Meeting of Cultures and Architectural Dialogue: The Example of the Dominicans in Taiwan

Marco Lazzarotti

Institute of Ethnology, University of Heidelberg, 69115 Heidelberg, Germany; mu421@uni-heidelberg.de

Abstract: This article introduces how, even if in a context refractory to the Gospel, the evangelization of the Dominicans started a kind of dialogue between the symbols embodied in the Catholic cosmology and the ones belonging to the traditional Taiwanese culture. The opposition of the local population to the presence of Westerners, and the fact that the Dominicans, being Spaniards, did not benefit from the protection of France, as happened for other religious orders working in China, are all factors that impacted the evangelization carried out by the Dominicans, and they have prevented the Christian message from taking a hegemonic position in Taiwanese culture. By observing better, however, the places and buildings affected by the missionaries' evangelization, one can read the traces of a fruitful dialogue between the teaching of the missionaries, and therefore of the Catholic cosmology that they were bringing, and the artistic and architectonic cultural heritage of the Taiwanese tradition. Both public places, such as churches, and private places, such as houses of converts, show signs of the adaptation of Catholicism to local tradition, and likewise signs that local culture began to accept Christian symbols and cosmology.

Keywords: Taiwan; Dominicans; hegemony; cosmological architecture; cultural dialogue

1. The Flow of History and the Locus of an Encounter

The meeting of cultures is a topic that has fascinated historians (Todorov 1999), anthropologists (Sahlins 1985; Geertz 1980; Comaroff and Comaroff 2008, 2009) and political scientists (Huntington). The analysis of the subject of my paper will be based on the line drawn by the great anthropologists who have addressed this topic. The encounter between the Catholic Church, specifically with the Dominican missionaries, and Taiwanese culture has interested many authors (Ku 2000; Chen 2011), their studies include also how this encounter developed on the artistic and architectonic level (Li 2008). These research widely demonstrates how the encounter with a new subject (the missionaries for the Taiwanese, and the Taiwanese for the Dominican missionaries), has been interpreted by each of the participant of this encounter, by following semantic structures that preexisted this encounter.

Taking my cue from these important works, and also building on ideas proposed by Todorov (1999), who argues that this encounter should be analyzed as a process shaped by cultural patterns, but also capable of creating new symbolic references at the same time, I have tried to take this discussion a small step further. I have been interested, in fact, not in the encounter or the process itself, but in the symbolic space that this encounter and the subsequent historical process created. As Standaert (2008) suggested, the encounter between missionaries and Chinese culture created spaces, which may be symbolic spaces, but they are certainly concrete spaces, such as the architectural forms both domestic and public that I will introduce in this article and through which I will analyze the symbolic dialogue that the two cultures contributed to build.

The two cultural universes, meeting and interacting with each other, have created through a definite historical process, a place of interaction where the symbols of one culture have been reinterpreted and adapted to the purposes—and needs—of the other. The encounter thus becomes a Locus, a place where two different cultures and traditions meet and are shaped through what I have called a cultural dialogue (Lazzarotti 2020).
2. Historical Background

The complex history that frames the experience of the Dominican missionaries in Taiwan, and the distance (physical and political) that separated Taiwan from Mainland China between the end of dynastic China and the beginning of the Republican era, may partially explain the limited influence that the missionaries were able to exert on Taiwanese society and culture. If we exclude a first visit from Father Juan Cobo, a Dominican missioner who was murdered in or within the vicinity of Taiwan in 1592\(^1\), the activity of the Spanish missionaries in Taiwan can be divided into two great moments. A first evangelization (1626–1642), linked to the Spanish occupation of the northern area of Taiwan, which lasted until the destruction of the Catholic Church by the Dutch. The Dominicans went back to Taiwan in 1859.

While the 1626 the Dominicans arrived in Taiwan on board of two galleys commanded by Carreño de Valdés (Borao Mateo 2009a), in 19th Century the Spanish Dominicans had established missions since the late 16th century in the northern Philippines and from 1630 in Fujian province. It was natural for them to see Taiwan as a place to re-establish themselves, and they did it in 1859. As soon as the Treaty of Tianjin (1858) opened several Chinese ports, some of which in Taiwan, to Western trade, the Congregation of Propaganda Fidei (the Vatican entity responsible for the missions) asked the superior general of the Dominicans to return to the island; and they did it, although the Beijing agreement (1860) were not yet been signed (Borao Mateo 2009b). These treaties were allowing foreign missionaries to carry out missionary work inside China, allowing them to rent or buy land (Fernández 1958). After their return in 1859, the religious belonging to the order of preachers founded by St. Dominic of Guzmán in 1206, were the only evangelizers of Taiwan at least until 1949, when with the conquest of power in China by the party of Mao Tze-tung forced the foreign missionaries (and many Chinese too) to leave their missions in mainland China and to move to Taiwan.

Dominicans moved back to Taiwan on 1859, just at the end of the Second Opium War (1856–1860) (Wong 2002), in an inauspicious historical period. In fact, since the Opium wars, the Chinese government and Chinese people considered Christianity a foreign religion and, more important, imported by colonial powers by war and weapons (Li 1997). The missionaries had little defense against this situation. They were too far removed to Beijing, and being Spaniards, they did not like to call on the help of France, which had done a lot for the foundation of the Catholic Church in China. They called upon the Spanish consul of Amoy, which was of some help (Verbiest Study Note 2004). In the letters that the missionaries who were working in Taiwan have written to their superiors in Manila, it is evident the rejection of the local population to the presence of Westerners, the missionaries explicitly described the “rancor that they [Chinese people] harbor in their hearts against anything that smacks of Europe and the Europeans” (Fernández 1994). Starting from these historical considerations, we can understand the strong feeling of hostility with which the Taiwanese people (at least the largest part of them) received the first missionaries from the Philippines. They were arrested by the local Mandarins, kidnapped, robbed; their houses and churches were looted, destroyed and burned by the local population (Fernández 1994). Despite this, however, their job gave, and still gives, remarkable fruits.

3. Meeting of Cultures: Interpretation, and Alterity

The missionaries who arrived on the island represented, for the local population, the other. They were bearers of a new way of life, of a new way to interpret reality; in other words they were messengers of a new culture. I think we must see the situation of the Catholic Church in Taiwan as a reciprocal cultural interpretation based on the cultural schemes specific of each culture. With culture I mean the symbolic system which gives a meaning to all big and tiny events that characterize the everyday life of every man and woman.

When Dominicans arrived in Taiwan, they brought with them a considerable experience, but especially they arrived as protagonist of the Chinese Rites Controversy. By
definition, the term “Chinese Rites” does not refer to any indigenous Chinese rituals, but to three specific customs. First, periodic ceremonies performed in honor of Confucius, in temples or halls dedicated to the well-respected Chinese philosopher. Second, the veneration of the familial dead, a practice found in every social class and manifested by various forms of piety including prostration, incense burning, serving food, etc. Third, the missionary use of the terms 天主 (Tian Zhu, Lord of heaven) and 上帝 (Shangdi, the Chinese term for “Supreme Deity” or “Highest Deity” in the theology of the classical texts, especially deriving from 商朝 Shang theology) to convey the Christian concept of God (Chan 2000). Dominicans, in opposition to Jesuits, rejected these practices defining them as “pagan”, “idolatry” and “superstitious”. Chinese who wanted to embrace the Catholic faith were obliged to burn down their ancestors’ tablet and any image of Confucius present in their home. Beside this, believers were forbidden to perform with their family the traditional ceremonies that were—and still are until today—performed during the lunar New Year or on other occasions. They were also forbidden to marry non-Catholic believers. All this could help us to understand how these precepts, imposing a total renunciation of the local traditions, often were an obstacle for those who wanted embraces the new faith (Lazzarotti 2020).

