The Indigenization of Chinese Churches Before and After the Boxer Rebellion — A Case Study of the Xishiku Church and the Wanghailou Catholic Church

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Abstract: At the end of the nineteenth century, there was a spate of church cases in China, and missionary activity was again challenged since the dissolution of the prohibition. In this context, the styles of new, rebuilt, and restored churches began to change. Some church designers began to consider the choice of architectural style for their churches, and the call for the indigenization of Christianity grew louder and louder. Therefore, this paper takes case studies of two churches built by the missionary Alphonse Favier, the Xishiku Church in Beijing and the Wanghailou Catholic Church in Tianjin. The two churches are analyzed from the perspectives of layout and space, structure and decoration, and the Chinese and Western elements of the churches are classified. Various factors that contributed to the changes in the style of the two churches, such as the architect's background and social factors, are discussed to analyze the reasons for the change. The church cases' short-term and long-term influence on the choice of Chinese church style in the context of the indigenization of Christianity is analyzed concerning other indigenization concepts in society. The combination of these influences and the participation of church designers from different backgrounds has led to the development of Chinese churches through several different stages of development, from predominantly Chinese styles to a combination of Chinese and Western styles, to completely Western styles, and then to a combination of Chinese and Western styles.

Keywords: Church Cases, Indigenization, Chinese Decoration, Gothic

1. Introduction

In 1605, an Italian missionary, Matteo Ricci, transformed the Shoushan Academy into a small church, later known as the South Church. As the oldest Catholic church in Beijing, it marked the official entry of Christianity into the heart of China. The East Church (1655), the North Church (1693) and the West Church (1723) were built separately, giving Beijing a four-way pattern of Catholic churches in the east, west, south, and north [1]. However, the richness and sophistication of Chinese culture made it difficult to integrate foreign cultures. Christian influence was limited during the long and slow development, but Christianity developed slowly as the government did not do much to restrict it. Western church-building techniques had not yet entered China, and churches produced various styles, predominating the combination of Chinese and Western styles. Churches in cities were often transformed from traditional Chinese public buildings, such as the General's Temple in Jinan, which was transformed into a Catholic church by the Spanish missionary Gabriel in 1650.

At the same time, the Chinese Rites Controversy intensified between the 17th and 18th centuries. It led to a countermeasure by the Qing government, which ordered missionaries to move to Macau and Guangzhou in 1724 and forbade them from entering the mainland. Most of the churches were transformed into warehouses, academies, or temples.

After the Opium Wars (1840), powerful external forces forced the Qing government to end its years of prohibition of religion, and in 1844 the Sino-French Treaty of Huangpu stipulated that Christian missionary activities in China should
be protected. China went through many more wars and treaties in the following decades and continued to open its borders. Missionaries re-entered mainland China and began to preach freely. Christianity in China entered a period of rapid development. Due to the support of war reparations and foreign investment, many churches were built. Along with the introduction of Western technology into China, Western-style cathedrals began to be built in major Chinese cities, such as the Xujiahui Catholic Church in Shanghai and the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Guangzhou.

At the end of the 19th century, an anti-Qing anti-foreigner movement, the Boxer Rebellion, emerged in Chinese society. The Qing government later used the movement to exclude foreign powers. In the context of the frequent church cases, the Boxer Rebellion developed into an armed anti-foreigner riot in 1900, mainly in the Zhili area. Churches in many places, including Beijing and Tianjin, were affected, and the regimented people used lynchings to execute many Christians and missionaries and set fire to churches and Christian houses.

The occurrence of the church cases, represented by the Boxer Rebellion, showed the xenophobic attitude of the contemporary Chinese people towards foreign powers, which forced the Western countries and Christian missionaries to rethink the relationship between the Church and Chinese people. The church, as the most important representative building of Christianity, was the direct connection between the Church and the people. The church style was a top priority for missionaries and architects to consider [2].

This paper discusses the changes and reasons in style in the reconstruction or restoration of two churches in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the current research in this field, the Chinese literature focuses on the architectural techniques and decoration applied in the two churches and the history of their construction. It is mainly contained in a few comprehensive introductions to all the churches in Beijing, and there is a lack of in-depth discussion of specific cases and analysis of the influencing factors [3]. The English language literature is dominated by Coonans and his students' studies of the historical events, the people involved and the reasons for the indigenization of Chinese churches [4]. This paper combines the studies in English and Chinese. It analyzes how Western and Chinese techniques and decoration were combined and expressed in the specific churches. It also analyses how the social context of China and the West influenced the choices and changes made by church designers in designing churches in China, by examining some of the changes in church design, the church design books published by church designers of the time, the views of various missionaries on church design, and the debates between church designers on church style.

2. Two French Churches

The main subjects of this paper are the Wanghailou Catholic Church and the Xishiku Church. The Wanghailou in Tianjin, destroyed twice by the Tianjin Church Case and the Boxer Rebellion, was rebuilt in 1897 and 1901, respectively [5]. The Xishiku Church, one of the most important churches in Beijing, was one of the few churches in Beijing to have been preserved from the Boxer Rebellion, but it was still damaged [6]. Both churches belonged to the French Church. They were influenced by the French missionary Alphonse Favier in their building history. In 1888, the Xishiku was asked to be rebuilt by the Qing government because of its location and height, which affected the imperial palace. Much of its design was retained in the reconstruction after the Church Case of 1900. He also negotiated and designed the first reconstruction of the Wanghailou after the 1897 Church Case in Tianjin. Although the church was broken again after the Boxer Rebellion, the subsequent reconstruction largely preserved the appearance of the previous restoration [7].
The main entrance to the Xishiku church is located on the south side. The chancel is not set before the altar but above the main entrance, influenced by the church's dimensions. It can be seen in many Chinese churches. The interior plan shows a Latin cross, like the Gothic cathedrals common in France. The Wanghailou has a Basilica plan, with an additional side entrance on the east side of the nave in the fourth and seventh spans, and the chancel is also located above the entrance.

