

# HAINAN ISLAND CATHOLIC CHURCH AND MISSION, CHINA

## THE BRIGHT WIND IS BLOWING — Isobel Loong



**Sisters of the Immaculate Heart in Guangzhou**

Last October I had a specific mission for Hainan concentrating on formation development for Sr. Yu and her two novices, and to assist the return of Sr Moh, now older and with some health problems, back to her original Congregation on the Mainland. To organize this I had to fly to Guangzhou (Canton) capital of Guangdong Province and meet Fr. Yang and Sr. Yu from Hainan at the Motherhouse of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Jiangmen.

It was not an easy task for us but eventually we were able to negotiate sister's passage home including a financial package to assist the Congregation after her many years away on the Island. She finally agreed to leave Hainan on the last day of this Lunar New Year, 2018!

This has been a relief for us all and opens the way for the kind of formation the young women require particularly a close community life. Monsignor Michael Cheah, VG in Penang diocese, who has accompanied me before to Hainan to offer priestly support to Fr. Yang and his assistant Fr. Zhang was also present. While we were still in Guangzhou we enjoyed a celebration meal one evening with a local couple in honour of Fr. Yang's 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his priestly ordination – he has worked so hard during those years to bring the catholic faith back to his homeland, as has Sr. Yu, and now they are so delighted that two young women have completed their postulancy formation and will soon be ready to move on to noviciate. We spent four days on the Mainland and then back to Haikou, Hainan.

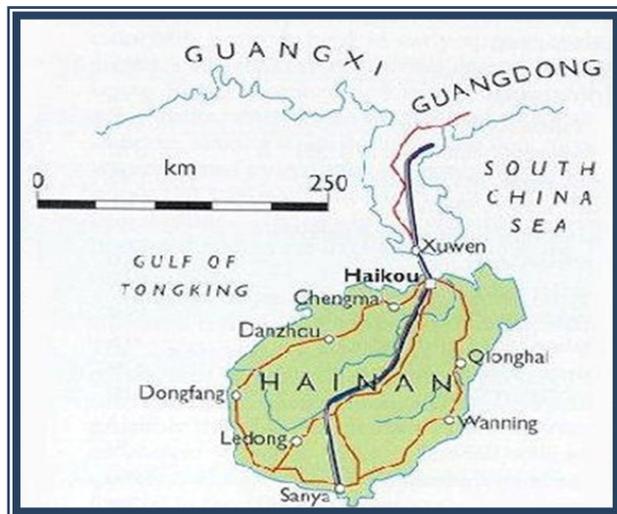
### **HISTORY IN THE MAKING!**

Over the past year there has been much uncertainty about how to continue formation for the two young women. An original plan which included two Formators coming over from the Mainland from a developed Chinese Congregation of sisters, plus our Sr. Inez Koh from Singapore as the external member, did not finally materialize. It is essential that Sr. Yu has some access to Ongoing Formation for herself and noviciate formation for the women. However, often things do not go as planned and, in retrospect, one can say sometimes it is for the best and in our case it proved to be true!!

In 2012 while I was still living on the island Fr. Javier, the Father General of the Sacred Heart Fathers (SS.CC) arrived on Hainan researching the Order's missionary presence there before the Cultural Revolution and subsequent expulsion of all missionaries from China in 1949. In one village we were able to see the tombs of some of the missionary Fathers who were executed at that time and so Father Javier requested that I keep him informed of any future development of the Church. In 2016 I was able to tell him that two postulants had been received in the Haikou parish with Sr. Yu as Formator. He shared that information, along with photos of his earlier visit, with his female counterparts in Rome. On hearing the impact of the ravages of the communist era, their own sisters' missionary influence then, and the long-suffering of the faithful Catholics, the SS.CC sisters "hearts were burning"!!

So much so, that in February/March 2018 Sr Auror and Sr. Regina, flew into Singapore, met up with our Sr. Inez Koh and then spent two weeks with Inez as interpreter and guide exploring possibilities for involvement with the formation of future sisters in Hainan. Later, on their transit at Changi Airport, Singapore, I was able to meet up with them to hear their experiences and for in-depth sharing regarding their discernment. They were so excited and positive about the whole mission! The “Signs of the Times” indicate that in today’s context mission on this Island has to be re-imaged and it may take on a different form or shape. With an awareness of the seeds growing, and sensing the heart-cry of Fr. Yang and Sr. Yu who has laboured over these years, we felt that although we all have a serious interest and a desire to explore more deeply it seems to us that it is more urgent to allow Fr. Yang and Sr. Yu to do “what is theirs to do” and follow their dream of developing and forming a religious congregation of their own on the Island.

One moving encounter that the Sacred Heart sisters shared was to meet the last living local ex-SS.CC sister on the island who is now 93 and her husband 83, both frail and no longer mobile with no children. The former sister kept crying and saying, “we were given no choice when the communists invaded the island, no choice - at the height of the revolution local religious were all forced out of their convents and married off to farmers!” So very sad.....



**TO SUM UP THE NEXT STAGE**

Sr. Aurora has proposed the following:

1. Sr. Yu will go to live in the SS.CC Formation Community in the Philippines for one year to experience their spirit and get first hand Formation Training of candidates. At the same time Fr. Yang and Sr. Yu will arrange for the two novices to go to a local Congregation on the Mainland for a canonical year at the end of which the three will hopefully unite back in Hainan.
2. To facilitate further community formation the SS.CC sisters will continue to support in whatever ways possible

My heart is overflowing with joy and gratitude for the way things are working out in Gods time. There is now a concrete direction set, with backing from the SS.CC sisters. Just at the right moment God works in the revival of the Catholic Church on Hainan with “living stones” and at the right time his chosen instruments, the Sacred Heart Sisters, were ready to respond. Something new is struggling to be born in a Church shrouded in the cobwebs of history on this isolated island of Hainan. Moments of light are springing up like seedlings of hope – the vision and dream are slowly emerging on the horizon and Fr. Yang and Sr. Yu can now confidently and more courageously take on the challenges.



*From a seed to a plant.  
Chinese Lantern Plant.*