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Jesuit buildings in China and Japan: a comparative study


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The Society of Jesus was one of the most important channels of cultural diffusion between the East and West during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries. Founded in 1540, the Society was profoundly based upon a university culture, which was what, undoubtedly, distinguished it from the other religious Orders. Relying upon a comprehensive education of its clergymen, it soon involved itself in establishing Colleges, not only in Portugal, but also overseas. At the same time, it created a model of performance that, from the very beginning, stimulated this aspect, as many of the missionaries had to prepare annual reports of their missionary activities.

These dynamics of teaching and intellectual valorization are fundamental components in understanding the role that the Society played as agents of profound cultural exchanges between these two worlds that, at the time, were far removed from each other. The enlightened approach of these individuals was critical, even though, as is well known, not all of them were in agreement about this aspect. Without a positive perception of the differences of the newly discovered civilizations, the Jesuits would never have managed to realize the innovations that so characterized their sojourn in this remote part of the world. The so called method of adaptation, initiated by the missionaries of the Society of Jesus in their various missions, was based upon a first hand knowledge of the local realities which they had to deal with, and the Jesuits exerted themselves to learn as much as was possible about the local language, literature, customs, traditions and arts. It was only after this phase that the missionaries would be ready to go about their task, the conversion and evangelization of these peoples. Even though this model had been adopted

in various missions, the results differed widely - the other factor that conditioned these encounters was the local environment, and it is in this sense that we have to consider China and Japan as two distinct realities.

The differences between these two missions can be observed at various levels, including that of art and, in particular, of architecture. Without expounding upon missionary art in general that, obviously, would encompass innumerable aspects that are beyond the scope of this article, we will focus upon what we consider to be one of the most visible aspects of the Christianization of these far flung outposts - the churches.

In those regions where the missionaries had to face adverse conditions, such as in China and Japan, where there was no Portuguese political or military dominion, the construction of a religious site was, in our opinion, a critical moment for the entire mission, given that it embodied a public acceptance of Christianity and its agents. However, as we have already mentioned previously, the social and cultural contexts of these two missions produced different results, and the architecture was no exception to the rule. We do not intend to speculate if a lesser cultural adaptation was synonymous with a greater triumph of Christianity, because it would surely be impossible to quantify any such notion, given the distinct local scenarios.

What is expounded in the following pages is merely a small fraction of the material that is still to be studied about this question. Here, we will analyze two distinct areas in time and space. If, in the context of Japan, we can encompass almost the entire mission in its totality, with reference to China, we have focused upon the second half of the Seventeenth century. Before embarking upon a comparison based upon the same timeframe, we have the opportunity here to see if the conditioning factors that prevailed in the early moments of the missions altered in accordance with the influence and integration of the missionaries of the Society in these regions or if, on the contrary, nothing changed.

1. Japan

The fact that Japan was an archipelago with a rather irregular topography presented a novel challenge to the missionaries who wished to eva-
gelize this region. The Land of the Rising Sun had long been closed to the outside world and was politically divided. The arrival of the first missionaries, as a rule, was normally associated with the first commercial contacts, and the case of Japan was no exception. The fact that the local warlords tolerated the presence of missionaries in their lands had, in part, much to do with the connection that naturally existed between the missionaries and merchants, that is to say, the local daimyô who wished to establish commercial relations with these foreigners, appealed to the local populaces to treat the missionaries well. The warlords who controlled the best ports in Kyûshû competed amongst themselves for the presence of these foreigners. Thus, we can understand the euphoria that Francis Xavier transmitted in his first letters sent from Japan, expressing the belief that the conversion of Japan would take place rapidly and would be a true evangelical success.

Despite his optimism about the conversion of the Japanese, Xavier was quick to perceive that the cultural richness of this civilization could not be cast aside, as was required by the customary tabua rasa method. If they wished to realize their objectives, they could not afford, in any way, to eliminate the cultural substratum of the Japanese and oblige them to accept only that which was occidental. It was necessary to take the plunge into this unknown world, and find points of understanding between these two realities. Without actually designating it as adaptation or acculturation, Xavier thus established the first principles of comportment of the missionaries who wished to collaborate in the task of evangelizing the archipelago.

The initial enthusiasm was followed by a gradual perception of the true nature of the situation and its difficulties. The internal wars and consequent strife put the stability of the embryonic Christian communities in danger, and hindered a natural progression of the missionary activities. On the other hand, the non acceptance, on the part of some missionaries, of certain social rules induced them to invest their evangelical actions with a more aggressive and intolerant face, with the obvious negative consequences. However, as the Jesuits further developed their activities, the degree of knowledge and understanding of the Japanese culture also increased correspondingly. And this is very evident in the Advertimentos by Alexander Valignano, dating to 1581, a work in which the Visitor expounded upon the comportment to be utilized in

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every moment and situation such as, for example, the manner in which to receive a Japanese warlord in the Society’s residence, the way in which one should perambulate through the city streets, or even the manner in which one should construct the churches, an aspect that we shall explore further in subsequent pages of this article. In this text, Valignano made ample use of the experience accumulated by his fellow missionaries, over a time span of more than three decades.

