


# Starting From and Beyond Matteo Ricci. Perspectives for the Inculturation of the Liturgical Space in China

*A partir y más allá de Matteo Ricci. Perspectivas para la inculturación del espacio litúrgico en China*

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## ABSTRACT

Between 1500 and 1600, the Jesuit Matteo Ricci carried out a true process of inculturation of Christianity in China. Later, other actors operated according to acculturation, which is a form of colonialism. This process also occurred in the construction of churches, most of which were built in the neo-Gothic style. In 1926, Dom Gresnigt was sent to China with the aim of creating a new Sino-Christian style, backed by Bishop Costantini and the new missionary policy. However, these attempts at architectural inculturation only focused on stylistic issues. At present we must act according to an intercultural dialogue that, starting from a textual translation of the liturgical books and ritual action, can provide the architect with images of experience that are capable of being implemented as places and movements on the horizon of the sacred. Metaphors have to be found and even better affordances have to be found to increase the efficacy of ritual actions, making even the merely imaginable emotionally perceptible.

## KEYWORDS

Matteo Ricci, China, Inculturation, Liturgical Space, Architecture.

## RESUMEN

Entre 1500 y 1600, el jesuita Matteo Ricci llevó a cabo un verdadero proceso de inculturación del cristianismo en China. Posteriormente, otros actores operaron según la aculturación, que es una forma de colonialismo. Este proceso también se dió en la construcción de iglesias, la mayoría de las cuales se edificaron en estilo neogótico. En 1926, dom Gresnigt fue enviado a China con el objetivo de crear un nuevo estilo chino-cristiano, respaldado por el obispo Costantini y la nueva política misionera. Sin embargo, estos intentos de inculturación arquitectónica sólo se centraron en cuestiones estilísticas. En la actualidad debemos actuar según un diálogo intercultural que, partiendo de una traducción textual de los libros litúrgicos y la acción ritual, pueda proporcionar al arquitecto imágenes de experiencia que sean capaces de implementarse como lugares y movimientos en el horizonte de lo sagrado. Hay que encontrar metáforas e incluso construir mejores affordances para aumentar la eficacia de las acciones rituales, haciendo que incluso las meramente imaginables sean emocionalmente perceptibles.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Matteo Ricci, China, inculturación, espacio litúrgico, arquitectura.

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*Dieu semble ne pas être chez lui en Chine; il demeure toujours dans une maison étrangère.*  
Father Vincent Lebbe.<sup>1</sup>

In order to address issues related to liturgical space, after a historical survey, it will be necessary to ask the cognitive linguist for help. Spatial metaphors are generated in religious and ritual spatial experiences. These constitute the liturgical and theological thought on which the liturgical texts are based. Tracing the experiences that give rise to the metaphors of the liturgical books makes it possible to construct spaces that can in turn generate them. But spatial metaphors are inevitably culturally dependent and can differ completely, even the most basic ones, from one cultural world to another. To disregard these differences, which lie at the root of any step in the delicate world of inculturation, is to fail from the start. Moreover, the liturgist's task is not to give stylistic and formal indications, but to provide metaphorical, never allegorical suggestions, images that will be translated into architecture. The process suggested can only be developed later by liturgists and architects of Chinese culture and language.

#### MATTEO RICCI AND ACCOMMODATION<sup>2</sup>

In 1571, Matteo Ricci joined the Society of Jesus and in 1578 he arrived in Kochi, India, where he was ordained priest. The visitor of the East Indian missions, Alessandro Malignano, sent Matteo Ricci to Macao in 1582. Here he took the name *Lì Mǎdòu* and began *the ascent to Beijing* (Spence 1988). Between 1595 and 1596 he wrote in Chinese a key text to understand his idea of interculturality, *About Friendship (Jiaoyou Lun)*. Ricci's ascent towards Peking is connoted as a geographical ascent towards the city in order to meet the emperor, Wan-li; as a literary ascent since, being aware that in China the value of the written word was much higher than the spoken one, it was necessary to learn the language at its best, showing to be able to publish works in Chinese; as a social ascension, because, having abandoned the dress of Buddhist monks, which proved to be ineffective, he wore a dress similar to that of the literati, aware that important relationships had to be forged with the socially and culturally higher

classes; an ethical ascent, since it was his wish to see himself recognised, as well as a scientist, as a sage of the great West who could authoritatively offer philosophical and moral teachings; as a cultural ascent, in addition to developing a bilingual skill to be able to expound the Christian faith, his knowledge of Chinese culture was such that he could identify in the texts of classical Confucianism those thoughts compatible with the Christian faith (Tai-Fai 2010).

Ricci shows how friendship is *openness* towards universal brotherhood, divine transcendence and human wisdom (Tai-Fai 2010). It was not just a pretext for a literary exercise, but a text on the primary and essential value for Ricci, who deeply lived a sort of «spirituality of friendship» (Costa 2010, 276-277). What is striking is his continuous search for concepts in Chinese culture that he elaborates from Greek philosophy and Scripture, basing himself on Zhu Xi's *Four Books*.<sup>3</sup> Ricci considers Confucius' teaching as a *praeparatio evangelica* and that, starting from this principle, he will be able to trace a space of encounter between Christianity and Confucianism. The Confucian-Christian synthesis of the Jesuit Ricci was based on a deep understanding of contemporary Chinese culture, something that other missionaries later failed to carry out (Mungello 1985). The method, which today we would call inculturation,<sup>4</sup> was then called *accommodation* and was set out in *The ceremonial for missionaries in Japan* (1582): Alessandro Valignano, Ricci's novice master, had been his teacher on this topic. Specifically,

The term 'accommodation' applies to the setting in China where Jesuit missionaries accommodated Western learning to the Chinese cultural scene and attempted to achieve the acceptance of Chinese literati through the Confucian-Christian synthesis (Mungello 1985, 15).

Ricci was able to publish his texts in Chinese before arriving in Beijing, *Jiaoyou Lun* and the *Twenty-five Sentences*, written as aphorisms and anecdotes in the style of Confucius' *Analecta*. Indeed, Ricci and the other Jesuits understood that «more is done in China with books than with words» (Costa 2010, 273). Learning the Chinese language, «all visual and all intuitive» made up of tens of thousands

of ideograms that had to be learnt by heart, meant «a different way of approaching reality, now seen through different eyes. In fact, writing always conveys a particular vision of the world. Communication, therefore, presupposed an inner change, and therefore the acceptance of being culturally» reshaped. It is «a further step in the maturation of accommodation» (Costa 2010, 274). The other important work that shows Ricci's method of accommodation/inculturation (1603) is *The True Meaning of 'Lord of Heaven' (Tianzhu Shiyi)*. In this text we can see the missionary's effort to find the most suitable words to use in the theological field for evangelisation in the wake of a deep knowledge of language and culture. We can also see that Ricci was already clear about the most suitable dogmatic approach to proclaiming the Gospel. Some terms are still used today despite the fact that there were later attempts to replace them, which inexorably failed because they were the result of Western pre-compression and suspicion». Lord of Heaven (*Tianzhu*), is the term Ricci chose to indicate God in a prevalent way and this is still used today in the liturgy.<sup>5</sup> Also Ricci's Christology is constructed as a Confucian-Christian synthesis.<sup>6</sup> Ricci also notes that for a Chinese scholar, understanding the meaning of worship of God is difficult; for him, one honours *Tianzhu* by practicing *benevolence*. In order to give meaning to worship, he explains that «a being both bodily and spiritual is capable of constructing sacred buildings, performing sacrificial rites, praying and worshipping as an expression of gratitude» to his Creator (Xuyi 2015, 75)<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 01).

