

The Contribution of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong in the Twentieth Century

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Abstract

The Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres were founded in 1696 in France. They started their charitable activities in Hong Kong in 1848 and have made significant contributions to Hong Kong. Through their vigorous interactions with the classes and institutions of the society, these Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong have been growing, developing, and changing from mainly an orphanage and a nursery in the beginning to a broader mission covering education and health care now. Today, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong are most well-known for their schools and hospitals. The reasons for the changes are complex; one of the reasons may be that the social welfare policy of the Hong Kong Government has been changing. This article examines the various and changing social contributions of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres since their coming to Hong Kong in 1848.

Keywords: Contribution, Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres, Hong Kong, Twentieth Century, Catholic Congregation.

Introduction

Founded in 1696 at Levesvilla-la-Chenard in France, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres came to Hong Kong in 1848.¹ These French Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong dedicated their tireless services to the weak, the abandoned, the handicapped, the sick, the elderly, and the young. The Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong not only have taken care of the well being (socially and physically) of the needy people of Hong Kong, but in the twentieth century, they also extended their services to cover educational and medical aspects. Inspired by St. Paul, their Patron, and faithful to “All things to All people - All to All,” their motto, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong

¹ The Hong Kong Catholic Diocesan Archives “Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres Files.”; see also Sergio Ticozzi, 1997. *Historical Documents of the Hong Kong Catholic Church*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Catholic Diocesan Archives; Marie Paul Bord, 1996. *In China*. Hong Kong: Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres; Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres. 1960. *Asile de la Sainte – Enfance French Convent* and 1973. *Almost as Old as Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres; Jean Vaudon. 1979. *Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in China, 1848 – 1926*. Hong Kong: Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres; Thomas F. Ryan. 1959. *The Story of a Hundred Years: The Pontifical Institute of Foreign Missions in Hong Kong, 1858 – 1958*. Hong Kong: Catholic Truth Society; and Carl Smith. 1995. *A Sense of History: Studies in the Social and Urban History of Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Educational Publishing Co.

Kong have made significant social contributions to Hong Kong society. Indeed, they have been growing, developing, and changing from mainly running an orphanage and a nursery in the nineteenth century to a broader scope covering education and medical and health care in the twentieth century. Today, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong are most famous for their schools and hospitals. The reasons for the changes are complex; one of the reasons may be that the social welfare policy of Hong Kong's Government has been changing. This paper attempts to examine the various and changing social contributions of the charitable services of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong during the twentieth century.

General Background: the Christian teachings of charity

To perform charitable services in observance of Jesus Christ's teachings has been a goal for many Christian orders. We may easily cite more than a dozen quotations from the Bible to illustrate the Christian teachings of charity. For instance:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffeth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, ... Charity never faileth; ... And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. (I Corinthians, 13: 1 – 4, 8, 13 in the Holy Bible. 1974. New York: Meridian.)

The above quotation is St. Paul's classical description of charity. "Charity," in Christian terms, is a synonym for love. In its highest form, charity signifies God's love for people and people's reciprocal love for God, which may be manifested through one's love of his fellow men. Indeed, charity (a translation of the Greek word *agape*, which also means "love" depending on the context) is most eloquently reflected in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. St. Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430) summarized much of Christian teachings about charity in calling it a virtue, which unites men to God, because through charity men love God. St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225 – 1274), the medieval theologian, too, named charity as the foundation or root of all virtues.

Allow me to cite another passage from the Holy Bible:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in. Naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. (St. Matthew, 25: 35 – 40).

Here is another passage:

*For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. ... To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made **all things to all men**, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you. (I Corinthians, 9: 19, 22 – 23).*

Indeed, St. Paul, the Apostle, summed up the vocation and mission in these words; and the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres have chosen the Apostle as their Patron and have taken “**All things to All people - All to All**” as their motto.