These guidelines of conduct established by Valignano were, in large measure, related to aspects of behaviour with regard to day to day matters. In this context, we can affirm that the visual aspect assumed an enormous importance in the actuation of the Jesuits in their missions, and particularly in the Japanese mission, because it was their principal means of communication with the natives. In the specific case of the Asian missions, the additional difficulties involved in learning the language and the alphabet hampered the accessibility of the evangelical preaching, and obliged the missionaries to resort to the more visual aspects (as is evident in the decision to opt for a more oriental raiment, or even in their preference for theatre and other stage activities). If the public ceremonies were to attract the attention of curious passersby, even if they were unaware of their significance, it was essential that the missionaries had to think of ways to transform them into splendid and grandiose affairs. Apart from this, the necessity to ensure that their future converts and newly baptized Christians could visualize the fundamental ideas of Christianity, induced them to frequently request (with unwavering regularity) that they be sent the best examples of what European art was producing at that time, because it was only thus that they could arouse the necessary emotions amongst the populace in order to effectively evangelize them. It is in this context that we must base our understanding of the role that the Society played in the divulgation of European art in the oriental world.

We can place the construction of the churches in the same framework. As we have already mentioned previously, the construction of a church was a key moment for the entire mission, as it signified the public acceptance of Christianity and of the Society. But how did the missionaries arrive at this stage? Naturally, their arrival in any territory did not presuppose the immediate construction of a church, especially because the conditions were generally unfavourable for their activities. They would begin by installing themselves in houses that were lent to them, normally by poor people who would

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give them the little that they possessed\(^7\). Sometimes, these situations took place in the context of attempts to return to a place after they had been expelled, in which the authorities did not authorize their sojourn, but where the local residents protected as best they could their continued presence.

If the context evolved favourably, the missionaries would then maneuver the situation to be given some houses, which were not always suited for liturgical acts, but which enabled them to have distinct functional spaces. Ideally, there would exist a division for the residents, preferably removed from the reception area, another for the practices of the community and yet another for their guests, with whom they engaged in the most varied kinds of conversations. These donations differed in their origins, because they could have been made as much by ordinary folk with some possessions\(^8\), as by warlords with local influence\(^9\). It is important to note the fact that not all of these donors were necessarily converts\(^10\), as happened in the case of Ōtomo Yoshishige, before he was baptized. Another form of demonstrating their goodwill was through the donation of lands to construct their houses as per their own requirements\(^11\), or to establish cemeteries for Christians\(^12\). But in our opinion, even more significant than all these points, seems to have been the fact that there were donations of monasteries or varelas (Buddhist temples) that would conveniently be transformed into churches\(^13\). It is of even more significance, when one notes that some of the donors were local

\(^7\) " [...] até que por derradeiro, no cabo da cidade, aonde ordinariamente morava a gente mais baixa e vil, foi achar uma casinha de uma viúva, a qual não era pardieiro formado, mas um pardieiro velhís-simo, que propriamente era para agasalhar cavalos". Cf. *Historia de Japam*, I, p. 153; “Chegados a Sacay, como o Padre era estrangeiro e não tinha naquella cidade quem o agazalhasse, Ursula, por sua caridade os fez agazalhar em casa de humo cunhado que tinha umas pobres casas junto da praia”. Cf. *Historia de Japam*, I, p. 142.

\(^8\) “[...] hé este logar tão continuado de christãos, que vão alli fazer oração quazi como à Igreja, porque em acabando de fazer nella oração (que hé uma fer monza caza que o mesmo defunto [Julião Shinsukedono] deo, logo se vão a sua sepultura”. Cf. *Historia de Japam*, II, p. 68.

\(^9\) “[...] el rey de la tierra [de Bungo] nos hizo merced de unas casas suyas de madera de sedro, las quales eran las mejores de la tierra”. Cf. Letter from Cosme de Torres to Inácio de Loyola and António Quadros, Funai, 7.11.1557 in *Documentos del Japón*, vol. 1, p. 73; “[em Yamaguchi, o rei] deo-lhes huma varela em que se recolhessem elle com seus companheiros”. Cf. *Historia de Japam*, I, 39.


\(^12\) Cf. Letter from Baltazar Gago to the Jesuits in India and Portugal, Hirado, 23.9.1555, in *Documentos del Japón*, vol. 1, p.569.
noblemen\textsuperscript{14}, which is very revealing, on the one hand, of the relatively little importance that the nobles attributed to the Buddhist monks, but also, on the other hand, of the dire necessity they had to have priests present in their domains. In a certain sense, this necessity could be linked with their interest in maintaining commercial contacts with the Portuguese, for which reason it was of fundamental importance to maintain good relations with the Jesuits, although in some cases one could justify this act as being for reasons that were truly religious\textsuperscript{15}. Finally, we note the case of some houses which were bought by the fathers themselves\textsuperscript{16} and others which were rented by them\textsuperscript{17}, but this does not appear to have been the general norm.

In cases where only some land had been donated, the next step was the construction of the houses, or even often reconstruction of houses, if they were received in a bad condition and uninhabitable. Here, too, they were dependent on external assistance, as the alms had to come from both the community as well as from Christian nobles\textsuperscript{18}. Sometimes, it was the case that the houses were not in the best of conditions and it was necessary to make some renovations\textsuperscript{19}. The fact that all of them were constructed of pine or cedar wood, when they were of a better quality, made their construction or reconstruction extremely easy and, above all, accessible, because the missionary himself, with the help of two or three Christians, could manage to repair it\textsuperscript{20}. As this was the traditional way of construction in Japan, the houses which were either donated or rented would not have been different\textsuperscript{21}. Sometimes, this
construction was so rapid that its degradation would manifest itself very soon. This was what happened in the case of a church in Yamaguchi which, owing to the fact of having been rebuilt with materials salvaged from a fire that had ravaged it a few months earlier, faced serious problems in its subsequent upkeep and maintenance.

