chinese theology.”⁵⁰ Articulating Catholic faith in Chinese languages is also a vital part of ongoing inculturation for centuries, for textuality is an aspect of “the indigeneity of Chinese theology in the incarnations.”⁵¹ Chinese Catholic theology and its engagement with the process of inculturation in Chinese Catholic Church cannot be done without taking into consideration Chinese literary expression and taking on the Chinese linguistic and textual form.

⁴³John Earl Joseph, *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, 224.

⁴⁴Chloë Starr, *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016, 2.

⁴⁵Starr, *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*, 38.

⁴⁶Starr, *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*, 286.

⁴⁷Starr, *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*, 127.

⁴⁸Starr, *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*, 6.

⁴⁹Starr, *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*.

⁵⁰Starr, *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*, 281.

⁵¹Starr, *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*, 283.

Further, the uniqueness of popular piety and its various expressions present in Chinese Catholicism is another identifiable Chinese characteristic and Chinese expression. The significance of the popular piety in the life of the Church has been well elaborated by the Magisterium. It is acknowledged that popular piety is “a living reality in and of the Church” and “a true treasure of the People of God.”⁵² Authentic forms of popular piety are “fruits of the Holy Spirit” and are “a sure sign of the extent to which the faith has taken root in the hearts of particular peoples, and of its influence on the daily lives of the faithful.”⁵³ Popular piety is the first and most fundamental form of inculturation of the Catholic faith and “naturally cries out for artistic expression.”⁵⁴ Pope Francis even considers popular devotion as “a hermeneutic key” in understanding the action that is generated when the faithful Holy People of God pray and act.⁵⁵ Thus, there should be no doubt that popular piety is a valuable source for Catholic theology, especially if it is to be relevant to the everyday lives of people. This importance has been stressed by Latino American Catholic theologian Orlando O. Espín, who insists that “popular Catholicism ought not to be simply an object of anthropological and sociological studies (as necessary as these might be), but also a principal resource for Christian theology itself.”⁵⁶ Popular piety, as considered by Espín, is a “privileged locus of divine revelation” and “a central affirmation of the larger Catholic theological tradition itself, especially insofar as that tradition accords a privileged place to the *sensus fidelium*.”⁵⁷ That is, theologians must not overlook the revelatory character of popular piety and Catholic theology ought to take into account the profound wisdom of popular piety expressed in the daily life of the faithful in the Church.

⁵² Congregation for Divine Worship and The Discipline of The Sacraments, “Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy. Principles and Guidelines,” Vatican City, December 2001, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20020513_vers-direttorio_en.html.

⁵³ Congregation for Divine Worship and The Discipline of The Sacraments, “Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy. Principles and Guidelines.”

⁵⁴ Congregation for Divine Worship and The Discipline of The Sacraments, “Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy. Principles and Guidelines.”

⁵⁵ Francis, “Letter of the Holy Father to Card. Marc Ouellet, President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America,” March 19, 2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160319_pont-comm-america-latina.html.

⁵⁶ Orlando O. Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997, xi.

⁵⁷ Espín, *The Faith of the People*, xi.

Popular piety has certainly been a primary means through which the Chinese Catholic Church expressed its faithful witness throughout the history of Chinese Catholicism and the process of ongoing inculturation. One of the most visible expressions of popular piety in China is Marian devotion, due to the role it played during many periods of persecution throughout Chinese history. Chinese Catholics accredit the unrelenting survival of their faith to Mary's protective mantle.⁵⁸ The Chinese Catholic Church was consecrated to the protection of Mary – Our Lady Queen of China – at the Plenary Council of 1924 at the earliest and most famous pilgrimage location, Sheshan, in Shanghai. Devotional practices such as the recital of rosaries, the establishment of Marian shrines in both urban and rural areas, and visitation of Marian pilgrimages are central to Chinese Catholic communities and their identity. Jeremy Clark, in exploring the expression of Chinese Catholic identity through Marian imagery, describes the prevalence of Marian devotion in the life of Chinese Catholics,