From the Taiwanese point of view, the situation was complex and complicated. Local population—which was a result of different migratory movements from Mainland China—was composed of people belonging to the Han ethnic group 漢族, which again was composed of people coming from different parts of Mainland, as Minnan 閩南 and Hakka 客家 people. These people, which came from the provinces of Fujian 福建 and Guangdong 廣東, were in contrast each others. Politically, the island was governed by a Mandarin, who had ambassadors in the bigger cities. But from a local perspective, the power was managed by the clan leader of the most powerful families. These families, thanks to a net of influences and intimidation, created an out-and-out local mafia (Andrade 2010).

We already mentioned the deep xenophobic feeling that these populations felt toward Western people. As an example it is possible to cite the case of the city of Tainan, which in 1868 was bombed by the British consul (Verbiest Study Note 2004). This intervention was requested by English citizens (opium traders but also Protestant missionaries) exasperated by the continuous vexes and mistreatment that they suffered from Taiwanese people. As we can see, the hate toward Western people—called foreigner ghosts or devils 洋鬼子—was generalized and not specifically directed toward missionaries.

If contextualized in this way, we can understand many of the episodes described on the missionaries’ letters: the missionary who after a touchily defense in Spanish, was surprised that “I did not speak Chinese, and, most assuredly, the mandarins did not speak Spanish” (Verbiest Study Note 2004), and the local people, who defined the missionaries as “barbarians” (Verbiest Study Note 2004) or “dog and pig” considering them as people who came to Taiwan “merely to tell stories” (Fernández 1994), which it was the insult that hurt the missionaries the most. In summary, we can say that this encounter led to a reciprocal interpretation of the other. Most of the Taiwanese population interpreted the presence of the missionaries according to the cultural patterns of the time in which they lived. The missionaries were therefore barbarians, Western ghosts, invaders, and so on. At the same time the Missionaries made a negative interpretation of the Traditional Taiwanese culture and of all the customs linked with it. They have been looking at the pantheon of the popular Chinese religion as if it was the pagan religion of ancient Greece (Bresciani 2006). What I want to stress here is that the encounter between two cultures ignites a kind of a dialog that developing itself on the basement of the respective cultural roots, has created the history of the history of the Catholic Church in Taiwan. This dialog between two cultures, this encounter-collision between two different concepts of the world and of the man, can have different levels of interpretation. Although submitted to a strong psychological and physical pressure (kidnapping, robbery and ill-treatment), observant of Jesus’ precept that at the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well,
and christianly persuaded of the redeemer value of martyrdom, the missionaries never replied with other violence to the violence made by Chinese people. Dominicans always addressed their complaints to the Mandarin, asking to be protect as stipulated in Beijing by the treaties between the Chinese emperor and European countries. Clearly these complain remained unheard, in part because the above-mentioned situation, and in part because the Mandarin did not have at his disposal enough forces in order to contrast the local gangs that practically managed the power in that period. The Missioner’s behaviour, which could be described as exemplary, had lots of “cultural” consequences. On one hand the authors of these violence read the pacific behaviour of the missionaries as an explicit act of submission, with the consequence of an increase in hate toward the Fathers. On the other hand the faithful interpreted this pacific conduct as a sign of weakness of the missionaries, and in many cases they left the ecclesiastical community. What I want to stress is that it seems that the same fact has been interpreted in different way by different people, in according with their own cultural comprehension. It is now time to ask ourselves a question: if the interpretation of the other was based solely on negative interpretations, how could this meeting develop a cultural dialogue? Where can we read and find the passages of this dialogue?

4. A Dialogue between Cultures

First of all, it seems to me necessary to state that a dialogue is not an event, but something that is much more like a process. According to Todorov (1999) and to his book The Conquest of America, this dialog can be considerate as a process composed of three levels. First of all, there is the value judgment that Todorov calls the axiological level. At this level I can recognize the other nature as good or bad, I love or do not love him, the other is my equal or my inferior. A second typology is what Todorov calls action of rapprochement or distancing, action that the author describes as a praxeological level. That means that I can accept and embrace the other’s values, I identify myself with the other or else I identify the other with myself, I impose my own image upon him. Between these two extremes there is also a third term, which is neutrality or even indifference. Thirdly, there is a third level, the epistemic one: I know or am ignorant of the other’s identity, I recognize the identity of the other and in this way I am also able to better understand my own identity. Of course there are relations between these three levels, but no strict implication. I can know very well and recognize a culture identity but this does not mean that I like it. Or I like it but I don’t recognize the other’s identity.