We come across references to the precariousness of these constructions, that are as quickly built as they are destroyed by the innumerable fires that periodically ravaged the cities and towns, and can deduce the perishable nature of the Jesuit buildings in this mission. On the other hand, we have to note that several of these houses were dismantled, only to be constructed again at another, possibly more favourable, site. In what proved to be a period of grand uncertainty and instability for the mission, this appears to have been a relatively common measure in some missions. The fathers took great pains to not only salvage what they had managed to obtain, but also to save time and money in its construction. However, one should not overlook the difficulties that they faced in managing to maintain these materials stored in safe places, and with trusted people.

Until this stage we have only been dealing with houses and not with churches. We know that the former are distinct from the latter in their functions, and possibly in their architectural style as well, but in this missionary framework we cannot make a distinction of this kind. At certain points of time, we do not come across any differences, given that the difficult conditions often did not permit that a house or residence be separated from the space of worship, or church.

However, as the situation became progressively favourable, the churches began to make their mark on the urban landscape in a more visible manner. These buildings, apparently, were distinguishable from the others only by the crosses that they were crowned with. All the other aspects were in total archi-

22 “[...] ando com pressa de fazer huma casa, porque a velha estava toda podre e ouve medo que agora, com as chuvas que nos caisse em cima [a sua rápida deterioração deveu-se ao facto de ter sido feita demasiado depressa aproveitando as madeiras que sobreviveram ao incêndio de Setembro e às adversidades do clima]”. Cf. Cartas de Cosme de Torres e Lourenço de Hirado aos Jesuítas de Bungo, Yamaguchi, June/August 1555, in Documentos del Japón, vol. 1, p.511.
tectural conformity with the local traditions. Apart from the various extant pictorial representations, the information supplied by the Jesuits themselves serve to guide us in this context. We know that the churches were covered with tiles and built of the better wood, cedar, taking into account that the most utilized materials were pinewood and straw. They had a quadrangular plan, and were low, but raised structures. In the interior, they were laid out in the same manner as traditional Japanese houses, with various chambers and ante-chambers. Instead of naves and chancels, here, we come across a single, uniform space, where there would have been a high altar, with images (sculptures or paintings) and altar pieces, and the necessary liturgical paraphernalia.

In a certain sense, this is more or less in conformance with what Valignano had established in his Advertimentos. In these texts one notes a great preoccupation with regard to the chambers of the missionaries in which they would receive illustrious personalities. He stipulated that these rooms should always be in good condition and be kept meticulously clean, as was the norm, so that the fathers would always have dignity when they were interacting with the high and mighty. This reveals an almost political and diplomatic component of the mission, given that it was very concerned with trying to establish relations with the most influential people of the regions in which they were installed. The Visitor also emphasized the idea that the houses that the missionaries were to construct should always be in accordance with the local social customs, in order to avoid shocking those who went to visit them. Perhaps because of this it was deemed impossible to construct in the Western manner, because occidental architectural characteristics would not serve the needs of the fathers in this part of the world. The Visitor did not propose any kind of adaptation of these European typologies, but did possibly consider that occidental architecture would not incorporate or merge with the local characteristics. This idea became even clearer when he proposed that, in the case of any house that was to be built by the Society, a Japanese master should be employed, in order to mark out the plan, because the missionaries’ knowledge about local construction techniques were undoubtedly insufficient, and they would not be aware of all the specific aspects involved. Thus, “in any house that is to be built, in the very first instance one has to deal with good Japanese masters, who should be employed to mark out its plan, because, as its fabrication is so different from

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24 There are various screens that depict everyday urban scenes in various cities and which clearly show the houses that belonged to the missionaries. Cf., for example, Maria Helena Mendes Pinto, Biombos Nambam, Lisbon, 1988.
that which we use in Europe, and the treatment and cladding is so different [that] we cannot mark it out well by ourselves.”

However, despite having initiated an approximation to the Japanese way, Valignano strongly emphasized the idea that the plans of the churches that were to be constructed should never be far removed from the European manner, “keeping the chapel on the length, and not on the horizontal plane, as the Japanese tend to do in their *varelas*, because it is not suitable to imitate them in the form of the churches, as theirs are the synagogues of Satan and ours are the churches of God, however, as for the rest it is necessary to place on either side of the chapel their *zaxiquis* [chambers] in the Japanese manner, in such a way that apart from the doors everything can be in the form of a single body.”

Despite all this, Valignano had in mind a certain distance from the architectural typology of the Buddhist temples. At the same time that he appealed for an almost total adaptation, in almost all possible aspects, when it came to a question of the churches, the spaces of worship where the most important religious moments were to transpire, these could not in any way be confused with pagan spaces. It appears to us that the Visitor sought to accentuate the interior aspects, giving much more advice in this aspect, while in the case of the external appearance he had a more permissive attitude. However, as we have already seen previously, the reality of the situation did not always follow his norms, given that the missionaries were, on several occasions, given Buddhist temples to serve as their houses and churches, and their are no records of alterations to the planimetry of these edifices. With regard to everything else, the appeal also indicated a certain sense that all the traditional Japanese structures should be maintained, “that in all our churches, one should extend the patios with varandas in the Japanese manner, and in front of the same varanda there is a welcoming and covered place.”

It is curious to note that, at the same time that he motivated all this accommodation, Alexander Valignano also affirmed that one should not construct any Jesuit building without their projected plans having been submitted for the consideration of the Superior of Japan, but that, taking into account the distances and the necessities of the hour, should there be any real urgency, that it should be “done well and in an orderly manner”. What we can deduce from all these small indications is that, at the same time that the path

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27 Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 278.
28 Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 278.
of accommodation proved to be the only way of interaction, the Visitor sought to ensure that a total disregard of the rules did not take place, because he was aware that this would be misinterpreted and would not be accepted by the Jesuit authorities in Europe. One gathers an attempt at compromise, on the one hand, between the European architectural tradition and the directives imposed by the Roman orthodoxy, and, on the other hand, the necessity to adapt to local realities. In our opinion, the rules stipulated by Valignano would appear to be an open door to a profound accommodation of the Japanese culture.

With reference to the interiors of these spaces, there are not very many detailed descriptions. We know of the existence of the altar pieces and varied religious images in altars, but very little about the way in which they were arranged. Some studies that have been done about this question reveal that the Jesuits relied upon this kind of visual assistance, so much so that in their letters they incessantly request that they be sent the maximum possible number of paintings and sculptures. Taking into account that the journeys were long and hazardous, many of these works must have been of fairly small dimensions, thus facilitating its transport and, sometimes, would not have been of the best quality. Nonetheless, the fathers constantly appealed for these items, even if there was a far from satisfactory response from Europe. To mitigate this situation, they were obliged to resort to training local artists in European techniques of painting, so that, consequently, there was a marked increase in this kind of pictorial production. Painting schools were established, namely the “artists seminary”, in 1583, under the direction of Giovanni Niccolò, that produced religious objects for the Japanese mission, and also for the mission in China. Yet again, the Society of Jesus served as a vehicle of cultural exchange, given that it was through them that innumerable European techniques, till then completely unknown to the Japanese, entered the local artistic panorama - concepts such as painting with oil colours, perspective, chiaroscuro, shading, and scale, all became an integral part of the artistic resources of this new generation of painters. Apart from giving incentives to local production, the Jesuit

30 Cf. Michael Cooper, op. Cit., p.34.
32 Cf. Michael Cooper, op. Cit., p.32.
requirements also stimulated the circulation of objects between the Jesuit missions in the Orient. These works of art came not only from Europe, but also from India, China and some even from other cities in the Japanese archipelago. When a church was constructed from the very beginning, often, the images and altar pieces that were to be found in its interior had originated in other houses belonging to the mission, perhaps even from the place where one of these schools had been established.

However, this production was not limited to public churches, taking into consideration the fact that innumerable Christians would commission small oratories for their houses, the so called seigan, which are considered to be the most outstanding examples of namban art, where European religious themes mingled perfectly with Japanese techniques. The majority of these were made in Japan, even though the images contained therein, very probably, were European in origin. The fact that the paintings which were placed inside were of small dimensions, leads us to believe that many of them would have been utilized for these small oratories. Apart from this, the new converts sometimes received small paintings from the fathers, that they could perfectly adapt to this type of oratories. With regard to the liturgical accessories that existed in these churches, we have very little information. We do, however, know that the most important churches in Japan, and in particular, the Cathedral in Nagasaki, a commercial port par excellence, were full of silver ornaments.

2. China

Established after the consolidation of the Japanese mission, the Jesuit mission in China was based upon the experience that had already been gathered in the Japanese archipelago. When they set off for the interior regions of the Chinese Empire, the Jesuits already knew that it was of prime importance to learn the language and script, as well as the local customs and traditions. Yet again, we come across Alexander Valignano as the moving force behind this entire process, encouraging fathers to go to Macao so as to prepare for

35 “[...] todos com muita alegria o poserão por obra e em pouco dias com ajudas de muitos foi feita [a igreja]. Pera o qual lhe veo de Firando retábolo et frontal e mais ornamentos por via dos portuguezes”. Cf. Letter from Luís de Almeida to António de Quadros, Funai, 1.10.1561 in Documentos del Japón.
37 Cf. Michael Cooper, op. Cit., p.32.
the evangelization of China. Amongst the missionaries who responded to this appeal were Michele Ruggeri and Matteo Ricci, who immediately began their studies, a process that culminated in the establishment of the first Jesuit house in Zhaoqing, in 1583. With the method of acculturation already having been formulated, the Jesuit fathers knew that an artistic approximation with the prevalent Chinese traditions was one of the essential elements for the successful development of their activities.

One of the facts that stands out in our analysis has to do with the funding for the construction of these churches. In the vast majority of cases, the buildings were donated or bought by Chinese Christians who would later give them to the fathers. The most common pattern was, without doubt, the raising of funds to purchase it. The missionaries did not always have the required money available and, in the majority of cases, the Christian community would get together and pay for these houses, even ending up working to ensure the maintenance and reconstruction of these buildings, given that many of these edifices were not suitable to house the missionaries and all their activities. There also existed cases of a house being donated by a well to do citizen, who sometimes would also give them the money for buying a house, or simply lend them one until the repairs underway were completed.

There are also, however, instances of the Jesuit fathers themselves purchasing houses, with their own money, but without referring to the source of this money, that is to say, we do not know if it was money that the Crown had sent them, or if it was a sum which they had managed to raise, either by means of alms or by trade. This gives us an idea of the oft mentioned difficulties, pertaining to the arrival of the money that the Portuguese Crown made available for the maintenance of the missions. It is thus very clear that the assistance of the local Christian communities was one

41 “[…]este ano se acabou a de Nossa Senhora, e com Christãos per sy mesmos nos seus carros acarretaram a madeira, tijolos, tellas e todos os materiaes necessarios […].” Cf. “Annu da vice-provínica da China, Residência de Kiam Cheu” [Jiangzhou], Macao, 29th January 1659, BA, 49-V-14, fl. 66-66v.
of the fundamental pillars for the survival of the mission in China. An example of this is the case of a Chinese Christian who was born in Macao, Pascoal Carvalho who, “by means of his industry, negotiated everything that was required to erect the first chapel, or shrine, with all sorts of excellent ornamentation of images, antependia and all the necessary equipment to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice for Mass in this chapel”47.