Marian paintings and posters are usually displayed in official settings, above church altars or on church walls, as well as in private houses. Personal devotional items like rosary beads, liturgical calendars or prayer cards featuring images of Mary are also very popular. Popular baptismal names include not only Mary, but also the names of female saints associated with Marian devotions, for instance, Bernadette.⁵⁹

Mary has no doubt been a source of spiritual consolation for Chinese Catholics, especially during times of hardship. In modern China, Mary is also patron, and Clark notes that the national patronage of Mary “encapsulates the attempt at an institutional level to foster a unique identity among the Chinese Catholic communities.”⁶⁰ Marian piety is a constitutive part of Chinese Catholic identity.⁶¹ It has become a national devotion and has been promoted and utilized by Church leaders in China as a way of strengthening Chinese Catholic communities.⁶² Clark notes that “Chinese Catholic identities are expressed through artistic expression of Marian devotions.”⁶³ Chinese ecclesiastical leaders have approved the attempts to express Chinese Catholic identities in new artistic forms with Chinese cultural characteristics without neglecting or purposefully downplaying “the significance of traditional European

⁵⁸Clarke, *The Virgin Mary and Catholic Identities in Chinese History*, 10.

⁵⁹Clarke, *The Virgin Mary and Catholic Identities in Chinese History*, 9.

⁶⁰Clarke, *The Virgin Mary and Catholic Identities in Chinese History*, 12.

⁶¹Clarke, *The Virgin Mary and Catholic Identities in Chinese History*, 9.

⁶²Clarke, *The Virgin Mary and Catholic Identities in Chinese History*, 12.

⁶³Clarke, *The Virgin Mary and Catholic Identities in Chinese History*, 194.

pieties and their representations.”⁶⁴ These attempts point to the irrevocable link between the Chinese Catholic Church with the universal body of Christ. Thus, Marian devotion in China demonstrates a fundamental form of inculturation in the Chinese Catholic Church that obtains its distinctive Chinese characteristic while maintaining its Catholic identity and tradition within the universal Church. It is no doubt a “privileged locus of divine revelation.” Chinese Catholic theology will become a unique gift to the universal Church only when it claims its Chinese characteristic and takes seriously this aspect of God’s revelation present in the life of the Chinese Catholic Church.

Conclusion

Doing Chinese Catholic theology through triple-engagement and with Chinese characteristics is a challenging task that requires the collaborative creativity of Chinese Catholic theologians in dialogue with the universal Church. While still in its infancy, the development of Chinese Catholic theology must seek to further the evangelical mission of the Chinese Catholic Church and deepen its self-understanding. It must announce the presence and works of God evident in the Chinese Catholic Church throughout history by remembering the faithful witness of past Chinese Catholics, encountering the transformation and liberation of the inculturated faith, and reflecting on the lived faith experienced by Chinese Catholics in their daily life. The task of doing Chinese Catholic theology is vocational. It is an ongoing process through which the theologian continuously witnesses the presence of the living God and articulates through mutual discernment with Chinese Catholic communities in dialogue with the universal Church. In seeking to assist the self-understanding and self-articulation of Chinese Catholics’ faithful witness, the doing of Chinese Catholic theology is not only an act of solidarity with Chinese Catholics, but also a deepening of a divine call for the theologian as Chinese and Catholic in Chinese Catholic communities. The Chinese characteristics that mark Chinese Catholic theology are signs of Chinese Catholic identity. The unrelenting existence and growth of Chinese Catholic communities in China’s contextual reality underline profound wisdom and theological insights that are uniquely Chinese and await to be further explored and theologized. Faith expressed in Chinese linguistic and textual form, along with the central role of Marian piety, signifies the reality that God is alive

⁶⁴Clarke, *The Virgin Mary and Catholic Identities in Chinese History*, 198.

in Chinese society and culture. The distinctiveness of Chinese characteristics in Chinese Catholic theology witnesses to the diversity of the body of Christ and proclaims the faithfulness of God in every human society. Thus, Chinese Catholic theology with Chinese characteristics developed through triple-engagement with the treasures of the Chinese Catholic Church will be an indispensable gift not only to Chinese Catholics and Chinese society, but also to the universal Church and the world.