But what is the place where these cultures meet, crash and have dialogues with each others? If we speak in terms of dialog, we must have a place where this dialog can happen.

4.1. Architecture as the Locus of Dialogue

First of all we must to affirm that culture is not a concrete thing, but rather a system of symbols and significant, that in some ways culture imposes meaning on the world; culture makes the world understandable through semiotic processes. “Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs” (Geertz 1973a); webs of meaning which form every aspect of our daily life, from interpersonal relationships, to daily acts, such as (how) to get dressed or (what) to eat.

In our specific case, the cultural dialogue between Catholicism and Traditional Taiwanese Culture is played out in the field of religion. The concept of religion falls under the boundaries of this environment of meanings. Following Geertz, we can try to define religion as a cultural system, “where culture means a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which non communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about attitudes toward life” (Geertz 1973b). Meanings, according to this definition, are embodied in symbols and these symbols are historically transmitted. But because history
cannot belong only to one man, it follows that these patterns of meanings also belong to a community, in other words, these patterns of meanings are public.

It is possible to put the situation of the Catholic Church in Taiwan within the framework defined by the above mentioned concepts: as a new symbolic system that merges into a preexisting one. To the old symbolic system are added new symbols, which are translated and interpreted according to the symbols already existent. In this way each person chooses the symbols—in a personal way—that in a particular moment and situation can help him resolve everyday problems or give a deeper meaning at his life. These symbols, in fact, “are historically constructed, socially maintained, and individually applied” (Geertz 1973c).

The architectonics changes that followed this encounter, are able to show how this encounter was only the first step of a cultural dialogue, which I already mentioned was played on the field of religious symbols. This dialogue meant that the Dominican missionaries allowed some of the local symbols to continue their existence close to the new Catholic symbols, and at the same time it allowed the Dominicans to re-semantize some of these pre-existing symbols with meanings proper to the Catholic faith.

Many of these processes of integration and adaptation are present and clearly visible both in private architecture (in the homes of the faithful) and in public architecture (churches and religious buildings).

4.2. Private Architecture

A traditional countryside household in Taiwan is a large U-shared compound (Figure 1), constructed as closely as possible to conform to an ideal of perfect symmetry. A home of this type is usually built in stages, the growth of the building reflecting the growth of the family. The original structure is a long, rectangular building partitioned internally into three, five or seven rooms. It is expanded by the addition of wings, first to the left side and then to the right (Wang 1974).

This particular form embodied many meaning belonging to Chinese cosmology and Confucian elements. The central part of the U is formed by the main room of the house, Zhengting 正廳, which is occupied by the ancestors’ shrine and by the home deities. This main room is the social and ritual heart of the house. In the zhengting guests are received and it is here that the traditional ceremonies of ancestor worship are performed. The part of the house on the left of the zhengting is considered the part of the dragon which according to geomancy (fengshui 風水) is linked with the elder son. In a similar way, the right part is believed to be linked with the tiger, and with the younger son. Architecturally, the dragon part must be longer or at least must have the same dimensions as the tiger part (Lazzarotti 2013).
Figure 1 explains how the allocation of space in the house reflects the social principle that the older brother takes precedence over the younger brothers and at the same time the architectural principle that the zhengting is the center of the house. The household is a way to show to which family belong the people who inhabit it. For example, a household belonging to people of the clan Li 李 will place these characters Long Xi Tang 龙西堂 above their main gate which means that the people who live in the house are coming from Longxi, a place situated in the north of China (a county under the Dingxi 定西 municipality in Gansu 甘肃 province), which is believed to be the ancestral homeland of the Li family (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The characters Long Xi Tang 龙西堂 show that the house is inhabited by people belonging to the Clan Li 李.

