



Higher Education Press

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

ScienceDirect

www.elsevier.com/locate/foar

Frontiers of
Architectural
Research

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A pragmatic approach to church construction in Northern China at the time of Christian inculturation: The handbook “*Le missionnaire constructeur*”, 1926



Thomas Coomans^{a,b,*}

^aFaculty of Engineering, Department of Architecture, University of Leuven, Belgium

^bSchool of Architecture, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Sha Tin, Hong Kong SAR, China

Received 2 August 2013; received in revised form 15 March 2014; accepted 17 March 2014

KEYWORDS

Architectural transfers;
Christian mission churches;
Construction history;
Gothic style, inculturation/indigenization;
China

Abstract

In 1926, French Jesuit missionaries from Daming published at Xianxian (Hebei province) a little handbook for church construction in Northern China: “*Le missionnaire constructeur, conseils-plans*” (“The missionary builder: advice-plans”), containing 67 pages of text and 54 plates. After a short introduction about handbooks and pattern books of churches, this paper describes and analyses the handbook’s content and its different practical aspects about building materials, masonry, roofs, etc. The book, however, is more than a compilation of technical hints and reveals a lot about the missionaries’ perception of Chinese building traditions as well as the transmission of Western techniques to Chinese workers. The paper also contextualizes the handbook and tries to identify both the authors and the addressees. In the mid-1920s, the Vatican launched the Christian *inculturation* process in China, which concerned architecture too. Nevertheless, many missionaries resisted, preferring Gothic or Italianate architecture to a new Sino-Christian style. The handbook participated in this debate.

© 2014. Higher Education Press Limited Company. Production and hosting by Elsevier B.V. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

*Correspondence address: Faculty of Engineering, Department of Architecture, KU Leuven, Kasteelpark Arenberg 1, 3001 Heverlee, Belgium.

E-mail address: thomas.coomans@asro.kuleuven.be

Peer review under responsibility of Southeast University.



Production and hosting by Elsevier

1. Introduction

Building Christian churches in China during the early twentieth century was a great challenge for missionaries. It was more than a question of style and how identifiable churches should be in China’s varied urban and rural landscapes. New churches had to be well built, the least expensive possible, beautiful, and appropriate to their liturgical use.

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.

Some missionaries came to China with Western architectural knowledge, but were immediately confronted with the local reality. They first had to understand the local building traditions and techniques, evaluate the quality of the available materials, experience the climate, chose the good locations for building, and, of course, learn the Chinese terminology and how to deal with Chinese workers and contractors. After having acquired this indispensable knowledge, missionaries initiated skillful Chinese craftsman into Western techniques. These specialized foremen were able reading plans, supervising the works, and transmitting their new knowledge to local workers.

The missionary-builder and his Chinese collaborators were the two main agents of a fascinating exchange process that involved all aspects of architecture. So, in many rural villages and small towns until the 1930s, the building site of a church was a place of encounter and crossbreeding of building techniques. Other tools, however, were necessary for theorizing and transmitting this practical experience to other church builders, especially at the time of the Republic when Christianity expanded and the need for new and larger churches increased.

In 1926, French Jesuits of the apostolic vicariate of Xianxian published a handbook entitled “Le missionnaire constructeur, conseils-plans” (“The missionary builder: advice-plans”). This small in-8° booklet contains 67 pages of text and 54 plates. It is written in French, prefaced from Daming, and signed by “missionaries from Northern China”. This rare handbook, which has only been mentioned once in recent literature,¹ is discussed for the first time in this article. Until now no copy has been found in China,² but two copies were traced in France and Canada:³

- Lyon, Bibliothèque Municipale, SJ H 678/42, coming from the former Jesuit library of Chantilly. This copy is dated 1926 and has lost its plates.
- Québec, Bibliothèque de l'Université Laval, Bibliothèque des sciences humaines et sociales, NA 6045 M678 1935. This copy is a reprint from 1935 and preserved its illustrations.

¹Aubin, Françoise, 2010. “Christian Art and Architecture”, in: *Handbook of Christianity in China*. Volume Two: 1800-Present, edited by R. Gary Tiedemann, Leiden: Brill, p. 733-741 (mention on p. 735).

²With all thanks to Cui Jinze, who checked the Wenjin search engine at the National Library of China [July 2013].

³I would like to thank warmly the people who helped me to trace these copies: Jeffrey Cody and the library of The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles; Luc Vints and KADOC Documentation and Research Centre for Religion, Culture and Society, KU Leuven; Fabienne Wijnants and Campus Library Arenberg, KU Leuven; James Lambert and the library services of the Université Laval, Québec; as well as Liu Yishi, Françoise Aubin, Luo Wei, Dirk Van Overmeiren, Wang Ying, and Léon Lock.

The purpose of this article is to describe, analyze and contextualize the handbook. Comparing the handbook's theory with contemporaneous churches built in Northern China is part of a long-term research project based on fieldwork.⁴ After a brief introduction about handbooks and pattern books of churches, we will analyze the structure and describe the content of the Xianxian-Daming handbook and its different practical aspects about building materials, masonry, roofs, etc. The book, however, is more than a compilation of technical hints and reveals a lot about the missionaries' perception of Chinese building traditions as well as the transmission of Western techniques to Chinese workers.

The context in which the handbook was produced as well as the identity of both its authors and its readership are essential questions. In the 1920s, the Vatican changed its missionary strategy and promoted the principle of local churches with native bishops and priests instead of the colonial and Eurocentric model of evangelization of people. This movement of “inculturation” aimed to root and integrate Christian faith with specific culture. Architecture, the most visible expression of Christianity in the public space, was a major challenge to inculturation. In China, many missionaries resisted, preferring Gothic and other Western styles to a new Sino-Christian style. The handbook, as we will see, participated in this debate.

2. Architectural handbooks and pattern books of churches

Transmitting all kind of symbolic, aesthetic, technical and practical knowledge and rules about architecture is the foundation of the discipline. For long, it was only based on oral transmission of craftsmanship, but the need of theorizing by writing architectural treatises appeared early in the great civilizations. Amongst the oldest treatises, the *Ten Books on Architecture* (*De architectura libri decem*) written by Vitruvius around 15 BC was the most influential in the West, and Li Jie's *Treatise on Architectural Methods of State Building Standards* (*Yingzao fashi* 营造法式) from around 1100 (Song Dynasty) was the most famous in China. From the nineteenth century, the industrial revolution completely transformed the art of construction in the West and new kinds of architectural publications such as encyclopaedias, pattern books, handbooks and specialized journals increased. Some of these books were spread to the colonies, diffusing technical advice for all kinds of building types and promoting new building techniques and materials as well as home country architectural design and ornaments, more or less in accordance with the local climate.

One of the consequences of the combination of demographic growth, Christian revival and Western imperialism during the nineteenth century was the proliferation of churches across the world. At the age of industrialization, even the construction of churches was approached from a rational point of view: new churches were to be solid,

⁴Collaboration agreement between the School of Archaeology and Museology of Peking University and the Department of Architecture (Faculty of Engineering Science) of Leuven University, January 2014.

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات