

Herce, Francisco. "Father Herce to the father provincial of the Philippines, Hong Kong, July 15, 1866." *Correo Sino-annamita* 2 (1867): 14-18. Translated by Patrick Stein. Edited by Douglas Fix.

My venerated and very dear Father Provincial: I informed you how on the 10th of the present month I arrived at this place [Hong Kong] on the order of the M. R. P. Vicar, with the goal of seeing whether a change in climate could expel the fevers which for seven months have continued to bother me in Formosa, without having been able to find any other way to end them. During my stay here I find myself improved, as the three attacks which have visited me here were quite weak, not even obliging me to rest in bed the way they always did in Formosa. So I expect, God willing, with this climate and the better resources here, to reestablish myself as soon as possible in order to return quickly to my beloved mission. That went on step by step, and seemingly in complete peace until one season ago; but when we thought we could relax, others sordidly schemed an all-out war against us. The Cantonese, our capital enemies, and among the natives the most faithless men, managed through scheming calumnies to get from the mandarin of the capital a decree diametrically opposed to the treaties signed by the Emperor in Beijing, in which he rigorously prohibits the people from becoming Christian, and also orders those already entered into the religion to repent of their sins. And while the schemer does not say anything direct or expressly against the ministers of the Catholic religion, out of fear for the consequences which the Europeans might bring him, he still obligates local authorities to proceed with rigor to the point of seizing those who dare to infringe on said decree. This [decree] is edited in such terms as to attest well on one hand to Chinese astuteness and sagacity; and on the other, to the anxieties and pressures in which the mandarin must have found himself in promulgating it, and that were it not for the reiterated false accusations made by our adversaries, he never would have taken this step.

I suppose that you will already have received word of what happened to me around last Christmas due to the groundless idea which arose among the Chinese, especially the Cantonese, that the Europeans had come to the mountain by my village to take the mine, and help themselves to its territory. As that attempt did not go according to their desires, namely to kill the Missionary and disperse and finish off the Christians, they took another path, with which they thought to deal their most certain blows, thus obtaining the same effect without any responsibility. This path was to accuse us before the mandarin of being spies or explorers for the Europeans, among other accusations. The mandarin, who for his part was already greatly angry, due to the voices which had come to him (and even in the newspapers of Hong-Kong this had been said) about how the Prussians wished to take Formosa, fell into the trap which our enemies set up to damn us, and proclaimed, although with animalistic fear, the following decree, which is written (I do not know if purposefully) with much obscurity and vagueness.

"We, \* \* \*, High Mandarin<sup>1</sup> of the province promulgate this decree, rigorously prohibiting the following trade. Having indefatigably sought out information

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<sup>1</sup> This title is quite vague, and Sainz offers further clarification in his translation of August 24, 1866. He refers to this official as "Mandarin Iab, second-in-command of the captain general of Formosa and governor of the indigenes of the southern region, and soon governor superior of the whole island."

according to our duty, we, \*\*\*, the High Mandarin, have discovered, that in the villages of Ban-kim-cheng, Chia-soá and Ka-pu-lón as of recently are to be found more than 200 people of all classes, men and women, seniors and children, who have embraced religion, gathering together to pray. This is a proven thing. Asking the men of these villages we have heard that they gladly have entered into religion to pray aloud together. We hereby rigorously prohibit anyone from receiving baptism. The villages of the natives are not commercial ports. Having already been converted into civilized peoples, adoring their ancestral tablets, and receiving the customs of the Middle Kingdom, each one [of the natives] should concern themselves with preserving his duty; shaking off the hardness of his heart and embracing docility and sweetness. How could you be so foolish as to let yourselves be seduced and cheated, like simple hill folk tricked by the clever wolf, into committing crimes for which you will be gravely punished? Very well; you, villages of natives, have entered into religion to pray in song. . . . What do you want us to tell you? At the outset we certainly cannot determine the size of the effect of this evil thing. . . . Yet, who can say whether after much time, once there are already many such people of diverse conditions, wise and ignorant, they might some day be tempted by villains, and allow some germ of revolution to spread, some grave deed, with which they themselves will suffer, and involve those around them?

"Thus, it is of utmost necessity to prohibit it [Christianity] with all rigor, in order that a great evil not be born, and so that this putrid member does not propagate to the other parts of the body; thus we order the village heads to investigate and sever [this 'member'] with diligence, dispatching prohibitory orders to that effect. For this reason we turn to the mayors and other heads of villages with all their subalterns, and their subject peoples, so that they are in full awareness. You all ought to know that to enter into religion to pray aloud has *very clear terms*.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, from the present decree forward it is required for the mayor with the other officials<sup>3</sup> to correct the villages with utmost rigor, inducing them to repent and emend their ways; and those who loyally obey this prohibited doctrine, without exception, shall mutually exhort each other to no longer enter into religion. Those who have already entered are to repent and promptly mend their past crimes; and those who still have not embraced it, are not to let themselves be tempted anew to enter into religion; procuring thereafter that each one guards himself, that is, to be more cautious, all exerting themselves to be good and meek citizens.

"Thus, do not be as foolish as before, when you recklessly tangled yourselves in the net. If anyone should be so rash as to dare to break this decree, his neighbors

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Sainz notes parenthetically that by the time of his letter, this official was already himself "captain general of Formosa," and it is presumably to this title that Herce meant to refer.

<sup>2</sup> Herce's note: "I do not know what is meant by this." Sainz's parallel translation has: "You all ought to know that to enter into the religion in which one prays publically is neither ignored nor, less, unforeseen in our civil code."

<sup>3</sup> Sainz writes: "the minor civil and military mandarins."

shall all search for and seize him, with the end of punishing him when convenient. And to the village heads: know that should there be any attempt at opposition, you are to investigate with diligence until finding the culprit.<sup>4</sup> The mandarin superior of the natives has spoken. The law is set, and certainly will not proceed aimlessly. All shall thus be loyal observers, not contradicting this prohibitory decree.

Year Five of *Tong-ti*, Fifth Moon. {Seal, not reproduced}."<sup>5</sup>

This poorly dictated decree, if it is compared with those produced by even marginally mediocre literati, does not deserve that name; rather it is a muddle of poorly formed ideas; and this after I have exerted myself to give it some order, translating it with unusual liberty to improve its intelligibility in Spanish. For this reason we suspect it might not be the product of the mandarin, but rather of the roguish mayor, meant to prejudice the Christians and take revenge on their teacher. But as it was published two days before my departure in Ban-kim-cheng, and with the seal of the mandarin, and as the Chinese never dare to commit such an enormous crime as to falsify public seals, for the animalistic fear they have of these, our doubts have been dispelled, and we have been persuaded that this is really the product of the ignorant yet astute current mandarin, meant to ingratiate him with the Cantonese, and rid himself of the Europeans who cannot enter [to see him]. I anxiously await the letter of the Father Vicar to know the consequences to the mission which have resulted from the above. Today, the 21st, I conclude without having received news from Formosa. I remain the same; this morning I took a vomitive, to see if I can thus expel them [the fevers].

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<sup>4</sup> Sainz's translation here is quite different. He writes: "The minor civil and military mandarins are advised of these particulars, because if they conduct themselves henceforth as if they do not know or see, they will be stripped of all authority and submitted at a later date to the judgement of the high tribunal."

<sup>5</sup> Sainz's concluding comment: "What do you think of this disgraceful document? Such a China! and such Chinese!"