

## MSC Missionaries in the Midst of Civil Wars in China During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

A few simplified historical facts may help the reading of the letters of Mother Loyola, Fr. Buchholz MSC and the article by Sr. Corneliana. The reality was much more complex. With admirable trust in God, with courage in the face of hunger, danger and adversity, with the resilience and resourcefulness of true missionaries our MSC Sisters and Brothers lived in the midst of this complexity, as their letters reveal.

- 1911 -The last of the ruling Chinese dynasties, the Qing Dynasty, collapsed, after which China was under the control of various warlords. President Sun Yat-sen formed the Chinese Nationalist Party to unify the country and defeat the warlords. He tried to get help from foreign powers. The West ignored him, so he turned to the Soviet Union.
- 1917 -The Communist Soviet Union had come into being after the Russian Revolution.
- Communist ideology spread into China and the Communist Party of China was formed.
- The Chinese Nationalists and the Chinese Communists were at loggerheads for control of the country. The Soviet Communists wanted to consolidate Communism throughout China and at this stage were prepared to work with whoever were the victors.
- 1926 - The struggle for power between the Nationalists and the Communists began in earnest.
- 1927 – 1937 Civil War between the Nationalists (now supported by the West) and the Communists (supported by the Soviet Union) was in full swing. In the upheaval our missionaries had to contend with bandits, rebels, communists, informers, whilst they themselves were considered to be “foreign devils”. The extracts from Mother Loyola’s letters of January 1936 foresee the impending war with Japan.
- 1937-1945 -The China/Japan War in the midst of World War II. The Japanese invaded and occupied Manchuria so the two Chinese Parties, the Nationalist and the Communists, suspended their own fighting for a time to fight against a common enemy, the Japanese. The long letters from Monseignor Buchholz and Mother Loyola were written on 1<sup>st</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> August 1945. The missionaries in China had been cut off from communication with the Motherhouse in Hilstrup. They didn’t know whether their congregation still existed in Germany, yet they continued on faithfully with their daily tasks. They didn’t know that World War II with Japan had abruptly ended with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6<sup>th</sup> August. They were grateful for a substantial gift which Mother Liboria had sent to help them flee if necessary. No doubt you will smile at the unusual translation on Page 4 of Mother Loyola’s letter with its sustained bird imagery: “But as we couldn’t follow Mother Liboria’s invitation to fly, nor the time has come for flying off, we made plans to use the money for repairing our plumage which, by this time is in a rather progressed stage of moulting.” Do you think they used the money for much needed repairs to the plumbing?
- 1946 – 1950 In spite of attempts to negotiate peace after WWII, full scale Civil War broke out again, with the United States supporting the Nationalists and the Soviet Union supporting the Chinese Communists. Millions of people were killed. The Communists were the victors. The Nationalists retreated from mainland China to the island of Taiwan under the command of Generalissimo Chinag Kai-shek. On 1<sup>st</sup>October 1949 Mao Zedong proclaimed the People’s Republic of China and in December Chiang Kai-shek declared his government to be the true Republic of China in Taiwan.
- 1950 -The Cultural Revolution began in China. Christian missionaries were forced to leave.

Shihtsien.

7th January, 1936.

For the first time we have spent a peaceful Christmas here, and have done our best to please God and man. A year ago today we started back on our return journey here, after our flight at Christmas. Fr. Mauermann is now on the way to bring Fr. Hockenback back from Hankow. He wanted to set out from Tongjen at the beginning of November, but the journey was postponed on account of communists from the next province barricading the road. We have not heard from either of them. We hope that Fr. Mauermann will reach his goal, and the new priest will not have to wait too long. It is impossible to say when they will both arrive here, it could be months. Many soldiers have been sent to the east in the direction of Japan, the west has again been left defenceless.

Latest reports indicate that the Red Army is again at the borders of Kweichow. For us that means: "Be careful! Trust in the Heavenly Father." We will have nothing to worry about if we do that. You either. We learn, as well as you, to place ourselves completely in the hands of God.