Historical Background: the Papal Decrees since 1891

In addition to the patron's and Christian spirit of love and charity, from a world historical perspective, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong might have been influenced by several Papal Decrees since 1891. On May 15, 1891, Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) issued the Decree: *Rerum Novarum* (Of New Things) which called for a Catholic social service movement in the world, and it is probable that this had great impact on the social services of all the Catholic congregations, including the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong. Furthermore, in 1931, Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) issued *Quadragesimo Anno* (Forty Years After) to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*; and the following pope, Pope Pius XII (1939-1958), also promoted the social services of the Catholic Church. Pope John XXIII (1958-1963) issued two more Decrees: *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher) and *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), promoting social services. In 1967, Pope Paul VI (1963-1978) also issued the Decree: *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of People); and last but not least, Pope John Paul II (1978-2005), issued Decrees promoting the responsibility for social services on the part of the Catholic Church: *Laborem Exercens* (On Work) in 1981, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concern) in 1987, and *Centesimus Annus* (The 100th Anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*) in 1991 (Cheung 2005: 242-243). All in all, these papal decrees calling for social services by Catholic congregations and the general policy and atmosphere of the Catholic Church towards social services in the twentieth century probably have had great impact on the active participation and social contribution of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong. In other words, I believe that the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong have been responding actively and positively to the decrees of the Popes since 1891.

The First Period (1848 – 1917): the beginning phase of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong

In 1848, after a long and dangerous sea journey from France, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres were the first women foreign missionaries to arrive in Hong Kong. The mission of the four Sisters,² headed by Sr. Alphonsine, the first Superior came in response to the appeal by her brother Augustin Forcade, Bishop of Samos, Apostolic Vicar of Japan, and Apostolic Prefect of Hong Kong, asking for Sisters to take care of unwanted children, nursery, schools, and hospitals. Upon their arrival on September 12, 1848, the Sisters saw immediately that the most urgent task was to rescue abandoned

² The four Sisters were Sr. Alphonsine, Sr. Gabrielle Joubin, Sr. Auguste Gallois, and Sr. Louise Morse.

babies in the streets of Hong Kong. On October 1, 1848, (about two weeks after their arrival), the Sisters took in their first baby, and during the final three months of that year, they had received a total of 170 children, mostly whom were weak and sick. It was a huge number in proportion to the population in Hong Kong in the 1840s. The first census in 1841 indicated that the population of Hong Kong numbered only 7,450 (and in 1849 was still only 22,000). From 1848 to 1854, the number of collected children was 1,360 reflecting the drastic need of such an orphanage (Ticozzi 1997: 67).

In October, 1850, Sister Alphonsine Forcade died at the young age of 37, and fifteen days later, Sister Gabrielle Joubin died, also young at the age of 33. In February, 1851, a second group of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres (Sister Sante Marcelle, Sister Theodora, and Sister Sainte Foi) arrived in Hong Kong, and they moved to a three houses-quarters, also in Wanchai, which was named “*L’Asile de la Sainte Enfance*” after the Association of Holy Childhood based in France. In the words of Mother Marie Paul Bord (translated by Sister Anne Patrice Cahill), “It was in the extreme poverty that the first Holy Childhood was founded” (Bord 1996: 5). In 1874, a shelter for elderly women was also started by the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong. The *1878 Report on Catholic Educational and Charitable Establishments* states that “Patients were crowding at the door of the Asile and the good Sisters devoted two or three hours every day in distributing medicines and treating with great courage the most disgusting sores.”³

The *1878 Report* provides the following information about the social services of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong:

Everyone knows of the Asile kept by the French Sisters at Spring Garden (in Wanchai). Upwards of 60 little children under six years of age are taken care of, all girls with the exception of four or five Besides the children kept in the house, the good Sisters have always a very considerable number of little babies to nurse inside, not less than 80, all female, with one or two exceptions.⁴

During the plague of 1894, the Sisters began taking care of more and more aged women. A hospice for handicapped and geriatric women began to take shape and would later also include a hospital. In 1898, because of the growth of their services, the buildings of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Wanchai were enlarged, and a hospital where about 2,000 women and children each year sought medical care, was officially inaugurated (Smith 1995:121).

By the beginning of the century, the Association of Holy Childhood in Wanchai had reached its maximum capacity, and in 1908, *Le Calvaire* in Happy Valley was officially opened by Sir Frederick Lugard, the Governor of Hong Kong. In 1914, as the space in the quarters in Wanchai was far too small in comparison with their services, the Sisters of Charity bought a large factory in Causeway Bay, then at the extremity of the city – since then, the headquarters of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong has moved from Wanchai to Causeway Bay (Smith 1995: 121). With the orphanage and headquarters relocated to Causeway Bay, the Sisters continued to provide services in medical and health care as well as education; and in 1930, a church was also built there.

All in all, this first period in the development of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong was a period of constructive response to the urgent need of the

³ Hong Kong Catholic Diocese. n.a. Hong Kong Catholic Register, No.30, July 15, 1878.

⁴ Hong Kong Catholic Diocese. n.a. *Supplement to Hong Kong Catholic Register*, No.31, July 22, 1878.

Hong Kong society. Through these years, thousands of orphans were fed and clothed, taught reading, writing, religion, and sewing.

The Second Period (1917 – 1964): a transitional period with a setback from the Second World War

The Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres opened their first house, an orphanage and a clinic, in the Kowloon Peninsula of Hong Kong in the late 1930s. The house was later developed into St. Teresa's Hospital, which accepted its first patient in 1940.

During the Second World War, despite the many difficulties and a shortage of basic necessities, the social services of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong continued: the quarters of the Sisters in Causeway Bay became a refugee center and hospital. The sick and wounded flooded the quarters and were treated and accommodated by the Sisters. In April 1945, bombs hit the orphanage of the St. Paul de Chartres in Causeway Bay, killing fifty orphans and seven Sisters (Ticozzi 1997: 69). After the war, the orphanage was rebuilt as a children's home and nursery in a boarding school (Ticozzi 1997: 69). Indeed, the tireless services for orphans, children, and women by the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong definitely have made a great contribution to society in Hong Kong. This was a transitional period for the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong with a serious setback in the bombing and destruction of 1945, by the end of the Second World War.

The Third Period (1964 - present): a period of expansion

In 1964, the orphanage of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong was changed to a day nursery because a new social condition had developed – the number of abandoned children gradually diminished during the twentieth century. By 1998, only eleven orphans, now aged, remained under the loving care of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong. It cannot be denied that the economy of Hong Kong had improved quite rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s, and more and more women have gone out to work since then. Through their vigorous interactions with the classes and institutions of the Hong Kong society, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong have been growing, developing, and changing (in response to the social needs of Hong Kong) from mainly as an orphanage and a nursery to a broader scope covering education and health care. Today, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong are most famous for their schools and hospitals: St. Paul's Convent School in Causeway Bay, St. Paul's Primary Catholic School and St. Paul's Secondary School in Happy Valley, and St. Paul's School in Lam Tin. All schools have become renowned for providing quality education to young girls and producing elite/leaders in serving the Hong Kong community. In medicine, both St. Teresa's Hospital in Kowloon and St. Paul's Hospital in Causeway Bay have become modern hospitals equipped with the latest medical equipment and facilities.

Let us look into the educational and medical contribution of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong as follows. Schools in Hong Kong during the nineteenth century were mostly for boys, until the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres started their school for girls. Even when some wives of Protestant missionaries opened schools for girls in the nineteenth century, the Chinese parents were reluctant "to send

their girls (daughters) to school as they could be more useful at home caring for the younger children or performing household tasks” (Sweeting 1990: 188). However, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong were early to be aware of the importance of having their orphans, who were mainly girls, learn basic knowledge. So, their girls were taught in reading, writing, arithmetic, and religious knowledge as well as practical skills in sewing and embroidery. When the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong moved from Wanchai to Causeway in 1915, their school changed its name to St. Paul’s Institution. In 1920, the school was named the Anglo-French School, which was further changed to French Convent School in 1945; and finally in 1956, changed to its present name, St. Paul’s Convent School. Meanwhile, during the twentieth century, educational needs increased with the growing population, and due to the lack of schools for girls, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong established in addition to St. Paul’s Convent School more schools, namely, St. Paul’s Secondary School in Happy Valley, and their third secondary school, St. Paul’s School in Lam Tin in 1970.

As for the medical and health services, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong have established two modern hospitals equipped with the latest medical facilities, namely, St. Paul’s Hospital in Causeway Bay⁵ and St. Teresa’s Hospital in Kowloon.⁶ Again, the medical services by the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres have been constructive responses to the social needs of Hong Kong. With so many inhabitants, first abandoned children, orphans in the nineteenth century, and then more sick, handicapped, and needy people in the twentieth century, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres established two hospitals. Four years after the plague in 1894 in Hong Kong, which killed thousands of people, St. Paul’s Hospital in Causeway Bay (which is popularly known as the French Hospital even today) was officially opened on December 1, 1898.

The population of Hong Kong continued to increase, and by 1941, the Kowloon Hospital in Argyle Street operated by the Government was considered too crowded. In response to the social and medical needs, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres (after many efforts and struggles), opened St. Teresa’s Hospital on October 3, 1940. On December 8, 1941, the nearby Kai Tak Airport was bombed. Many wounded were brought to the newly opened St. Teresa’s Hospital. In the 1950s and 1960s, there were many refugees coming from the mainland, and the population of Hong Kong, especially that of Kowloon, increased even more rapidly; thus, the need for the expansion of the hospitals became urgent. Furthermore, in 1960, there was a great fire in Shek Kip Mei, Kowloon, leaving 50,000 people homeless, with many burnt and otherwise injured. As a result, the South Wing of St. Teresa’s Hospital was extended, with more than 275 new beds (Cheung 2005: 251). Several phases of expansion of the St. Teresa’s Hospital continued in 1970, 1986, 1991, and 2002, and presently there are up to 900 beds (Cheung 2005: 251). Similarly, St. Paul’s Hospital in Causeway Bay has been expanding its medical services from more than 100 beds in 1948 to more than 200 beds in 1967, and over 400 beds in 1999 (Cheung 2005: 250).

On the other hand, let us get back to the reasons for the change of focus from orphanage and nursery to schools and hospitals. These reasons are complex. In addition to the changing social conditions mentioned earlier, I believe that one of the reasons may be that the social welfare policy of the Hong Kong Government was also changing.

⁵ Please see Appendix 2 for their Superiors.

⁶ Please see Appendix 3 for their Superiors.

Let us study the following clause of the *White Paper: Social Welfare into the 1990s and Beyond*, written and published by the Hong Kong Government:

(20) Residential services will be developed on the principle that a family setting is the natural environment for the healthy development of a child, and should be the preferred choice over an institutional setting, particularly for those below their teens. While there will continue to be diversity of options so that children can be placed in the type of residential facility that best suits them, **non-institutional care in the form of foster homes and small group homes will take precedence over institutional care in future developments.** Opportunities will be taken **to convert existing larger children's homes from institutional into non-institutional facilities** when the need arises for the re-provisioning of these homes.⁷

Evidently, the social welfare policy of Hong Kong's Government in the 1990s (or perhaps, the change of policy could be traced back a little earlier) has changed to promote foster homes or adoption, and discourage institutional orphanages. With reference to change of the public policy of the Hong Kong Government, the focus of the private charity of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres, changed responsively and accordingly.

Conclusion

In conclusion, since their arrival in Hong Kong in 1848, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong have been responding positively to the social needs of the Hong Kong community – from orphanage and nursery in the nineteenth century (the early phase), to serving more and more in the areas of education and medical and health care in the twentieth century. On the one hand, we may say that they have been changing according to the social needs of the community, but it is also true that spiritually, they have been consistent in a higher level, that is, they have been facing, coping and dealing with the urgent needs of the society. From a world historical perspective, they are actively and positively responding to the callings of several papal decrees on the social services movement, starting from Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. All in all, the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong have made significant contributions through their charitable and social services to the Hong Kong community, especially in the educational and medical services in the twentieth century.

⁷ Hong Kong Government. 1991. Clause #20 in Chapter IV: "Services for the Family and Child Care," in *White Paper: Social Welfare into the 1990s and Beyond*. pp. 23-24. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government.