## COLONIALISM

At the request of the Jesuit successors of Ricci, the S. Uffizio granted an indult by means of two decrees (15 January and 26 March 1615) that were to become part of Pope Paul V's *Romanae Sedis Antistes* (Congregatio 1907-08), which granted the use of a headdress during divine offices, the translation of Holy Scripture into Chinese, the privilege for indigenous priests to use literary Chinese in the celebration of Mass, in the Breviary and in the administration of the sacraments: unfortunately this was not implemented (Marson 1994).



Fig. 01. Frontispiece for Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*, published at Amsterdam by Elisée or Elizaëus Weyerstraet and Jan Janszoon van Waesberghe, depicting Adam Schall, an angel, and Matteo Ricci displaying a map of China below SS Francis Xavier and Ignatius Loyola venerating an IHS representing Jesus Christ surrounded by angels, 1667.

Under the Kangxi empire, the second of the Qing dynasty, the Jesuits were still held in high esteem, so much that in 1682, the emperor issued a decree for full freedom to preach Christianity. In 1683, the Apostolic Vicar, Charles Maigrot, issued a decree condemning Chinese rites and forbidding them to Chinese converted to Christianity (Mignini 2004).<sup>8</sup> The *quaestio de ritibus sinensibus* was then exacerbated by the arrival of missionaries who had little knowledge of Chinese language and culture. Persecutions began, culminating in the xenophobic revolt of the Boxers in the early 1900s.

In 1886 Pope Leo XIII started a new line of foreign policy in an attempt to re-establish diplomatic relations between the Holy See and China (Gagliardi 2010) and in 1919 with the encyclical *Maximum illud*, Pope Benedict XV opened a new era regarding the idea of mission: the promotion of the training of indigenous clergy, an excellent knowledge of the local language and culture, the abandonment of nationalism, the respect for cultural differences. Pope Pius XI sent Bishop Celso Costantini as the first apostolic delegate to China in 1922 to implement his predecessor's encyclical.

In 1926, French Jesuit missionaries (Coomans 2018) published a book in Xianxian (Hebei province) entitled, *Le missionnaire constructeur, conseils-plans*, for the construction of churches in northern China.<sup>9</sup> The *Maximum Illud* encyclical proposes a new model in place of a Eurocentric colonial model, for which the architecture of the liturgical space, a more visible expression in the territory, could have been the spokesman.<sup>10</sup> Constructing a liturgical space in a public urban context in China coincides with putting Christianity *physically* and visibly in place, and so choices about style become matters of the cultural relations that missionaries wish to enact in a given context (Coomans 2014b). One can propose a colonialist and Eurocentric missionary style or attempt to interact with the local culture or propose a truly Sino-Christian style. Despite the good intentions to start a new approach also in the field of architecture, «In China, many missionaries resisted, preferring Gothic and other Western styles to a new Sino-Christian style» (Coomans 2014a, 90). Western imperialism, combined with a new missionary drive in the 19th century, had accelerated the construction of new churches around the world<sup>11</sup> and «most new churches adopted a triumphant Gothic style that, at that time, was considered the best expression of Christian Civilization» (Coomans 2014b, 125). In the colonies, bishops and missionaries used manuals for the construction of churches and the French Jesuits' volume can be considered the first among them (Coomans 2014a). The stated author, *the missionaries of North China*, conceals Father Paul Jung, a French Jesuit from the Champagne province who

came to China in 1897 and who was not an architect but a lecturer and superior of the college of Daming. He describes himself as

a missionary who lived a long time in China, whose architectural knowledge, experience of the country, perfect adaptation, as well as the real beauty of the numerous churches he built, authorised him to have an opinion and to formulate it (Coomans 2014a, 92).<sup>12</sup>

In the preface, the author distances himself from Valignano's and Ricci's method of *adaptation* by stating that «This is not even an essay on the famous adaptation of Chinese art in our Christian churches» (Coomans 2014a, 93).

The content of the manual is purely technical and spread over nine chapters.<sup>13</sup> Attention to the place is reduced to a few elements and a colonialist spirit is apparent: warning against applying Western rules regarding the orientation of buildings, traditional Chinese rules of place layout based on the flow of energy and harmony with the environment are forgotten (*fengshui*) (Coomans 2014a).

The chapter on roof ornaments is an unnuanced criticism of the Chinese tradition, written in a totally different style than the technical and practical chapters (Coomans 2014a, 99),

opening the chapter with these words: «this is only to prevent you from decorating your roof as perhaps the people around you would like» (Coomans 2014a, 99), scornfully explaining that roof ornaments belong to the Chinese *culture of beauty (Haokan)*. All examples of ornamentation, windows, and arches are Gothic; the paradigmatic association of pointed arches and church architecture was part of the worldview of nineteenth-century Catholic missions (Coomans 2014a).<sup>14</sup> In the introduction of the volume, it is shown that one cannot speak of Chinese architecture, but only of construction because, according to the author, Chinese rituals, which helped build China, suppressed the freedom that is the *sine qua non* for architectural development, so artists focused on decoration. The author considers the Chinese style to be a mode of decoration and not of construction, and therefore it is a surplus not suited to the financial status of the missions, as well as unsuited to the «the-



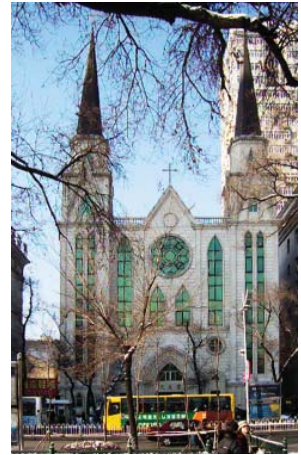
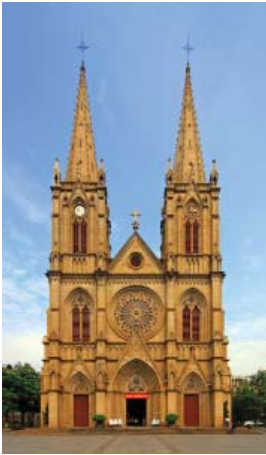


Fig. 02. Leon Vautrin, Sacred Heart Cathedral, Guangzhou (China), 1863-88.  
Fig. 03. Pierre-Marie-Alphonse Favier, Church of the Saviour, Beijing (China), 1890.  
Fig. 04. Dominik Przylusky, Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Harbin (China), 1907; 1966 destroyed; 2004 rebuilt.  
Fig. 05. William Doyle, St. Ignatius Cathedral, Shanghai (China), 1905-10; façade.  
Fig. 06. Interior.  
Fig. 07. Korbinian Paugger, Sacred Heart Cathedral, Jinan (China), 1905.

ory of pain, which Christ came to teach» (Coomans 2014a, 104). For the author, Chinese architecture is based on «a monumental roof placed on columns», and is an «eminently childish construction mode» (Coomans 2014a, 104) (Fig. 02-07).