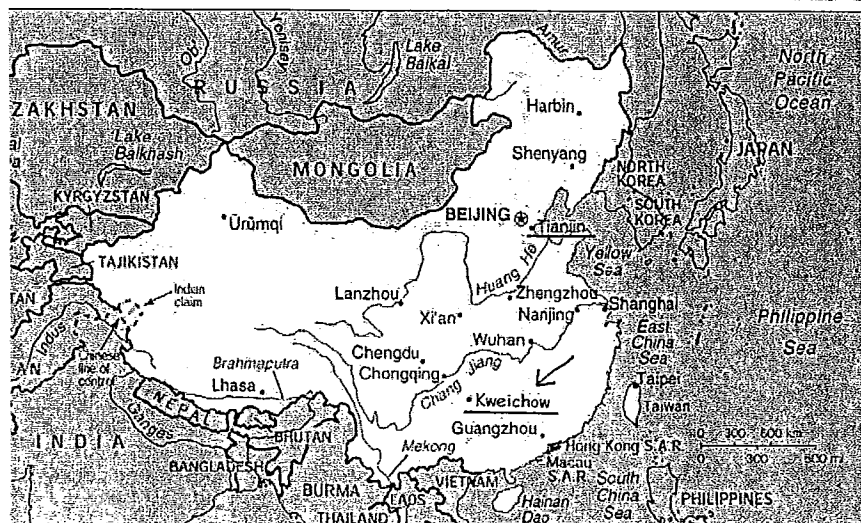
Apart from that, I have no other news to report. If the sisters want to hear anything else than stories about bandits from us, they will have to write and ask us. If this letter arrives, you could also say a prayer that our boxes may get safely through the danger zone.

\* \* \* \* \*

Shihtsien.

10th January, 1936.

The communists are already in the province - the day before yesterday we heard they were two days away from here. Yesterday we again worked hard to put our goods and chattels in a place of safety. We have to do it at night, so that none of the Chinese will notice anything. Our bundles are tied up, we are ready to flee. The mandarin has sent out spies. We can't very well take to flight before we know in what direction the enemy is heading. So we wait calmly for whatever our Heavenly Father has in store for us. The stations in the south are being threatened at present; the priest from Sannoni has already fled. Danger is still on the way for the stations in the north, where our other Sisters are. The goal of the communists is the province north of us, where 300,000 communists have already moved in. From there the Soviet Republic will be founded, spreading here to the west. By the time this letter arrives, our fate will have already been decided. So please keep on praying for China. I have got so used to living in uncertainty, that it will seem strange to me when a time of safety comes again.



CHINA

A.U.T.C.J.S.

St. Michael's Convent, September 28, 1945

Dear Sisters,

Two letters from China arrived; the first is from Msgr. Buchholz and is dated August 14, 1945.

"Let me thank you from the bottom of my heart for your generous help which came to us in April and May. All the Fathers and Sisters know about it, so they know for whom to pray - and be sure they won't forget to do so, because everyone knows it's pulling our little steamless boat through the shallow waters.

You will be interested to hear what we got here for your money. In May the exchange rate of the Clearing Board through which all Mission Funds pass gave us so much for your money that we could buy about 81 bushels of rice. That's a good heap of rice, - and it came in the right moment. God bless you and all your good donors.

The monetary situation is fluctuating all the time. To our great surprise and big relief, we received for the last remittance a higher exchange rate. We had been waiting and hoping for such a change to the better, as the cost of living is very high. Since then, prices have remained somewhat stationary, so there was a good profit in that exchange. Of late, prices have a tendency of going up again, - let's hope it won't be too bad, though even salt has made a terrific jump and costs today  $2\frac{1}{2}$  times more than it cost a few days ago.

Our general situation has not changed much. All Fathers, Brothers and Sisters are at work within their respective districts. Last year already the Sisters got passports with which they are more free to move around. Owing to these passes, Mother M. Loyola has been able to make a change several months ago: Sisters Euphrasine, Centiana and Rosmunda were transferred to Tehkiang, whereas Sisters Laurina and Corneliana were recalled from there to this residence. - Some time ago the Fathers got passports, too, but it was pointed out that the issue of our passes didn't mean a change of the present situation, - which means that we have to apply to the Government as before, if we want to leave our own district. - But we hope that with the end of the war in sight now, we'll recover our former freedom - the earlier the better, for all these restrictions have done much harm to work and workers, momentarily I am working for a general retreat this fall, for which the Foreign Minister has promised to grant special permission. The application is already off to Chungking and now I am expecting a favorable answer.