Appendix 1 Provincial Superiors of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong

Hong Kong Superiors

1848	Sister Alfonsine <i>Forcade</i>
1850	Sister Sainte-Marcelle <i>Carette</i>
1854	Sister Louise <i>Morse</i>
1859	Sister Benjamin <i>le Noel de Groussy</i>

Principal Superiors

(Indochina including Hong Kong, China, and Macau – based in Vietnam)

1861	Sister Benjamin <i>le Noel de Groussy</i>
1884	Sister Marie Virginie <i>Richard</i>
1888	Sister Candide <i>Cousin</i>

Hong Kong Local Superiors

1861	Sister Marie Ambroise <i>Yvon</i>
1863	Sister St Lucien <i>Briais</i>
1869	Sister Marie Auguste <i>Biard</i>
1871	Sister Paul de la Croix <i>Biard</i>

Hong Kong Province Provincial Superiors

1891	Sister Felicie <i>Jourdan</i>
1926	Sister Marguerite de St Paul <i>Nuss</i>
1935	Sister Saint-Xavier <i>Vermeersch</i>
1947	Sister Pauline <i>Figus</i>
1954	Sister Therese de St Joseph <i>Andrieux</i>
1960	Sister Bernard de Marie <i>de Broqueville</i>
1969	Sister Marie Isabelle <i>Tchan</i>
1978	Sister Lucie Marie <i>Ko</i>
1989	Sister Marie Pauline <i>Wong</i>
2004	Sister Marie Jacqueline <i>Ho</i>

Source: provided by Sr. Josefina Santos, Archivist of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong

Appendix 2 Superiors of St. Paul's Hospital in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong

St Paul's Hospital

Wanchai

1898	Mere Felicie <i>Jourdan</i>
?	Sr Anna-Joseph <i>Leon de Prezaes</i> (In-charge)
after 1902 (?)	Sr Francois de St Michel <i>Audureau</i> (In-charge)

Causeway Bay

1916	Sr Francois de St Michel <i>Audureau</i> (In-charge)
1918	Sr Marguerite de St Paul <i>Nuss</i>
1935	Mere St Xavier <i>Vermeersch</i>
1936	Sr Eusebe de Jesus <i>Hermann</i>
1946	Mere St Xavier <i>Vermeersch</i>
1947	Sr Camille de la Croix <i>Lesueur</i>
1948	Sr Therese de St Joseph <i>Andrieux</i>
1954	Sr Laurence de St Paul <i>Billet</i>
1966	Sr Marie Catherine <i>Loh</i>
1968	Sr Francois de la Croix <i>Mitchell</i>
1971	Sr Marie Auguste <i>Roue</i>
1974	Sr Marie Noel <i>Aranda</i>
1980	Sr Marie Jacqueline <i>Ho</i>
1986	Sr Marie Timothee <i>Chow</i>
1990	Sr Clotilde de Marie <i>Au-Young</i>
1996	Sr Ophelia <i>Lui</i>
1999	Sr Marie Jacqueline <i>Ho</i>

Source: provided by Sr. Josefina Santos, Archivist of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong

Appendix 3 The Superiors of St. Teresa's Hospital, Kowloon, Hong Kong

St Teresa's Hospital

1940	Sr Louise Vincent <i>Triphon</i>
1946	Sr Eusebe de Jesus <i>Hermann</i>
1950	Sr Laurence de St Paul <i>Billet</i>
1953	Sr Bernard de Marie <i>Broqueville</i>
1960	Sr Marie Noel <i>Aranda</i>
1971	Sr Bernard de Marie <i>Broqueville</i>
1977	<i>Sr Marie Catherine Loh</i>
1980	Sr Marie Noel <i>Aranda</i>
1986	Sr Marie Jacqueline <i>Ho</i>
1995	Sr Marie Noel <i>Aranda</i>
2002	Sr Marie Timothee <i>Chow</i>

Source: provided by Sr. Josefina Santos, Archivist of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in Hong Kong

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