In the vast majority of cases, the Jesuit fathers utilized edifices that were not built with the specific purpose in mind to serve as churches, we can say that the materials utilized were, in large measure, limited to wood48, given that

43 “[...] porque o Vi Rei de alcunha Fum, ainda que gentio, por respeito de por Dona Agueda Cristã, e mulher sua, levantou de novo hum templo grandioso, assim na obra como no gasto; este tem já passado de dous mil taes, concorrendo para a fabrica os Mandarins da Cidade por ordem do mesmo Vi Rei”. Cf. “Estado geral da vice província da China e suas Christandades, Província de Fo kien [Fujian]”, 7th May 1653, BA , 49-IV-61, fl. 225v; “[...] hum nobre Christão Fuon vital insigne bemfeitor da Igreja porque sempre ajudou esta, e no tempo do rei passado concorreo com a metade da prata para a compra da Igreja de Pien Lean e em outra povoação muito grande comprou huas boas casas, nas quaes se fez Igreja tudo a sua custa”. Cf. “Anuua da vice-província da China, Residência de Kiam Cheu” [Jiangzhou], Macao, 29th January 1659, BA, 49-V-14, fl. 66v; “Mui semelhante a esta he outra Matrona [...] pois he a cabeça de todas as Christas de Xam Hai e a que em sua casa tem levantado a Igreja de Nossa Senhora a qual tem gastado não pouca quantidade de prata e neste ano fez doação ao Padre não so da dita Igreja mas de todas as cousas a ella adherentes [...]”. Cf. “Anuua da Residência da Xan Hai [Xangai] do ano de 1659”, BA, 49-V-14, fl. 561; “Hum Letrado rico [...] ofereceu a Deos huma morada de casas, para nelas se edificar huma Igreja”. Cf. “Anuas das Residências do Norte, da vice-província da China do ano de 1660, Residência da Cidade de Kiam Cheu [Jiangzhou] na Província de Xan Si [Shanxi]”, Peking, 20th July 1662, BA, 49-V-14, fl. 689 v; “[...] se tratou com fervor da mudança de casa, e nova Igreja, oferecendo se elle com liberalidade a todos os gastos. Buscou logo o padre Casas para a fabrica”. Cf. “Anuua da Vice-Província da China do ano de 1660, Residência Ham Cheu [Hangzhou], Província de Chem Kiam [Zhejiang]”, 16th July 1661, BA, 49-V-14, fl. 713v; “Este ano huera senhora May de hum Mandarim deu conserto da igreja 50 taes, levantou o Padre com esmolla as paredes da Igreja”. Cf. “Relaçam da anuua de Kiem Cham do ano de 1659, BA, 49-V-15, fl. 27.

44 “Chegando o ano nouo dos Chinas mandou el Rey ao Padre todo o vestido interior, hum porco e algumas galinhas, [...].”Acomodou em humas casas junto a Sy muito boas e mandou prover as alfayas, catres, cadeiras, mesas, mas teve que sair porque o Rey necessitava dela [...].”A assim se accomodou o Padre por entretanto em casa de hum Christão, onde armou sua capella em lugar assaz decente”. Cf. “Relaçam do que se passou no cerco de Quantum [Guangdong] pelos Tartaros; e do que os Padres obrarão, e padeceram neste tempo, e quanto se tomou”, 26th November 1653, BA, 49-IV-61, fl. 239v-260; “Sempre se desejou na Cidade de Ham Cheu huma Igreja de Nossa Senhora, para escusar no empréstimo de casas alheias”. Cf. “Anuua da vice-província da China, Residência de Ham Cheu [Hangzhou]”, Macao, 29th January 1659, BA – 49-V-14, fl. 167.


48 “[um carpinteiro cristão soube que necessitavam de madeira] e pedio que lhe comprassem a madera em sua casa, que oferecia o ganho a Deos Nosso Senhor [...], e cortou as colunas conforme a grossura”. Cf. “Ao Padre Diogo Fabro Vice Provincial na China no anno de 1662. Relaçam da Missão de Huquam [Huguang]”, BA, 49-V-15, fl. 140-140v.
this was the traditional manner of construction in China. The ease with which the missionaries make mention of the erection and reconstruction of churches\textsuperscript{49} in their letters, a situation very similar to what happened in Japan, induces us to perceive that almost all these buildings were made from perishable materials, which would not have been very surprising. Should it be necessary to substantiate this further, we could cite the innumerable accounts of fires that ravaged the cities where they were established, and rapidly destroyed their houses and churches.

However, one of the references that we came across revealed an interesting piece of information, not just because it shows us that some of the missions churches could have been partially constructed in stone, but also because it clearly indicates that they utilized materials that were originally part of a temple that had been dismantled by the Chinese Christians themselves, to enlarge their church: “In one of these villages there was a heathen temple; which [although] small, [was] very beautiful, clean and well constructed. The Christians desired that, [and] the father sought a way and occasion to raze it to the ground, [and] destroy it, so that from its ruins, and materials [one] could rebuild and enlarge the Church of this very same village, which was small and limited. [...] And soon after, both young and old, united with their hearts full of great zeal, and fervour, razed the Temple to the ground; and with these materials built a worthy, and beautiful Church”\textsuperscript{50}.