I am applying also for permission to accompany our sick Brother Bernardy to a hospital, probably at Kweiyang (capital of the Province of Kweichow), for operation on hernia. I expect the permission to be here towards the end of this month, then we'll start right away. In the meantime, Brother Bernardy is busy with the grape harvest which is quite good this year and which would have been a record harvest had it not been for late rains and lack of copper vitriol against vine diseases ... Thank God we started early on our vineyard, - for now the whole Mission depends upon our own altar wine. -

From the long letter of Rev. Mother M. Loyola you get a few glimpses at the internal Mission situation. - Set against the background of happenings in Europe and in the South Seas, it seems little enough. Nevertheless, our problems are real, and a certain note of helplessness and hopelessness makes them quite serious. We have been working in a quarry, and we knew it. But things were going upwards, - then the war with its consequences brought down almost everything. A second start will be more difficult, not only on the side of the workers, but more so on account of changing circumstances which are not altogether in our favor. - Well, we are and remain in the hands of God, and all we have to do is to stay faithful to His holy Will . . .

I am glad to tell you that I can send six students to the Preparatory Seminary at Kweiyang in a month or so. First, the French Bishop there hesitated to re-open the Latin School because of lack of funds, but then, with the end of the war in sight, he decided to go ahead as usual. That makes altogether 13 seminarians

from our Prefecture, three of them are already theologians and will receive their tonsure in September, two are entering philosophy this fall. Let's hope and pray that they all become good priests, for our Prefecture will need them in the future.

Recommending myself and the whole Mission to your pious prayers, I remain with all best wishes and kindest personal regards and with best greetings to all the Mission friends

Yours very sincerely in the Sacred Heart,

Matthias Buchholz, M.S.C.

The second letter is from Mother M. Loyola, dated August 1, 1945

Dear Rev. Mother M. Felicitas  
and the whole M.S.C. Family:

"It was on July 23, 1945 after Mass when Rev. Father Superior Klaesener handed me a voluminous air mail letter. I read "St. Michael's Convent, Bernharts, Pa." put the letter in my sleeve and in a happy mood went over to our Convent. The joy still increased when I found out it was news from Hiltrup. And so many! And after such a long period! The last Red Cross message of 25 words was dated July 1943. And the last letter had brought the sad news of dear Mother M. Electa's death. Between these dates lay all our anxious questions, our conjectures and fears: Are there still any MSC? Are there still monasteries? Are the Sisters still together? Wearing their habit - or in brown Nazi shirts? And the future generation of the Society? Is there still a Motherhouse? What people are housing in it? - Finally we received the first news through America - through Father Roche's reports: Mission houses still existent, our Sisters sheltering refugee - Sisters and homeless babies - even a novitiate! This was a ray of light after a long dark night. Now the fog screen has dropped, and before our eyes there emerge from amongst the ruins all the manifold pictures of horror and anxiety and heroic courage. And amidst them, our Motherhouse - untouched! With you we thank God and Our dear Lady for the miraculous protection, trusting that the same fatherly and motherly Providence has been keeping watch over all our Missions. I am sure the Baining Martyrs will take care of our lost South Sea missionaries - that's their chance to work their way up and get their halo! - We all here still are anxious to get more news about the terrible last days-catastrophes, and how our threatened houses and also our beloved ones at home have come out of it . . .