In a village in the province of Yunlin, where I have conducted my fieldwork for many years, in a Catholic village dating back to the days of the Dominicans, I found houses with writing on the lintel that recalled the Catholic tradition. Figure 3 depicts a house in which the writing on its lintel means “Jesus is the Lord of my house” 基督是我家之主. The characters in the lintel mean “Jesus is the Lord of my house”.

Figure 3. The characters in the lintel mean “Jesus is the Lord of my house” 基督是我家之主.
Another house showed, also on the lintel, the inscription Wan You Zhen Yuan (Figure 4), which means “The true origin of all things”.

As consequence of their evangelization, Dominican missionaries replaced the ancestor worship with other kinds of rituals all focused on the importance of Jesus. Their interactions with the local culture had two outcomes. On the one hand, the Catholic families, no longer tied to their lineages by the ancestor’s ceremonies, became a sort independent lineages. On the other hand, by introducing a new—and only—ancestor, Jesus, the missionaries concretely helped the changes within the family structure. In this way, the Catholic community became a sort of independent and universal (from the Greek Catholicos) clan, where Jesus is the true and only ancestor (Lazzarotti 2020).

4.3. Public Architecture

Public religious architecture, or even better its evolution, is a mirror of how the Missionaries adapted their message to the rich symbolic religious tradition they encountered in Taiwan. In fact, it is evident that the first churches built by missionaries retain forms and symbols typical of Western churches. Good example are the Holy Rosary Cathedral, built in 1860 in Kaohsiung (Figure 5) in Gothic style, and the Wanchin Basilica (Figure 6) of the Immaculate Conception, built in 1863 in Wanchin, in South Taiwan.

Also the Immaculate Conception Cathedral (Figure 7), built in Taipei between 1911 and 1914 and bombed in 1945 during World War II, following western architectonic canons, was constructed in the Gothic style.

If we compare these first Dominican churches with the churches, always built in the areas managed by the Dominicans, built in more recent times, the architectural transformation that follows other models and other references is evident.

The main reason for this change in architectural patterns is to be found in the change in the missionary approach of the Dominicans and the Catholic Church in general. This change in missionary approach stems from the directions that came out of the Second Vatican Council, which was called by Pope John XXIII because he felt the needs of opening the windows of the Church to let in some fresh air (O’Sullivan 2002, p. 17). The Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, commonly known as the Second Vatican Council, or Vatican II, which was held in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. It was divided in for four periods (or sessions), each lasting between 8 and 12 weeks, in the autumn of each of the four years 1962 to 1965. Of the sixteen total decrees of the Second Vatican Council, six texts address the topics of “art”, “architecture”, and “artists” (Sacrosanctum concilium, Lumen
gentium, Presbyterorum ordinis, Inter mirifica, Apostolicam actuositatem, Gaudium et spes). Altogether, the council pronouncements embrace nine thematic areas: the architecture and furnishing of churches, the worship (veneration) of images, the religious and juridical-liturgical requirement of sacred art, the care of monuments, the dialogue with artists, the training of artists, the apostolic enjoyment of art, the consideration of art in theological studies, and artistic freedom and autonomy (van Bühren 2014). As the analysis of the individual texts demonstrates, there are two key points set (van Bühren 2008): on the one hand, legal-pastoral indications on sacred art intended for liturgical use (Sacrosanctum concilium, Lumen gentium, Presbyterorum ordinis), and on the other hand, moral and pastoral indications on artistic autonomy and pastoral relations between church and art in the contemporary world (Inter mirifica, Apostolicam actuositatem, Gaudium et spes) (van Bühren 2014). Following these directions of the council fathers, who favored the acculturation of the Gospel message to the local culture, typically local rites, such as ceremonies for ancestors, began to be incorporated into the liturgy in Taiwan and architectural experiments such as those that will be described shortly, were created.