However, despite these sources of information, there are no complete descriptions of the spaces themselves at of their interior decoration. We believe that the fathers who found themselves at the helm of these small missions would have been greatly interested in showing how their churches were in their letters, nonetheless, we have been given to understand that descriptions with a certain level of detail are scarce, and the fathers instead preferred to make small notes about certain parts of the temple. This could prove to be an indication of the existence of few European architectural elements and of a greater degree of approximation to the Chinese architectural benchmarks. Knowing that a post-Tridentine Rome would not calmly accept this scenario, the fathers quite naturally preferred to omit certain details. We could even dare to voice the possibility that this was perhaps due to the missionaries’ desire to occult the situa-


\textsuperscript{50} Cf. “Annua das Residências do Norte, da Vice Província da China do ano de 1660, Residência da Cidade de Ci Nan [Jinan], Metropoli da Província de Xam tum” [Shandong], Peking, 20th July 1662, BA, 49-V-14, fl. 698.
tion from Rome’s knowledge, given that they only referred to details of a European nature. In this context, we believe that the omission of facts gives us important clues for comprehending the spaces of worship - the assimilation must have been almost total. It is certain that the liturgical accessories had a strong European character, as also the images themselves (even if they had been painted by Asian masters, all the techniques and themes were European), but the plans utilized must have been local.

The most complete description found to date refers to the residences of Hangzhou, in the province of Zhejiang, headed by Farther Martino Martini. After the conquest of the city by the Qing and the consequent reconstruction of the city walls, Father Martini decided that the existing church should be rebuilt, but in another place. For this project the alms donated by a local mandarin, who had already aided the construction of churches in other provinces where he had sojourned, proved to be very handy. However, in the middle of this process of acquiring the houses, this very same mandarin was arrested, a fact that did not however hamper the church project as the missionary managed to enlist the assistance of the Christians of the community. In this way, this church was constructed, and was regarded to be magnificent. It had a longitudinal plan, with three naves separated from each other by perfect arched spans, that totaled 30 columns, half of which were positioned on each side of the nave, and those that were in the center of the church were higher than the others. This differentiation permitted that a balustrade was placed all around the central nave that, “formed a sort of a gallery and gives a very graceful air to the triumphant arches that are placed between columns, something that has never before been seen in China, and for this reason is highly extolled by all who see it”.

51 Despite the fact that the most important schools had been developed in the Japanese mission and in Macao, we know that, given the difficulty in sending paintings and other religious images from Europe at the necessary pace, a large part of the works that used to arrive at the mission in China were of Asian origin. Cf. Michael Cooper, op. cit., p. 34
53 The information given to us even includes its measurements, given in côvados, the height was 36, length 88 and width 42, and keeping in mind the dimension of the côvado, 66 cm, the measurements were about 23m in height, 58m in length and 28m in width.
transparent“\(^{55}\). However, the description of the façade is the most succinct part, mentioning only that it had three doors and three prominent varandas. With regard to these descriptive elements given by the missionary, nothing indicates to us that this was any different from any other church, were it not for these last two statements. Here, we clearly have the case of the insertion of an element foreign to the European practice, when he states that the windows had doorways and that they were made in mother-of-pearl, in the Chinese manner. Even though, apparently, neither of the structural elements are Chinese, an assimilation of the indigenous practices and decorative techniques had taken place\(^{56}\). The description also included the sacristy, that was located laterally in relation to the temple, in which there was also to be found a chapel of the Passions, and both had doors leading to the church, and a room where the Christians would wait for Mass and where they would have their catechism lessons. In conclusion, the missionary also speaks of the residence, stating that it was spacious and with a fairly large capacity. It had two corridors, one with ten cubicles and the other with seven, and all of these had “a beautiful view looking out over the walls, of the surrounding mountains and valleys\(^{57}\), as did the guest room and library, that had, in his opinion, a very well stoned floor.

Apart from this comprehensive report, the Jesuit fathers have also left us timely notes about particular aspects of their religious architecture. There are references to the existence of a public church in the court whose portal had been built in the European manner\(^{58}\) and of a transept in another church that had also been built in the European style\(^{59}\). However, no more architectural details are revealed to us. We can only deduce that, in the larger churches, the idea of European style would have materialized in the form of two floors, the second terminating in a triangular pediment, three portals crowned with semi-circular or triangular pediments, columns addorsed between each one of the entrances, and large, rectangular or alternatively, small and oval shaped windows. They also mentioned triumphal arches that were crowned by


\(^{56}\) Nevertheless, this wasn’t an uncommon element to the Portuguese, since the civil architecture in India used mother-of-pearl to protect windows. Cf., for example, Ângelo Silveira, A Casa-Pátio de Goa, Oporto, 1999.


\(^{59}\) Cf. “Carta ao padre Diogo Fábio Vice Provincial na China no ano de 1662. Relaçam da Missão de Hauquam [Huguang]”, BA, 49-V-15, fl. 140.
inscriptions in Chinese characters, that said hall of the Lord of the Heavens, or hall where one respects or venerates a sole divinity, or even, with the name of Christ, but in Western characters. Another feature that was mentioned referred to the patios that existed in this churches. The indications we come across are not sufficient to enable us to place these spaces within the planimetry of the churches which are described, taking into account the summary nature of the reference. Nor do these descriptions reveal the kind of activities that were carried out in them, but they would, without doubt, have been small antechambers or atriums. If we refer back to the structures used in Portugal, it could have been something similar to the patios of the schools that used to link the churches with the school precincts, the arcades not being a space of meditation, but only serving to protect the entrances to the classrooms.

