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Citation

TSE, Justin K. H..(2019). Attending to the movements of my heart: An Asian American conversion from 'Uniatism' in the 'model minority.'. *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 59(1-4), 293-312.

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Attending to the Movements of My Heart: An Asian American Conversion from “Uniatism” in the “Model Minority”¹

Justin K.H. Tse

你的眼神 充滿美麗 帶走我的心跳

*The spirit of your eyes flooded with beauty leads my heartbeat away*²

王力宏 Wang Leehom

Introduction

Until recently, I considered myself an Asian American evangelical Christian. Now I am a Greco-Catholic in the Church of Kyiv.³ I was received into the Church by chrisma-

¹ This is a longer version of an essay that appeared in *Patriyarkhat: A Greco-Catholic Analytical Publication*, in 2018. I am grateful to be able to present the English version here.

² This is my decidedly wooden and awkward translation of a sentence that can simply be rendered: “The beauty of your gaze takes my heartbeat away.” I insist in this case on keeping the rendering awkwardly literal to demonstrate that Chinese is a language that, through just a few words, can paint beautiful word pictures.

³ Andriy Chirovsky, “What’s in a Name?” *Newsletter of the Ukrainian Catholic National Shrine of the Holy Family* 3 (December 3, 2003). Available at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20040505112922/http://ucns-holyfamily.org:80/ChurchName.html>. The most conventional name for our Church, which is the proper nomenclature used in *Logos*, is the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church. But, as Chirovsky points out, the term has problems, as does other commonly used nomenclature, such as “Ukrainian Catholic,” that appears to describe an ethnic Church. A more satisfactory solution, Chirovsky proposes, is to return to the consciousness of our Church as being part of the ecclesiastical see of Kyiv, using, for example, the “Greek-Catholic Church of

tion in Richmond, British Columbia on the feast of Ss. Peter and Paul in 2016. The parish there was famously described by the satire personality Michael Schurr, on his show Toronto Television, as the “Chinese mission” of the Greco-Catholic Church.⁴ I do not know if that is a good description of our actual demographic makeup, although it is a humorous characterization. Certainly, we have more than a few Chinese people in attendance because Richmond’s population is about 55% ethnic Chinese; in fact, people of Chinese descent make up about a quarter of the residents in the metropolitan area of Vancouver. But among those who regularly come to liturgies at the parish in Richmond, there are also people with backgrounds from the Philippines, Jamaica, Latin America, Japan, and the United States. We are a Canadian parish, which means that we have people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds who attend, and our common language is English – although the epistle is read in both English and Chinese.

I am one of the Chinese members of this community. My background, however, is a little bit more complicated than others who are actually from Hong Kong, the People’s Republic of China or Taiwan. Born in Canada and raised in the United States, my ethnicity is Han Chinese, but of all the languages that I speak, English is my most proficient.

It took becoming Greco-Catholic for me to describe myself as truly Chinese. I describe myself before my conversion as suspended between an English-speaking world and my inner Chinese heart. Now it is all one. This kind of integration required a process of conversion that was both spiritual and in-

Kyiv,” the “Church of Kyiv,” or the “Kyivan Church.” Another option, following the suggestion of Fr. Pavlo Hayda (of blessed memory) at the 2003 synod of our Church, is to call it the “Kyivan Catholic Church,” which was shelved at the last moment because the abbreviation in Ukrainian, the “KKЦ,” would have had the unfortunate effect of rendering the name in Ukrainian as the *кака церква* (a polite English translation would be the “excrement Church”). My preference is for those names that emphasize the Kyivan and Byzantine dimensions of our Church’s existence so as not to make the mistake that we are a Ukrainian ethnic chaplaincy in the Catholic communion.

⁴ “Утеодин з Майклом Щуром No. 32,” *Телебачення Торонто*, July 4, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sN2CNUxy-U&feature=youtu.be&t=14m44s>. I am grateful to Julian Hayda for his translation of the episode.