Here I would like to consider two exemplary models, the St. Catherine’s Church in Kaohsiung (Figure 8), and the St. Dominic’s Church in Taipei. The choice of these two churches lies in the fact that both have interesting architectural details that clearly show the symbolic integration that took place thanks to the cultural dialogue that I mentioned in the previous paragraphs. The church of St. Catherine of Siena in Kaohsiung has significant symbolic references to traditional Chinese religion. From a first glance, one realizes that the reference architecture of this church are the many Taoist and Taiwanese Popular Religion temples.

Figure 5. The Holy Rosary Cathedral 玫瑰聖母聖殿 is the oldest Catholic church in Taiwan, located in Lingya District, Kaohsiung, just east of the Love River.

A closer look reveals that the architecture of the church reflects that of the temple also in the location of the incense brazier commonly dedicated to the God of Heaven 天宮 (Figure 9).

The symbolic integration that makes the church of Saint Dominic in Taipei special is visible above all inside. Its rich symbolism shows us how the meeting and cohabitation of two different cultures created a concrete place, a Locus, where symbols from different cosmologies meet and are resemantized by the dialogue between meanings and their historical values. If the two bronze steeples placed outside the church would like to refer to the Western architectural tradition Figure 10, the church houses inside the tablets of the ancestors which are traditionally kept in individual houses. In fact, it is believed that only the descendants of an ancestor can preserve and honor the tablet (Figure 11).
Figure 6. Wanchin Basilica of the Immaculate Conception 萬金聖母聖殿, is a Basilica church in Wanjin Village, Wanluan Township, Pingtung County, Taiwan.

Figure 7. Immaculate Conception Cathedral 聖母無原罪主教座堂, Taipei. During World War II, the church was bombed in 1945 and then replaced with a simpler structure.

In the symbolic entanglement represented by this choice, it is possible to see that traditional symbols are assigned new values and meanings. The ancestor no longer belongs only to the individual family, but becomes part of the universal family represented by the Church.

The most interesting thing, at least from the point of view of symbolic integration, is the presence of a Bagua right above the altar of the church (Figure 12). It is important to note that the Chinese character located in the center of the Bagua, is the character 愛, which in Chinese means Love. Usually the central point of the Bagua is reserved for the Yin-yang symbol, which) is a Chinese philosophical concept that describes opposite forces which are interconnected.

In Chinese cosmology, the universe creates itself out of a primary chaos of material energy, organized into the cycles of yin and yang and formed into objects and lives. Yin is the receptive and yang the active principle, seen in all forms of change and difference such as the annual cycle (winter and summer), the landscape (north-facing shade and
south-facing brightness), sexual coupling (female and male), the formation of both men and women as characters and sociopolitical history (disorder and order) (Feuchtwang 2016).

Figure 8. The church of Saint Caterina da Siena in Kaohsiung 高雄聖加大利納堂.

Figure 9. The church of Saint Caterina da Siena in Kaohsiung 高雄聖加大利納堂. The incense brazier is located on the terrace of the second floor.

In Chinese philosophy, the feminine or negative principle (characterized by dark, wetness, cold, passivity, disintegration, etc.) of the two opposing cosmic forces into which creative energy divides and whose fusion in physical matter brings the phenomenal world into being. In other words, the Yin-yang symbol represent the creative principle that created the world and the whole universe.

Interestingly, in the church of San Dominic the the Yin-yang symbol is substituted by the word love, the true principle according to which, according to the Catholic tradition, God created the universe and all that it contains.4

The presence of the ancestors’ tables inside the church and the presence of the Bagua on the top of the altar, shows somehow the missionary approach of the Dominicans in Taiwan. Dominicans tried to make a semantic translation of some of the main symbols of the Taiwanese rich religious and cultural environment, which has been described as
“an empty bowl, which can variously be filled with the contents of institutionalised religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism” (Wee 1976). Ancient Chinese religious practices are diverse and vary from province to province and even from village to village, as religious behavior is related to local communities, kinship, and environment. What seems to characterize, and in some ways give a semblance of unity to the Chinese religious phenomenon, is its marked syncretism.

