

## Preface

As the research for this work progressed, I was astonished to discover that the French Jesuit Father Robert Jacquinot de Besange's contributions to relief and refugee work in China were almost entirely unknown to American scholars, Chinese researchers, and even to most of the Jesuits I met. His life spanned several decades, countries, communities, and also events central to World War II. During his lifetime, he did receive special recognition for his contributions on several occasions. Nevertheless, the subsequent lack of knowledge of his person and life today seemed to me quite puzzling. Perhaps this deficiency can be partly explained by his untimely death in Berlin in 1946, at a time when the world was still in chaos. The years just after World War II were also a time when China, where he had spent twenty-seven years of his life, was entering a period of civil war, followed by the reclusive and difficult years under Mao Zedong's leadership. Overall, it seems that Father Jacquinot somehow fell into obscurity through no fault of his own.

My discovery of his life and work convinced me that at least Father Jacquinot's main contribution, the establishment of safe zones meant to provide refuge and security for civilian refugees during wartime, needed to be carefully studied and presented. I found that to do justice to the subject required putting his zone concept in the context of his extensive services in the major treaty port city, Shanghai. I needed to illuminate his pastoral work, his extensive relief activities during periods of serious flooding in China, and his acute observations and firsthand experiences gained during the first Japanese attack on Shanghai in 1932. During the second Japanese attack in 1937, Jacquinot was ready with his plan to provide relief and safety to the Chinese who were threatened and in danger.

I was also inspired by the timeliness of the refugee issue. It is obvious that today there are many instances of refugee suffering, hardship, and, sometimes, failure to survive. So many of the sources I read on Jacquinot's work suggested

that valuable information might be gained from this early example of refugee protection and care. I share the aspirations of those earlier observers and believe that perhaps his example can be of practical use in meeting the often dire needs of refugees and their communities today. His safe zone concept does appear in the Geneva Convention of 1949, but without any context or explanation as to how his safe zone came about.

The fact of Father Jacquinet's life and work being so little known raises the obvious question as to how I learned about him. I came across Father Jacquinet's name several times in sources I used in researching a previous book, which focused on two other major refugee diasporas, the Jewish and White Russian refugees who found refuge in Shanghai during the first half of the twentieth century. For example, I discovered that Father Jacquinet was the senior chaplain of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps, a respected, quasi-militia organization that included both Russian and Jewish refugee units. I also happened to be well attuned to Jesuit work in China as a result of having done research for the master's degree on another French Jesuit, Joachim Bouvet, who left for China in 1685 and worked at the court of the Kangxi Emperor. My curiosity seemed to have a promising direction, so my interest in studying Father Jacquinet remained strong. As soon as time permitted, I began to research and uncover the fascinating story of his work with Chinese refugees in Shanghai.

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