## THE SINO-CHRISTIAN STYLE

In the 1920s, Western imperialism and Christianity were strongly criticised by the Nationalist and Communist Parties in China. Archbishop Celso Costantini promoted the first Catholic Council in Shanghai in 1924, founded the Catholic University of Peking in 1926 and, in the same year, Pope Pius XI consecrated the first six Chinese bishops. Despite this, some bishops and many missionaries, particularly French, boycotted Costantini's lines (Coomans 2014a).<sup>15</sup> Archbishop Costantini<sup>16</sup> supported the Benedictine monk Adelbert Gresnigt (*Ge Li-si*), appointed prefect of the Propaganda fide Congregation in 1926 to create a new Sino-Christian architectural style in this context (Coomans 2014c). In less than five years —from March 1927 to January 1932— dom Gresnigt, who was not an architect, immersed himself in Chinese art, designed churches and liturgical furnishings and built four large educational institutions (Coomans 2014c).<sup>17</sup>

This choice by Costantini may come as a surprise as Dom Gresnigt had never designed or built any buildings, was not familiar with Chinese culture and art and was an artist at the *Beuroner Kunstschule*, therefore not very inclined to adapt to other influences and there were already several missionary architects in China and an American architect, Henry Killam Murphy,<sup>18</sup> had built several important buildings according to the principle of *adaptation*. Costantini saw in Gresnigt the ideal man, obedient because he was a monk, a talented artist and a long-time friend (Coomans 2014c).<sup>19</sup>

In China, Dom Adelbert Gresnigt lived in the Benedictine community of the Catholic University of Beijing, which had settled in the ancient palace of *Tao beile fu*, belonging to a Manchou prince, where buildings and gardens were an expression of refined Chinese culture (Coomans 2014c). In 1923, in a letter

on the universality of Christian art, Costantini formulated the four fundamental postulates: he condemned the use of Gothic and Romanesque styles,

Western art in China is an error of style. It is an error to import European styles, Romanesque and Gothic, into China (Coomans 2014a, 103);<sup>20</sup>

the unfavourable prejudice of the Chinese towards religions imported from abroad and therefore the negative role of Western art used by missionaries; the tradition of the Church allows Christian art to renew itself, adapt and enrich its universal language; Chinese architecture can lend itself to the construction of churches, and that should not be copied but should be adapted to the requirements of the sacred Catholic liturgy. The letter was published in 1927 and accompanied by four drawings by the monk (Coomans 2014c).<sup>21</sup> After 1930 we can see the drastic reduction of the Benedictine's work.<sup>22</sup> Propaganda Fide and Pius XI decided to entrust the university to the German missionaries of the *Societas Verbi Divini* and so in 1931 Gresnigt, and in 1933 Costantini left China for good and with them ended the process of inculturation that they had pursued with great commitment (Coomans 2014c) (Fig. 08-10).

## FROM ACCOMMODATION TO INCULTURATION

Costantini's and Gresnigt's work concerns style and form as something useful to *clothe* a structure that ultimately remains Western. Matteo Ricci's process was not the same as that of Costantini and Gresnigt. Ricci had understood that entering into the language and culture of such different people coincided with starting to think in a different way.

It is therefore necessary to clarify the terms *acculturation* and *inculturation* and their current meaning. The first term, in classical cultural anthropology is defined as follows:

comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups (Redfield et al 1936, 149),



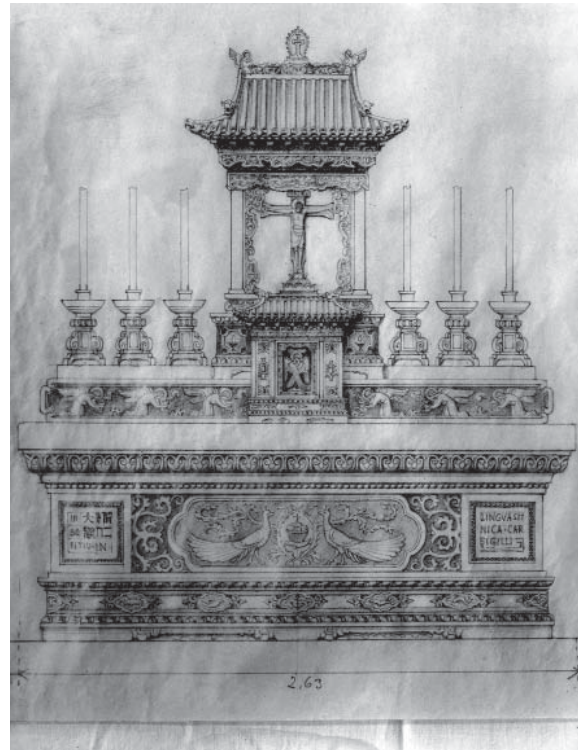
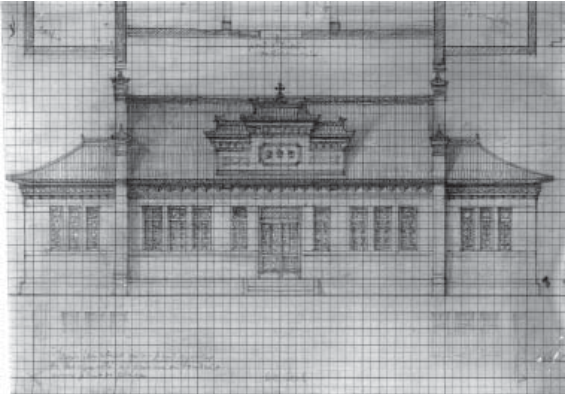


Fig. 08. Dom Adelbert Gresnigt's architectural sketch for the seminary of the Congregation of the Discipuli Domini in Xuanhua (China), 1930 ca.

Fig. 09. Dom Adelbert Gresnigt's sketch of an altar, 1930 ca.

Fig. 10. Dom Adelbert Gresnigt, Holy Spirit Seminary, Hong Kong, China, 1931.



## acculturation

is therefore the result of contact between cultures that have different strengths, and where the more powerful or dominant culture imposes its supremacy on the weaker one (Terrin 2009, 90).