Figure 10. The church of Saint Dominic in Taipei 天主教聖道明傳道中心.

Figure 11. The Ancestors’ Tables in the church of Saint Dominic in Taipei.
What the Dominicans tried to do is what I defined as “Semantic Translation”. The main idea that underlies this semantic translation is that the Universal (Catholic) Church is a family and that Jesus should be considered the first ancestor (Lazzarotti 2008). First because he is the only-begotten son of God and because he is the first to rise from the dead.

5. Conclusions

As Standaert points out: Missionaries [arriving in China] created a space of interaction that led to the reframing of that space wherein traditional actions and ideas are reconceived. Therefore focus is neither on the transmitter nor on the receiver, but on what is “in between” (Standaert 2008).

The methodological shift consists in the search not for others but for the space of interaction. Of course this space can be physical, such as a church; it can be a moving space, such as a funeral procession. But this space is often mediated by symbols: language, texts, images, songs, rituals (Standaert 2008). Therefore, it is possible to define the locus of a cultural dialogue a space of interaction, where the different entities which take part in its construction (religion, alterity, identity, etc.) could be considered and analyzed.

In this article I tried to demonstrate how the cultural dialogue that took place in the field of religion between Dominican missionaries and traditional Taiwanese culture is intelligible through the architecture, both public and private, that this dialogue has helped to create. Churches and private homes show the signs of a contact that has taken place and has created, through the dialogue of its protagonists, new symbolic forms where new meanings have been added to old signifiers.

This cultural dialogue, which began in the seventeenth century, is still far from any conclusion, and therefore probably the future will bring with it new artistic and architectural forms typical of this cultural dialogue.

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Notes
1 The exact place where the incident occurred is not precisely known but, according to the account of that time, his ship ran
aground in Taiwan—in such a way, that few people were able to reach the coast, yet they did so after a great effort. They arrived
there without weapons and the barbarians appeared, killing most of them. Among those who were killed was Fr. Juan Cobo. His
death was reported in the Philippines in 1595 by the natives of the Philippines and China who escaped from the cruelty of those
from Isla Hermosa.» (Santamaría 1986)
2 According to the Chinese usage, the right and left parts are considered according the perspective of a man standing with his back
to the front of the house.
3 This sentence comes from the very origin of Catholicism in China. It refers to the year 1775 in which the Beijing cathedral built
by Jesuits was damaged by fire, and 乾隆帝 the Emperor Qianlong donated 10,000 teals of silver for the restoration work and
also bestowed a board with calligraphy made from the Emperor’s own hand, inscribed with the above-mentioned characters
萬有真原 on it, meaning “The true origin of all things”.
4 First, the world of the Bible presents us with a new image of God. In surrounding cultures, the image of God and of the
gods ultimately remained unclear and contradictory. In the development of biblical faith, however, the content of the prayer
fundamental to Israel, the Shema, became increasingly clear and unequivocal: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord”
(Dt 6:4). There is only one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, who is thus the God of all. Two facts are significant about
this statement: all other gods are not God, and the universe in which we live has its source in God and was created by him.
Certainly, the notion of creation is found elsewhere, yet only here does it become absolutely clear that it is not one god among
many, but the one true God himself who is the source of all that exists; the whole world comes into existence by the power of his
creative Word. Consequently, his creation is dear to him, for it was willed by him and “made” by him. The second important
element now emerges: this God loves man. The divine power that Aristotle at the height of Greek philosophy sought to grasp
through reflection, is indeed for every being an object of desire and of love—and as the object of love this divinity moves the
world (Benedict 2005)—but in itself it lacks nothing and does not love: it is solely the object of love. The one God in whom Israel
believes, on the other hand, loves with a personal love. His love, moreover, is an elective love: among all the nations he chooses
Israel and loves her—but he does so precisely with a view to healing the whole human race (Benedict 2005).

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