With regard to the interior of the churches and its decoration, the indications that we have almost exclusively refer to the sacred images in the altars. These would be works painted in oils that the missionaries had ordered from Macao, where an art school had been established, as also from Goa or even from Portugal itself. There is even mention of a missionary who was a painter, Inácio Lagote, who had made three “very beautiful” images of the Lord for the altar and other images that were scattered throughout the walls of the nave. The image that all these churches had would, naturally, have been that of Jesus Christ in the main altar, and in the cases where there were two lateral altars, these would have been decorated with other images, such as those of Our Lady or of the Archangel St. Michael. Sometimes, these paintings were inserted in carved and gilded altarpieces, which is indicative of the utilization of Western decorative elements in these churches, although in the majority of
the references this is not mentioned, a fact which allows us to deduce that the
carved and gilded altarpieces were not the rule but, rather, an exception.66

The most detailed description of an altar that we have refers to the
private chapel of the wife of a mandarin who, due to the fact that there was
no one who could celebrate the liturgical services regularly, requested the
missionaries, who at the time were passing through Canton, to do the needful
on this occasion.67 According to one of these fathers, the “it was but one chapel, but very well arranged, and ornate, in the middle of the altar there was
a crucifix, flanked on one side by an ivory Baby Jesus from India, and on the
other a prominent St. Anthony, in the background, there was a large image of
Our Lady in the middle of the altar piece, and on the sides, altar pieces
depicting the life of Christ Our Lord.”68 Most importantly, this account
enlightens us as to the lavishness of the liturgical accessories, an aspect that
no other description has given us. On the other hand, it also shows us that
precious pieces circulated and were imported from other parts of the
Portuguese empire, namely, in this case when he mentions the ivory statue
from India. As for the decorative structure, this example, in all aspects seems
to have been similar to any European altar piece, wherein the figures are eche-
loned, with the crucifix placed on top of a stand, and the remaining figures
distributed at a lower level. Images and oil paintings were to be found behind
this, that in this case depicted scenes from Christ’s life.

Along with this decoration, the information gathered from this account
also reveal some of the liturgical accessories utilized. One finds mention of
host boxes and small flasks in which the Eucharist wine was stored, which
came from Portugal, and even mentions some pieces of furniture, as well as
thuribles, altar cloths and chalices, about which we have no further

66 “[...] imagem do Salvador com retabulo de macenaria dourado”. cf. “Carta annua da vice-
provincia da China do ano de 1660, Residência de Ham Cheu [Hangzhou], Provincia de Chem Kiam
[Zhejiang]”, 19th July 1661, BA, 49-V-14, fl. 715; “[...] sao todos os tres Altares, e os retablos delles
feitos ao modo Europeo, com columnas e trajas estofadas de ouro, azul, e verde, a obra de mercenaria
[...]”. cf. “Annua da vice-provincia da China, Residência de Yen Pin [Yenping]”; 12th May 1658; BA,
49-V-14, fl. 153v.
67 Cf. “Relaçam do que se passou no Cerco de Quantun [Guangdong] pelos Tartaros, e de que os
Padres obrarão, e padeceram neste tempo, e quanto se tomou”, 26th November 1653, BA, 49-IV-61,
fl. 254v-255.
68 Cf. “Relaçam do que se passou no Cerco de Quantun [Guangdong] pelos Tártaros, e de que os
Padres obrarão, e padeceram neste tempo, e quanto se tomou”, 26th November 1653, BA, 49-IV-61,
fl. 254v-255.
69 Cf. “Da Christandade da China e o que se passou nela”, BA, 49-V-13, fl. 10v.
70 Cf. “Carta annua da Vice Província da China do ano de 1660, Cousas da edificação que no
presente ano aconteceram”, 19th July 1661, BA, 49-V-14, fl. 716.
71 Cf. “Vida e morte do Padre Estevão Fabro da Companhia de Jesus Vice Provincial da China”,
Peking, 21st March 1658, BA, 49-V-14, fl. 313v.
details such as, for example, the material with which they were fabricated or their origins. Another element that is also important for the understanding of the liturgical space has to do with the incense that was burned in the churches. There are innumerable references to this olfactory component, to such an extent that, along with the paintings it was without doubt the most important element of the liturgical space. In all churches we come across the fragrances, perfume pans and burners, that even leave the closed religious space of the temple, and are found in processions and funerals. In our opinion this aspect is of great significance given that, in Europe, incense was used in the thuribles only during liturgical ceremonies. On the other hand, it is important to note that it was commonplace to light incense every time that one visited a temple, that is a practice even today, and this conferred a different atmosphere to the religious space. In a certain measure, the Jesuit fathers allowed this custom, that was not really very alien to the Catholic reality, to prevail in their churches throughout the Chinese empire. On a lesser scale, we come across flowers, including the arrangements and bouquets, that were also an important and decorative component in this space.

3. Comparison

After having seen the way in which the themata of the Jesuit architecture developed in each one of the two missions, it is also necessary to attempt to see in which aspects they are similar or diverge.

Above all, we find a similar pattern for the initial moments of the missions, in which the missionaries were dependent upon the assistance that the local communities were disposed to render to these strangers. Even in the Chinese mission, that in this article has been analyzed with a later chronology, the pattern repeats itself. Without the support of these communities the continued presence of the missionaries would not have been possible, both in terms of the alms that were given for their maintenance, as well as the houses that were lent to them or were conceded to them on an almost lifelong basis.