Thus, acculturation appears more as an aggression that also underlies a concept of «modernisation» as «westernisation» (Terrin 2009, 92). In China they were faced with a *strong* culture, and the results were rather poor, given the numbers of Christians (especially Catholics). In fact, even today, says Terrin

it seems that China is still afraid of the *Western* Catholic Church. One might suspect—more or less legitimately—that China is afraid that the Catholic Church is an *institution of the West* capable of creating political problems for power through a covert process of *westernisation* that could get out of hand (Terrin 2009, 127).

Terrin goes on to say that this is an unfounded fear in the context of the great evangelisation of peoples, but that if the purely spiritual mission of the church were to appear with greater transparency, there would be no need to demonstrate the church's good faith. Moreover,

the Christian faith must not be tied to the West as the only culture (...) it must be *flexible, adaptable* to the cultures and experiences of peoples, otherwise it becomes a *foreign body* that sooner or later will be expelled (128).

The method should therefore be that of *inculturation* as a synonym of adaptation, *indigenisation*, *contextualisation*

for a population who is converted to Christianity, it is necessary to bring the faith within the culture in which the believer lives, so that the faith is understood within the culture and is not like a foreign body to the cultural world to which it belongs (Terrin 2009, 98).

But in practice we have often found ourselves faced with an aggressive inculturation, and the architecture of the liturgical space is also the bearer of this method, given that

since the 1990s, many new Catholic churches have been built in the Gothic style in China (...) it is cer-

tain that this explicit, public and identity reference expresses the Western origin of Christianity in China<sup>23</sup> (Coomans 2015, 17).

There are thus two positions in the world of cultural anthropology, «one relativist and one aggressive and destructive of identities» (Terrin 2009, 118) and Terrin through Taylor, shows that there is the risk of an irremediable contradiction since, on the one hand «the principle of equal respect demands that we treat human beings in a way that is *blind* to differences», on the other «we must recognise 'diversity' and respect it, since only by recognising diversity we are able to attribute to others what is due to them» (119).<sup>24</sup> It must therefore be understood that the Christian faith must be a *trans-cultural* message, which does not do violence to other cultures, since «it can be incarnated in another culture while respecting its own paradigms that already exist and operate» (122).

If an architect needs images of experience to think about,<sup>25</sup> the liturgical text, which is in poetic form, with metaphors and images, may be able to suggest images of places and movement that can be relocated within the horizon of the sacred. Moreover, liturgical texts, which are poetic texts, by their very nature do not merely convey a conceptual content, but are endowed with the symbolic and associative power of the words used (Bonaccorso 1998). The way in which the signifier is handled radically modifies the meaning:

the *how* of the expressive form (of the signifier) conditions the *what* of the mental content (of the signified) also because that *how* interacts with the emotional dimension of man (Bonaccorso 1998, 907).

Taking the Missal, we discover that the translation is almost completely literal; we are faced with a linguistic, non-textual and non-cultural translation.<sup>26</sup> To operate in exclusively linguistic terms in order to translate liturgical texts means to carry out a hasty operation which omits the most important elements (Bonaccorso 1998):<sup>27</sup> words and phrases are messages, that is, the text of a communication, so translating is not passing from language to language, but from text to text (Bonaccorso 1998). A «trans-cultural or





Fig. 11. A Mass in China, 2020 ca.

intercultural work» or «intercultural communication» is necessary (Bonaccorso 1998, 908), since

translation is an intercultural communication, in which the semantic value of a text, both source and target, is the result of the dynamic comparison of two cultural contexts (909).

This dynamism seems to coincide with the term *gap* in Françoise Jullien's treatment, which is how he proposes to address the diversity of cultures. Regarding discard and difference, he argues that: «Both mark a separation; but difference operates in the sphere of distinction, while the gap in that of distance» (Jullien 2018, 21). *Difference* tends to determine identities,<sup>28</sup> *gap* on the other hand keeps in tension, separated, remaining in a confrontation in which each one remains open to the other:

The gap, through the open distance between the two [terms], has made visible the *between* and this between is active. In the difference, as each term folds back on itself after separating itself from the other to better identify its identity, there is no *between* that opens up between them and nothing happens anymore (Jullien 2018, 23).

Here, then, the translation of a text is a living operation in which the distance of the gap remains and in which «the translation is oriented towards the

target culture» (Bonaccorso 1998, 909). If we imagine the gap as a segment with a certain distance, in translation this segment will also have an arrow towards the point of arrival. The classic *prescriptive* method of translation is to be replaced by a new *descriptive* method: the former is concerned with the source (source-oriented), the latter with the target of the translation (target-oriented) (Bonaccorso 1998). A target-oriented translation possesses the typical characteristics of enculturation, bearing in mind that the gap must be maintained and that therefore the text that belongs to the source culture must not be completely flattened on the target culture by eliminating the distance/distance, but it is necessary to *make perceive* the specificity of the source text (Bonaccorso 1998). Remaining in the field of linguistics, taking up a thesis of Francis Jacques<sup>29</sup> it is a «textual game» (Bonaccorso 1998, 911) and translation must be textual and not phraseological, all the more when the translation takes place from a language, Latin, to Chinese, which belongs to «another cultural world», since «every single culture is a world» (Panikkar 2009, 192). The semantic and emotional power of the expressive forms of the Christian message of the source language must remain in the target language, but this cannot happen if the translation is linguistic.

## PROCESSES FOR THE INCULTURATION OF THE LITURGICAL SPACE

The liturgy is not only text, but also a complex whole made up of gestures, movements, music, songs, space, and an iconographic apparatus. We know that, in addition to translation, «intersemiotic transposition from one sign system to another is possible: for example, from the art of language to music, dance, film or painting» (Jakobson 1985, 64). Intercultural dialogue does not necessarily have to be spoken, but can make use of other forms such as art, dance, architecture, and that liturgy is an essential factor in intercultural encounters (Panikkar 2009). In fact, a fundamental problem in dealing with the inculturation of the liturgical space also concerns the translation of ritual action (Bonaccorso 1998). When the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*

in Chinese is often accompanied by explanatory photographs, it means that the ritual action of the Missal has not been inculturated, that the gestures and movements of the liturgy are not easily understood by the Chinese culture (Fig. 11).

If, in the ritual, the body shapes the space and the space *imposes* on the body a certain action,<sup>30</sup> if the inculturation of the gesture is not intervened upon, the operation of constructing a truly inculturated liturgical space fails from the start. This means that linguistic expression, poorly translated, fails to be gesture,

movement, expression of the self, not only mental but also bodily (...) to understand the word as incarnation, incorporation of language, therefore as physical and gestural expression, means to grasp it also as an act that is expressed within a world, in a context, in an environment (Ghilardi 2012, 104).

The religious and ritual spatial experience is of a liminal nature; it takes place materially on the threshold and we experience being in a fragment. This intermediate space connects seemingly irreconcilable and opposite places, operating metaphorically: I and other/Other, here and there, earth and sky and many others. The euchological texts of the liturgical books are poetic and therefore are already an

experience of translation: of sensations into images, of emotions into figures and words; of an unspeakable into a sayable that does not fix or stiffen the experience but preserves it and returns it to the ineffable, putting the emotion and the life that arises from it back into circulation (Ghilardi 2012, 116-117).