But now you surely want to know how we here in far away China have lived through the war. We have seen no combat actions, no bomb has exploded before our eyes, so we have nothing to show up in the way of heroic deeds and sufferings, like our Sisters back home have done and undergone much to our edification. The war passed us like a distant thunderstorm; but we have felt, and still are feeling, its consequences, and we shall feel them yet for a long time to come. Furthermore, the end of the war on this side is not yet in sight. -

Father Superior Klaesener was on his way leading the last group of missionaries to China when the war broke out. It was certainly a good angel that set Msgr. Buchholz going to the States in 1939, in order to collect funds and find friends for the young and poor Shihtsien Mission. Through the declaration of war on China we became out of a sudden "enemy-nationals" and were treated as such. Already before Christmas 1941 all Fathers of the district of Tehkiang were interned in the main station of Tehkiang-city. Sister M. Laurina, who was absent making sausages at an out-mission some 50 km. away, was honored with a military escort which accompanied her and her half pig safely back to the city. This measure deprived a big part of our Mission of its shepherds. Only Easter were the missionaries allowed for three days to visit their flock. - In Shihtsien restrictions started after Christmas. A military guard was thrown into the Mission, there were searches all over the house and we can't say it has always been done in a fair and friendly way, though we Sisters were treated somewhat better. All our belongings had to be registered; cameras, glasses, binoculars

had to be delivered to the local Government, - even Sister M. Solina's coffee-grinder was suspected. The missionaries at the out-missions of Shihtsien district were allowed to stay, but they had to be present at the general weekly roll call. - March 1942 the French Bishop of Kweiyang wrote that we were going to be interned at Kweiyang (capital of our Province), in one of the houses of the French Mission. So in our heart we said already a sad good-bye to house and home, to our Christians and our poor orphan girls, made our "testaments" and made us ready for the lot of the homeless and imprisoned. However, they let us stay. -

July 1942 the situation grew critical. All Fathers, Brothers and Sisters were ordered to Shihtsien to be concentrated here in the residence. At Tehkiang the Fathers and Sisters were without warning brought to the "Xamen" (court house) and there confined to a room, while the local military searched the whole mission, trunks, chests and drawers, during which search some things disappeared, drugs, soap and locks. Owing to Sister M. Cornelianna suffering from a big ulcer, and thanks to the kind intervention of a Catholic official the Sisters were allowed to return to the mission late in the afternoon. Thus they had time to consume the Most Blessed Sacrament, put a few important keys in their bags, dismantle their sewing machine, give the girls a few instructions and so on. The following day the caravan, Fathers and Sisters, left for Shihtsien under military escort. Happy we were to be interned in our own home, but unhappy enough to be without work, imprisoned and guarded by those for whom once we had left everything. We Sisters were better off and quite busy, though, having to attend to the needs of such a big community under such difficult circumstances and with such poor and altogether inadequate means, - especially as the concentration fell in the hot summer time. - Suddenly, in September 1942, all missionaries were allowed to return to their respective missions and continue their work under the supervision of the local authorities. Thus our communities returned to normal, and having made our common retreat we bade the Tehkiang Sisters farewell. -

November 1942 we had disturbance with bandits. This time no communists, but a band of armed rioters from some Miao tribes of our Province. When they approached our city, the gates were closed. There were a few skirmishes and quite some shooting - the bullets passed whizzing over our convent - but except for a good deal of anxiety and excitement amongst the population it was a small affair and soon the bandits were dispersed, after some of them had been captured and beheaded. -

Despite many restrictions of our liberty we were able to carry on undisturbed, though on a smaller scale, till the warfront came closer to our Kweichow Province. During Advent 1944 we had to reckon with an eventual evacuation order - or perhaps a run for life. In order to get the necessary travel money we had to sell most of our dispensable belongings, got our things packed, put the church vestments etc. into a safe place and made in as far as possible, emergency arrangements for our personnel and the orphans. Evacuees brought alarming news. Missionaries of neighboring Mission had already left, the Canadian Sisters of Kweiyang had been evacuated to another Province, some of them went home. Many missionaries were reported being in the hand of the enemy or put to death. Soon we felt there wasn't much of an escape route left for us in case of emergency. - Then came the change. The enemy was retreating everywhere, the fronts followed up and we were left quiet as before with the hope never again to be drawn into the battle zones. It was only a stormy sky, sheet-lightning and rumbling of thunder, - but the effects of this thunderstorm were paralyzing and destructive rather than stimulating and renewing. The financial sources dried up, and the Mission is still too young to be able to live on her own. Were it not for the help of the American Province, Providence couldn't have helped working a miracle for us. Unfortunately the building strength of our distant friends' generosity was to some extent cut short by the rising inflation. Therefore the Mission was forced to de-organize everywhere. The catechists school and the Preparatory for Chinese virgins were closed down; schools and teachers could not be maintained any longer; personnel with a home and means of their own was discharged, - kept were only a few virgins, our orphans and one or another teacher.