72 “[…] tomou hum dia humas contas de ouro que tinha do ornado da sua pessoa, e dellas fez hum calix pela igreja de Nossa Senhora”. Cf. “Annuia da Residência de Xan Hai [Xangai]”, 1659, BA, 49-V-14, fl. 560.
73 “[…] e achou assentada junto à meza do cheiro, que se queima na igreja”. Cf. “Relaçam do que se passou no Cerco de Quantun [Guangdong] pelos Tartaros, e de que os Padres obrarão, e padeceram neste tempo, e quanto se tomou”, 26th November 1653, BA, 49-IV-61, fl. 322.
75 Cf. “Relaçam do que se passou no Cerco de Quantun [Guangdong] pelos Tartaros, e de que os Padres obrarão, e padeceram neste tempo, e quanto se tomou”, 26th November 1653, BA, 49-IV-61, fl. 323v.
However, we note that in Japan this support came both from baptized Christians as well as non converts, which did not happen in the case of China. In Japan, alongside the conversions that were continually made at various social levels, there is a large stratum of the population that only sympathized with the missionaries. The role of the commercial relations between the Europeans and Japanese and the importance of maintaining this relationship is well known, and this proved to be a magnet for the local warlords who also wished to participate in this trade. If they motivated the missionaries to come to their lands, perhaps the merchants would follow in their wake. However, and also taking into account that we will never be able to know for sure how genuine their interest was, we can never discard the possibility that amongst these warlords, some were truly interested in the Christian faith. In its turn, in the Chinese mission, the funding came almost exclusively from the converted communities and from lords who had been baptized, but never from heathens.

These houses, in both missions, with respect to their architecture, do not purport any particular features in this sense, and were undistinguishable from the surroundings, owing to the fact that they were traditional edifices. When they start the construction of religious buildings, the two missions reacted in a different manner. Even though, as we have seen, both had put into practice the method of cultural accommodation, a much greater adaptation took place in Japan than in China. In the Chinese empire, the churches sought to ostentate something that was different from the local tradition, and was much closer to the European model, be it a portal, or a triumphal arch in the interior. In the Japanese archipelago, on the contrary, one does not find this preoccupation, and there existed an almost total freedom in the execution of these buildings, to the extent that Valignano requested that the project be conceived by a Japanese master, because none of the fathers would be capable of doing it. Reality further shows us that, sometimes, the warlord himself gave the instructions for the plan of that particular church, conceiving the space and its distribution, and would put into practice his own architectural reality and not a European one, with which he was undoubtedly not familiar.

With regard to the presentation of the interiors of these churches, the information available is not so detailed. We only know that there existed

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77 “E pelo muito que com estes favores ajudava, se dizia que já era cristão, pelo verem até ir dar as traças das obras que se havião de fazer”. Cf. Historia de Japam, I, p. 315.
images, both paintings and sculptures, distributed throughout the interior, without ever having been told of their exact placement. We also know that some of the more important churches were adorned with lavish silver ornaments. The execution of the elaborate altars made in a European manner was certainly not something that was easily fabricated in this part of the world, not only due to the elevated costs that this would imply, but also due to the inexistence of masters and labour who were capable of producing these kinds of works. From this stems the preference for importing pieces, which per force had to be of smaller dimensions, which would be adapted to the local religious necessities. On the other hand, the precarious situation of the majority of these missions, both in China as well as in Japan, served to discourage the placement of neither large nor very elaborate altar pieces because, in the case of persecutions or an expulsion order, one could only take smaller pieces, that were easy to hide, characteristics that did not match those of an altar piece. For these reasons, we are inclined towards a conception of a simpler and less elaborate interior space than the European context, punctuated only by small elements such as some liturgical accessories, apart from the statues and paintings.

By means of these elements we can perceive that the Jesuit mission in Japan was not the same as the China mission. We already know that this distinction was present in various levels and, based on what we have analyzed, the architecture that emerged in these places was no exception to this. The reason for which this development was different has to do with the rapid acceptance that Christianity witnessed in the Japanese islands, which is reflected in a rapid assimilation of European decorative elements, and that also resulted in a more rapid reaction by the Japanese authorities. On the contrary, in China, the difficulty that the mission faced from the very beginning, resulted in a greater caution in the imposition of the architecture and decoration of the religious spaces, given that there were no gentiles who extended them support, and almost the entire mission would develop in territory that did not favour the missionaries.
Abstract

In this article we compared the Jesuit buildings erected in the missions of Japan and China in the 16th and 17th centuries. We began the analysis on the way those houses and churches were acquired, and even properties, but the focus was given to the way they looked outside, their internal structure, and functions, and naturally the decoration used in both places, that is, houses and churches.

The application by the Jesuits of the so-called accommodation policy in these missions had distinct results, for which the architecture built in these parts was a clear example. We are able to see if the fathers of the Society of Jesus tried to get closer to the local architecture, or not, and that depended mostly on the cultural, social and political context they were in. We can also see if the theoretical orientations given, in particular the ones by Alexandre Valignano in the Advertimientos, had a real application.

Resumo

Neste artigo procuramos fazer uma análise comparada sobre os edifícios religiosos construídos pela Companhia de Jesus nas missões da China e do Japão, nos séculos XVI e XVII. A abordagem feita teve em consideração diversos aspectos, entre os quais a forma de aquisição das casas e das igrejas, ou mesmo dos terrenos para futuras construções, o seu aspecto exterior, a divisão espacial interna, a funcionalidade, e a ornamentação.

O facto dos jesuítas terem praticado, nestas duas missões, o chamado método da acomodação levou, contudo, a resultados distintos, a que a arquitectura não foi indiferente. Conforme o enquadramento cultural, social, e político encontrado, assim os padres da Companhia desenvolveram uma maior ou menor aproximação aos modelos arquitectónicos locais e à sua linguagem decorativa. Veremos também a diferença entre as orientações teóricas formuladas pela hierarquia da Companhia sobre este assunto, nomeadamente as encontradas nos Advertimientos de Alexandre Valignano, e a prática geral.