The paschal mystery itself

cannot be inscribed in a complete and exhaustive expressive framework (...) the divine mystery of salvation history, as such, is *in-dictable* (Bonaccorso 1998, 912).

It should be noted, among other things, the effectiveness and scope of the *lex orandi*, i.e. the liturgical text, since in China «there is no divorce between reflective discourse and poetic speech» (Jullien 2007, 43). Poetic discourse, unlike explicit discourse, is not a closed discourse, but «possesses a *beyond* that,

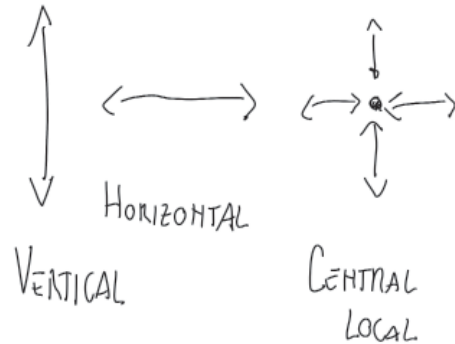


Fig. 12. The three basic spatial oppositions.

while remaining concealed, in reserve, does not cease to unfold and keeps the purpose ‘alive’ because it is open to becoming» (Jullien 2007, 50).

Just as *everyday* metaphors are generated from everyday thought and language, so in the ritual field the religious/ritual language that is the foundation of the euchological corpus of the liturgical books is generated. And thus, the spatial metaphors arising from ritual experience constitute the theological liturgical thought on which the euchological *corpus* is founded. We also know that the fundamental spatial metaphors are based on the three basic spatial oppositions: vertical, horizontal, central/local (Leto 2019)<sup>31</sup> (Fig. 12).

Everyday life is based on three fundamental spatial oppositions and these give rise to spatial metaphors in everyday life; these oppositions belong to the sphere of the intuitive. Moving to the religious world, that is, to the world of movements that unite the human being to counterintuitive elements, that is, to God, what will be the constitutive movements of religious experience that together with the spatial oppositions of everyday life give rise to the fundamental spatial metaphors of the Christian sacred? In my study, based on the *Editio typica* of the Roman Missal, I found that the constitutive movements of religious experience are of two types: one, on the vertical axis, which depends on

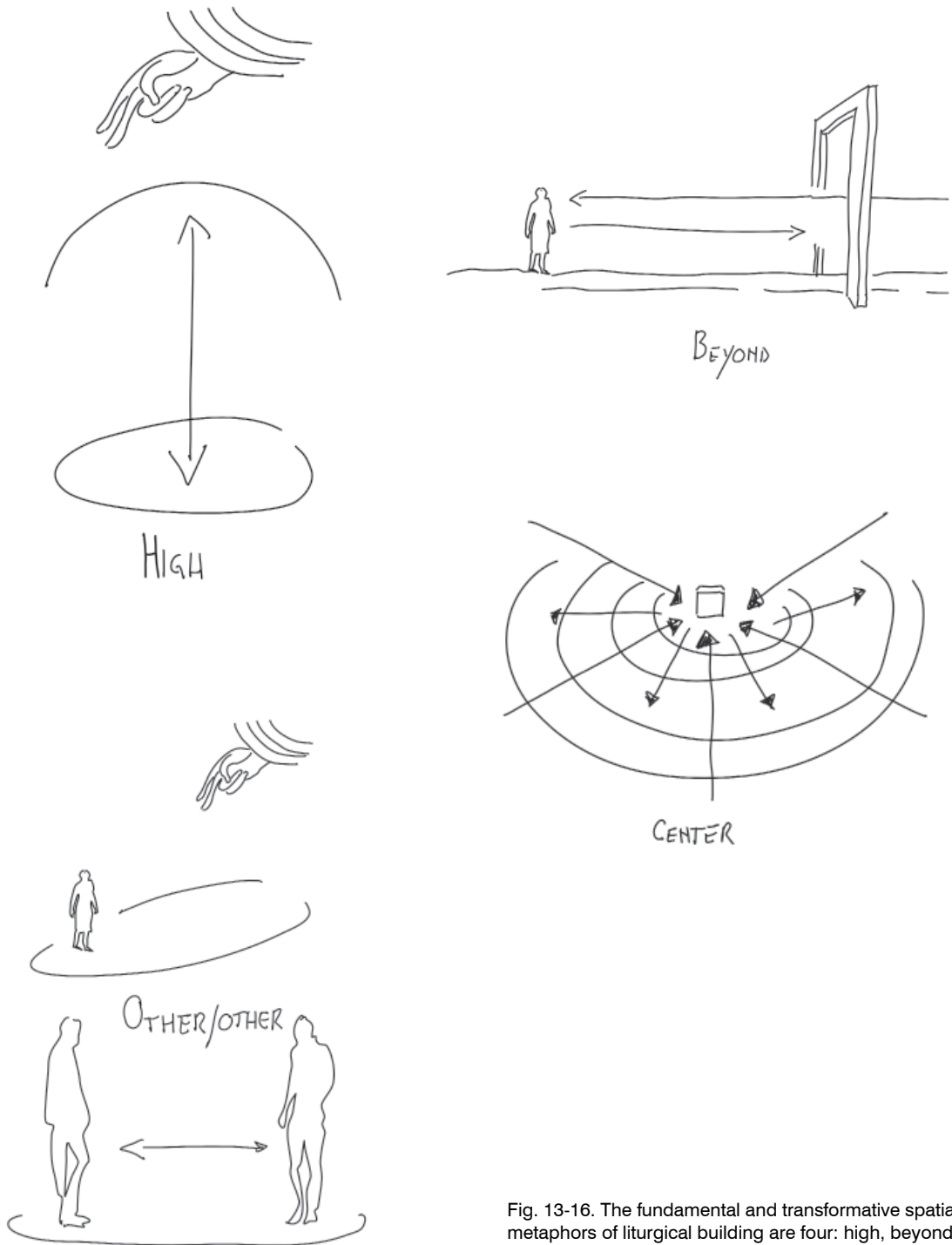


Fig. 13-16. The fundamental and transformative spatial metaphors of liturgical building are four: high, beyond, centre, and other/Other.



one man's understanding of himself in relation to the divine; the other, on the horizontal line, which insists on one man's possibility of crossing space, crossing boundaries, and of reaching and being reached by the transcendent. These movements unite one man with counterintuitive elements. By composing the spatial oppositions of everyday life to the three constitutive movements of religious experience, we give rise to the fundamental spatial metaphors of the Christian sacred (Leto 2017). From this, I inferred that:

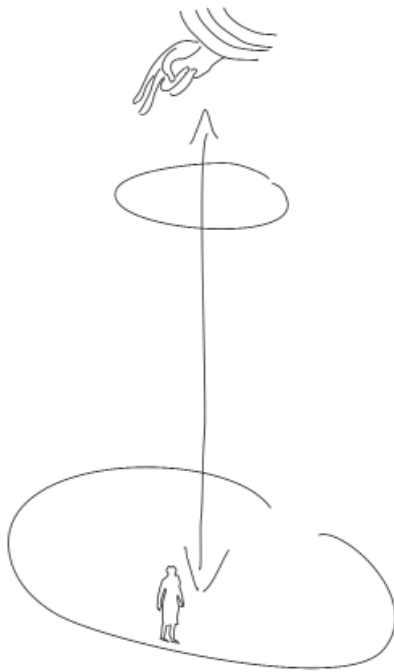
The fundamental and transformative spatial metaphors of liturgical building are four: high, beyond, centre, other. On the descending and vertical movements united with the vertical and horizontal opposition, the fundamental spatial metaphor *high* is generated. While the union of the crossing movement with the horizontal opposition generates the fundamental spatial metaphors *beyond* and *other*. Finally, the union of the crossing movement and the central/local opposition generates the metaphor relating to the centre. As they flow between opposites, *from* and *to*, they are transformative (Leto 2017, 315) (Fig. 13-16).

My analysis was carried out according to a *classical* method on the search for nouns used as spatial metaphors, but I preferred to add a second analysis by examining verbs. Verbs in fact indicate the action offered, the *affordance* (Gibson 1999). The sacred space must therefore offer the possibility of performing certain actions that are not simply functional to the execution of a rubric, but rather enrich and are enriched in meaning by the texts prayed in the ritual context. The metaphors are *put into action* and at the same time the places allow me the experience evoked by the euchology.

There are two good reasons for preferring research of this kind on liturgical books in Chinese. The first is of a linguistic nature: the Chinese language prefers the use of the verb rather than nouns as is the case in Indo-European languages; the Chinese language does not make use of ontological metaphors and more specifically metaphors of the container (Link 2013).<sup>32</sup> The second is philosophical in nature; in Chinese thought there is a propensity for process, as «every situation is in progress» (Jullien 2007, 51). Jullien

explains the logic of process through the Chinese term, *sei*, which has a rather elusive meaning «situation, configuration and at the same time power, potential» (50) that we could translate as *propensity*. In the Chinese poem there is «a continuous interaction of the *outside* and the *inside*, of landscape and emotion, and not according to our myth of creation» (50). For Chinese thought everything is becoming, there is a continuous transformation by adaptation, a kind of regulation (Jullien 2007). And the relationship is of primary importance both between humans and in nature: between Heaven and Earth, between humans, etc. (Jullien 2007). We know that «topological space is essentially the space of communication» (Marcolli 1983, 152), hence the space of relationship, of interaction. It is the movement, the process that unfolds between the thresholds that are in succession in the sacred space. The mode of interaction between individuals, individuals and places, between places, the how of relations within the liturgical space between the *fields*, will be identified through *affordances* (Leto 2017), that is, verbs that define these interactions.

Having suggested a process, a «bias» (Jullien 2016, 288) that starts from the texts and reaches the space, I will now limit myself to a few suggestions that are the result of some intuition. In the *I Ching*,<sup>33</sup> we read: «Heaven is high, Earth is low».<sup>34</sup> If, in Chinese culture, man's orientation is upwards, this spatial direction can be put into action, conscious also of the fact that the divine with the *actions* of descent and man with the *actions* of ascent can be represented in the mind/brain.<sup>35</sup> The other privileged direction will be that of the Way, of the journey, in which once again the tension of being in the fragment, between the thresholds will be highlighted (Jullien 2016). All of this is constructed so that the affordance of silent transformation can be offered and not the «sound event»<sup>36</sup> that would disturb the ritual actions of a Chinese believer. I would then be rather cautious about relocating some of our post-conciliar spaces that are the result of Western conceptions<sup>37</sup> that perhaps do not mesh well with Chinese culture, since, for instance



the central plan does [not possess] absolute character as the only way of interpreting liturgical space according to the Council (López-Arias 2019, 35) (Fig. 17-18).

## CONCLUSIONS

One might expect precise indications, architectural solutions, instead, in the face of the completed study, I could only choose to indicate a process and two great spatial metaphors of liturgical space on which to work later. The process of imposing models or solutions from outside, or the search for typological characters, has already proved to be a failure as shown in the historical notes: the colonialism of the missionaries first, and the exclusively stylistic attempt of Costantini and Gresnigt are not a way forward according to the principle of an intercultural dialogue.

As I have theorised, the process can only be carried out after a correct translation of the texts,

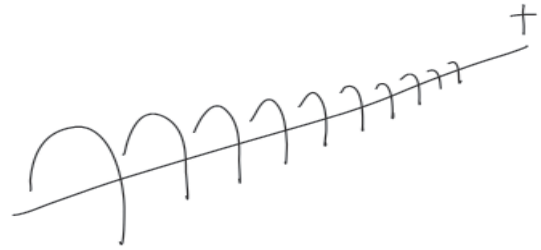


Fig. 17-18. Two possible spatial metaphors of liturgical building in China: Heaven-Earth (high), and the Way.

according to the principles set out, and the subsequent search for the spatial metaphors and affordances that will lead, since they are images and since architects think in images, to their implementation. This operation can only be carried out by people of Chinese language and culture.

This article suggests the approach to the process, after showing how only Matteo Ricci was really able to initiate it, but it cannot and especially must not give solutions. All these operations, translation, identification of affordances, carried out by people of Chinese culture with the collaboration of others, will have to be born from a real

intercultural dialogue, (...) an osmosis between two visions of reality, or rather between two worlds represented, so to speak, by two human persons who carry with them all the weight (the stories) of their culture (Panikkar, 2009, 254),

keeping as an objective the point of arrival «making perceive» the cultural sphere of origin.

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## NOTES

1. «God does not seem to be at home in China; he always dwells in a foreign house» (Coomans 2014c, 142). Father Vincent Lebbe, a pioneer of inculturation in 20th century China, was a Lazarist, first oblate at Maredsous.

2. For the Chinese translations and the research carried out on the Chinese liturgical texts, we would like to thank Dr. Martina Pasin for her precious and indispensable collaboration.

3. *Sì Sh*. The classical texts of literature he translated into Latin in 1593.

4. The term inculturation in the theological field was first used, distorting its original meaning, by Father Pedro Arrupe, General of the Jesuits during the 1977 Synod of Bishops on catechesis (Dal Lago 2000). Previously, in cultural anthropology it meant instead «the process of dynamic insertion into one's own culture of a member of that culture» (Terrin 2009, 97).

5. In order to distinguish *God* in the biblical sense from *god* in the cosmic or pagan sense, since there is no possibility of using a capital letter in the Chinese language, which is not alphabetic, Ricci adopted an expedient, known from classical Chinese writing, of inserting a blank space before the character used to indicate God (Xuyi 2015).

6. «In the Confucian world of East Asia it was more persuasive to expound a Christology that presented Jesus as the ideal and perfect Sage, rather than crucified and risen» (Xuyi 2015, 49). Indeed, «Unlike the Western-Greek approach to the search for Truth, the Sino-Confucian approach seeks the Way. The Christological perspective strongly emphasises the role of creation, seen as the foundation of all God's saving plans and culminating in Christ» (Xuyi 2015, 51). «Like the term *Tianzhu*, *Yesu* (...), *Jesus*, is also carefully thought out and meditated upon. The character *ye* (...) is made up of two parts: both indicate the ear, and formerly meant *father*. It is plausible to assume that here it indicates obedience, i.e. listening, in the subordinate relationship between Son and Father. The character *su* (...) is also composed of two parts: the first *yu* (...) means *fish*, while the second *he* (...) indicates grain or generally cereals; taken together, the characters designate awakening from death or resurrection» (Xuyi 2015, 51).

7. This shows how the concept of ritual for a Chinese contemporary of Ricci had nothing to do with ours. The so-called *quaestio de ritibus sinensibus* was «a very crowded and intricate affair» (Calvaresi 2010, 269), that for missionary reasons, political and economic interests and not least the character of the individuals involved, unfortunately partly blocked evangelisation, creating heated contrasts between China and the Church, which were finally resolved in December 1939 by Pope Pius XII. See in this regard: Calvaresi 2010; Standaert 2000; Metzler 1995; Zurcher 1994.

8. Immediately after Ricci's death, some Jesuits raised the issue of translating *Deus* into Chinese and adapting Christian morality to the Confucian one (Mignini 2004).

9. «Missionaries dreaming of Western models were confronted with Chinese building traditions. Western techniques such as arches, vaults, foundations, full masonry walls, stone carving, timber trusses, high towers, stairs, etc. were almost unknown in Northern China before 1900, except in the treaty ports and major cities» (Coomans 2014a, 90).

10. On the importance of the adaptation of liturgical space in China, the only text relating to the first decades of the 20th century is that of Henry K. Murphy on the liturgical space of reformed churches (Cody 2001).

11. «The aesthetic dimension was in the first instance the choice of a precise style from the classical or the medieval past in function of the national and religious identity of the patrons. So, for instance, English Gothic Revival became the style of the Anglican Church both in the British Isles and out the British Empire, while thir-

teenth-century French cathedral Gothic became the style of Catholicism in French colonies and French missions. Even Belgian missionaries built churches in Belgian Brick Gothic in Inner-Mongolia» (Coomans 2014a, 91). In this regard see Bremner 2013; Wiest 2004; Coomans and Luo 2014.

12. In fact, only the architect Alphonse De Moerloose, *He Geng Bo*, a Belgian religious of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of the Scheutist Fathers of the Beijing Diocese, had built many churches in the Gothic style. Alphonse De Moerloose «built in China as pure expansionist-missionary products. Alphonse De Moerloose remained faithful to his Flemish identity, his Catholic worldview, and the artistic certitudes he had learnt at St Luke's» (Coomans and Luo 2012, 252).

13. Choice of location; choice of building layout; plans, estimates, contracts; building materials; masonry; roofs, both Chinese and Western; roof ornaments; *miscellany*, on various construction elements; illustrations in 54 plates.

14. In the experience of the writer, this is still the case in other mission lands. In 2004, in Togo, the new churches and chapels being built or newly built by missionaries had pointed Gothic windows. When we asked why this was so, we were answered with great conviction, that only such windows can identify a church.

15. This makes it clear why the authors of the booklet wanted to remain anonymous: such an attack against the official missionary policy of the Vatican would surely have had consequences for the authors (Coomans 2014a).

16. «Mgr. Costantini's principles and convictions regarding artistic inculturation were stated very clearly: Western style art is unsuited to China; Western Christian art used in China gives the impression that Christianity is a western, not an universal religion; the Church throughout its history has adopted and adapted to local art forms; Chinese art and culture provide many opportunities for adoption and adaptation» (Ticozzi 2008).

17. Sent at the age of fifteen to Maredsous Abbey, he was admitted to the famous *Beuronner Kunstschule* to study painting and sculpture under Desiderius Lenz. He completed his monastic training in Maredsous in 1903 and was ordained a priest in Rome the same year. His fame grew gradually from his work as a painter in the crypt of St Benedict at Monte Cassino, then in S. Paulo in Brazil in the church of the Abbey of St Benedict, and finally in the church of St Anselm in the Bronx in New York, where Monsignor Costantini joined him in 1926 to give him the mission to China (Coomans 2014c).

18. Henry Killam Murphy was an advocate of adapting traditional Chinese architecture for contemporary buildings. On this subject see Cody 2001.

19. In the *Bulletin of the Catholic University of Peking*, in relation to the project for *The new university buildings*, we read: «Dom Adelbert did not obtain his understanding of the spirit of Chinese architecture without labour. For months after his arrival in Peking he pored over tomes and examined countless photographs collected from every part of China. He visited most of the ancient temples in Peking and its environs; and where the ordinary sight-seer would notice only the prominent features, Dom Adelbert would stand in silent admiration of the art and ingenuity displayed in some little detail by an artist long since dead. A certain native soundness of judgment and quickness of perception, coupled with a rich and varied experience in many lands, enables Dom Adelbert, after his comparatively brief study of Chinese forms to launch out fearlessly into the designing of Chinese churches» (Coomans 2014c, 141).

20. The archbishop had clashed bitterly with Father Alphonse De Moerloose. But this clash did not undermine the high mutual esteem, so much so that in 1928 Costantini asked the Pope to give De Moerloose the highest pontifical distinction (*Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice*) for his service to the Church (Coomans 2014a).

21. The article was published in English by an American magazine for engineers and translated into Chinese and French (Coomans 2014c).

22. The causes are to be found in the world economic crisis, the political crisis and growing insecurity in China, changes in the Vatican's policy towards China, the opposition of many missionaries to the inculturation movement and the failure of the American Benedictines to support the Catholic university in Beijing.

23. «Depuis les années 1990, de nombreuses nouvelles églises catholiques d'allure gothique sont bâties en Chine (...) il est certain que cette référence explicite, publique et identitaire exprime l'origine occidentale du Christianisme en Chine». One example is the church in Shadifang, Hebei province, from 2011.

24. «In the first case, it can be observed that by attributing equal dignity to all cultures, the diversity of peoples is not respected; in the second case, it can be observed that by recognising diversity, sufficient attention cannot be paid to the identity of each one» (Terrin 2009, 118).

25. «When I think about architecture, images come up inside me» (Zumthor 1997, 7).