Now we had to contribute to our living by productive labor. The Fathers

tried medicine, cigarette making, home industries with stocking machines. We Sisters started sewing, knitting, baking and brewing medicines. Now we took to curing opium addicts. Our patients keep us busy till 11:00 P.M. Brother Schroer became even an architect, supervising the building of the new public Middle School.

So you see, your generosity and our own modest endeavors kept us above water levels. Dear Mother M. Liboria sent us a substantial contribution last year, "inviting" us to come over in case of danger. But as we couldn't follow Mother M. Liboria's invitation to fly, nor the time has come for "flying off", we made plans to use the money for repairing our plumage which by this time is in a rather progressed stage of moulting. - We are hampered in our mission work. Restrictions on our freedom, scarcity of financial means, the general poverty of the common people, all this has done much to hinder our work. Last not least certain unfavorable feelings toward foreigners, which in the future will perhaps seriously affect our mission activities. There certainly is some truth in the saying that Chinese can be converted only by Chinese. Doing educational work in our schools is almost out of the question for us. Each civil district having its own doctors or medical helpers, with hospital or dispensary, our charity work is also on the decline. Already twice has our dispensary been closed officially; at the present we are again fighting for the existence of our local dispensary. The people, of course, are on our side, - but not so the medical authorities. - Orphanages? There are only very few really destitute orphans - most of them still have the backing of their kinship. Parents who for reasons of poverty or laziness wish to get rid of children, are plentiful. It would be easy to fill a house with them and get a whole community of baptized youngsters registered in our books. But what about the budget? Who will defend such grown-up "orphans" against egoistic parents? Who will help them establish a new home? - The Chinese always has been, and always will be, a merchant. And he does business as well with God as with the missionary, - unfortunately not for the Kingdom of Heaven. And where there is no profit, interest quickly fades off. He doesn't ponder over or marvel at our charity - he just exploits it. - Other war-meditations are not yet ripe for telling - there are still too many storms over the Pacific. At any rate, our future isn't very bright. Small wonder, then, that with the dark times many a mission ideal of many a missionary is darkening, too. Nevertheless, we are the messengers of our Lord, and we are where His holy Will has put us, therefore, we may hold our post, carefree and happy in the Lord. -

At different times we have had American and English guests here at the residence. We did our best to make them feel at home and treat them with a few good meals which they certainly needed and which they highly appreciated. Since then Santa Claus has come several times unexpectedly with things from fairy-land we didn't dare dream about: coffee, chocolate, soap, and books and a good smoke for the Fathers. - You, too, told us of such "international friendship" or "charity behind the front" in your long letter. May such feelings grow and extend everywhere.

Let me tell you that our number is still complete, that we all are able to work, stay at our post, have no want, and place our future cheerfully in God's hand. Please, tell or write this also to our dear ones back home. We are anxiously awaiting more news. As we haven't received any death news since the war started except the news of Rev. Mother M. Georgia's death (through America), please, let us know the new "promotions" to heaven. Since the beginning of the war, we have kept praying for all our deceased - in advance. Thus I hope we are somewhat ahead of our prayer obligations! Besides Melbourne and a letter from South-West-Africa we didn't hear any news from our other Missions. -

This letter has been translated by Monsignor Buehholz, lacking practice my English isn't as ready as it used to be. Soon it might be our home language again then we all will write. -

With all best wishes and kindest greetings to all Rev. Superiors and the whole M.S.C. Family throughout the world

Yours in the Sacred Heart,

Mother M. Loyola, M.S.C.