26. For a quick genesis of the Chinese-language Missal for China, here are some excerpts from the Preface

to the 2006 reprint: «In the early 1980s, the Liturgical Commission of the Episcopal Church of Taiwan, in accordance with the vision of the Second Vatican Council, compiled and published a three-volume set of versions in traditional Chinese upright characters (...) the translation was made into Mandarin (the national language). (...) In 1993, the National Catholic Congress adopted a resolution that the Chinese Mass could be celebrated in all churches according to circumstances. As a result, the Chinese Mass spread across the continent and was gradually formalised. However, the issue of mass texts was not adequately resolved and continued to plague the Church in mainland China. (...) Of course, it is also very inconvenient for young people on the mainland, who have been used to reading simplified Chinese characters in a horizontal format since childhood, to read vertical versions of the traditional Chinese characters of the Xiangtai Church. (...) On 24 June 2003, the Society of Faith sent a letter of comment on the «horizontal arrangement of the Chinese Missal in simplified characters», which received an immediate and enthusiastic response from many bishops. (...) the Mass was first published in a limited edition in 2005 in simplified Chinese characters» (Taiwan Regional Bishops' Conference 2017).

27. In this regard, see the very recent Decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments implementing the provisions of canon 838 of the Code of Canon Law, 22 October 2021, regarding adaptations and translations of texts in the vernacular. See also Grillo 2021.

28. Through intercultural dialogue, according to Panikkar, «other models of intelligibility, other perspectives of understanding, other forms of awareness, which cannot be reduced to a common denominator, are revealed» (Panikkar 2009, 36-37). In Babel, according to the author, «the Lord confused man's dreams on a monolithic and totalitarian vision of reality» (Panikkar 2009, 38), the way is therefore not a monolithic humanity with unique language, culture and cult, but the ability to build roads of communication.

29. Jacques prefers the syntagm *textual games*, in the field of religious rites, to Wittgenstein's *linguistic games*. On this subject see Jacques 1995.

30. According to Hammad's understanding, «Architecture acts on man»: to the extent of asserting the thesis that «*cosmic entities act on architecture and architecture acts on men*» (Hammad 2003, 37). Architecture is usually thought of as a human work in which the power of influence would seem to be the exclusive prerogative of man. However, in addition to man's influence on archi-



ecture, there is an equal influence of architecture on man who lives in it, passes through it, etc. The role of subject or object cannot be determined, but is changeable, since they are in a relationship of interdependence.

31. We can identify three fundamental spatial oppositions that structure the environment, the body, thought (since it is expressed through conceptual spatial metaphors) and the social relations between the members of the group. The first is the vertical opposition, superior/inferior, earth/heaven, human/divine that generates and is generated by the posture of the body and its gaze; it in turn generates and is generated by hierarchical structures. The second is the horizontal opposition of here and there, here and beyond, us and the other, it can generate and is generated by relations of otherness or of an equal, egalitarian type. The third opposition is that concerning the central and the local, which often incorporates the first two (Smith 1987). The first two can also produce temporal oppositions referring to already and not yet, to now and after death. The space between the oppositions is a liminal space, hence a ritual space that makes religious experience possible. Ritual always has to do with a transformation that takes place in a spatio-temporal fragment (*zwischen* according to Heidegger) that is referred to as liminal. Liminality, according to Van Gennep's and Turner's theories, refers to that middle phase in which the transformative performance of the rite takes place. The liminal experience, constitutive of the religious experience itself, is a *living through*: a journey between transcendence and immanence. Aldo Natale Terrin states that the meaning of liminality «is the ultimate root and in some way the *conditio sine qua non* of religious experience itself and of its linguistic-symbolic explication» (Terrin 2014, 19). This liminal living operates a sort of rupture with the everyday, posing itself as a difference in which a transformation takes place. Liminality always has to do with a material passage between one part and another and, in this crossing, the border plays a primary role. Liminality is thus closely linked to the concreteness of space. In this transformative liminal phase of the ritual, a specific type of language, the metaphorical, is in force. This is the only language capable of expressing being in the middle, living in a fragment, at the edges, at the margins; it allows to say what otherwise would not be possible, it allows to unite what could not be together.

32. By ontological metaphors, following Lakoff and Johnson's theory, we mean that human possibility of identifying experiences as entities or substances, referring to them, categorising them, grouping them,

quantifying them and then reflecting on them; when we use the term *container metaphors*, we mean a particular type of ontological metaphors, that is, those by which we conceive of a given thing, whether material or immaterial, as having an interior and an exterior (Lakoff and Johnson 1998). According to Link, this is a preference, not a necessity, but it certainly has implications for the construction of the philosophical thought of the two different cultures (Link 2013): «English phrases that use container metaphors are particularly difficult to translate into Chinese. As long as container metaphors are not involved, we can say that something 'disappears' in English and render it as *shizongle (...)* has lost track in Chinese; we can also say in English that something *is no longer there* and say *buzaille (...)* is no longer [somewhere] in Chinese. But the biggest problems arise when the container metaphors of English arrive. To get essentially the same idea as *disappear*, we can say in English *come out of existence*—as if one thing *came out* of another. We can also say in English that a thing *comes into existence* or *is in existence*. Chinese is opposed to this. On its own, the English noun *existence* is only awkwardly translated into Chinese. A direct translation of the phrase *is in existence* as *zai cunzaili (...)* sounds almost cretinous in Chinese, partly because *is* and *exists* (*zai* and *cunzai*) seem somewhat redundant, but even more so because, obviously, no *container* is needed here» (Link 2013, 217).

33. Also called the *Classic of Change* or the *Book of Change*, (10th century BC) is the most influential text in Chinese thought.

34. «The Sky is high, the Earth low: thus the creative and the receptive are determined; through this bottom-up arrangement the plus and the minus are in their places» (Jullien 2019, 187).

35. For Lawson (2008), a ritual action is distinguished from a common action by the fact that the participant detects the presence of a so-called counterintuitive agent CI. The normal human capacity or competence to represent agents and actions is the same as that employed to represent religious ritual actions, but subtly modified. People will consider a space as sacred if they detect the possibility of a divine action in it, i.e. if the space offers the *affordance* of being understood as a space of divine manifestation (Agency), of a possible theophany. Constructed space, therefore, as well as making us simulate forms and materials, spatial relations, colours, patterns, atmosphere, invites movement, so that things, parts appear as potential actions; the body's neuronal mechanisms, therefore, as well as

assessing the emotional valence of the surrounding environment, assess its affordance (Mallgrave 2015). Thus, the descending/ascending movement can and should be architecturally constructed.

36. On this subject, see Jullien's argument in chapter «13. Silent Transformation (vs Sound Event)» (Jullien 2016, 122).

37. López-Arias (2019, 35) notes that: «La planta central pierde su carácter absoluto como único modo de interpretar el espacio litúrgico según el Concilio. De este modo, en los últimos años se han favorecido organizaciones del espacio celebrativo donde la longitudinalidad del espacio se interpreta como apertura cósmica, cristológica y escatológica».

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Fig. 10. Isaac Wong.

Fig. 11. AsiaNews.