2.2. Structure

Two types of church structures are common in China: brick-walled wooden columns with raised-beam roofs and brick-walled wooden (brick or stone) columns with trussed roofs [8].

The first structure is almost an adaptation of the traditional Chinese architecture of the raised-beam style, where the main load-bearing elements of the building are the beams and columns, both of which are made of wood. The brick walls are independent of the main structure. To construct such a structural system requires only commonly used techniques of the local artisans. The space created by the raised-beam roof also meets the space requirements of the Basilica space, which is high in the middle and low on the sides. However, because of the disadvantages of the raised beam, which requires too much material, it is usually used only for the construction of small churches and not for the construction of large ones.

With the second structure, the height and span of the building are significantly increased due to the involvement of trusses. Tall masonry walls are more prone to collapse. Therefore, brickwork buttresses become an essential structural part of the wall and become one of the critical features of this type of church. In large-scale Gothic churches, special buttresses - flying buttresses - are introduced to share the pressure on the main walls. The flying buttresses are more flexible in their position and more aesthetically significant. Trusses reduce the timber selection requirements, and hinged joints replace mortise and tenon construction, reducing the technical requirements and processing time.

In this type of construction, the main structure of the nave, with its wooden columns and the trussed roof, has several variants. In some important churches, the nave is deliberately raised so that the roof forms a triple-section in profile, and then the high walls on either side are flanked by circular side windows. In other areas, the nave is not deliberately raised. However, it is covered by a herringbone roof over the side aisles so that the exterior appears as a whole, and the interior naturally forms a basilica space with a difference in height between the nave and the side aisles [8]. There are also a few smaller churches that are not so concerned with reproducing the basilica space as to convey a religious message and therefore have only a nave.

Statistically, most churches in China are of this structure. The Xishiku and the Wanghailou churches have this structure, but it has its peculiarities. The nave and side aisles of both the Xishiku and the Wanghailou churches are almost equal in height, so they do not form the traditional basilica space of high center and low sides. The horizontal space looks very regular. Both are built with fresh green brick walls and wooden columns, the base of which is supported by a stone plinth. The roof's interior is a wooden ribbed arch, but it is not part of the structural system, but only a wooden ceiling feature modelled on the Gothic. The lateral thrust from the weight of the roof is, therefore, very limited, and the buttresses do not serve much of a structural function but more of a decorative one.

Some missionaries were critical of the imitation vaults, which they saw as a way of deceiving themselves [9]. However, there is no denying that the imitation vault, which still has many advantages, is more stylish and shuts out the timber-framed roof, making the space tidier and improving the church's acoustics. The church vault also deters swallows from nesting in the trusses and prevents damage to the structure.

![Figure 3. The buttresses and wooden ribbed arch of the Xishiku and the Wanghailou Church.](image-url)

Brick walls with masonry columns and trussed roofs emerged mainly after 1900. Even though timber was a
considerable cost-saving alternative to stone, the frequent destruction of churches by church cases and the use of timber as the main structure in Chinese churches would have significantly reduced the fire resistance of the building and would not have met the biblical definition of an eternal sanctuary [8].

In terms of building materials, Western churches are mainly made of stone and brick. Brick churches tend to be dominated by red brick, while Chinese brick buildings are dominated by green brick. Green brick has somewhat superior physical properties to red brick but costs considerably more. Chinese artisans’ preference to green brick could be accredited to its aesthetic perception. Therefore, China’s more established and well-funded churches tended to be built in green brick, including the Wanghailou and Xishiku, the main churches of the region. The Xishiku church is even decorated partly with the more expensive Chinese white jade material used for carving mountain flowers, niches, standing statues or pillar capitals.

2.3. Decoration

The roof is one of the essential parts of the house. Most roofs in China are double-pitched, with the walls climbing up to the ridge to support the ridge purlins. It is the most economical way to build a house and provides good stability. However, the full ideal roof tiling method has yet to be discovered. The Chinese tiled roof is worth using. Although it is overweight, it is strong and well protected from rain, warm in winter and cool in summer.

The three most common forms are the barrel tile, the lean-to tile, and the buckle tile. Chinese artisans tend to use the barrel tile, which is more aesthetically pleasing than the other two, but is the least resistant to rain, requires maintenance and is the least suitable for church use. However, many main churches, such as the Xishiku church, have grey barrel tile roofs. The missionaries of the time were aware of the disadvantages of grey barrel tiles but still considered the church’s grade. The main churches were better funded and therefore had more money to spend on maintenance, and there was a greater need to consider the church’s aesthetics. For many regional churches, however, the missionaries generally regarded silo tiles as the least recommended practice. The most important thing is that it is economical and practical [9].

Roof decoration can be beneficial to identifying architectural styles. Ancient Chinese architecture, especially imperial palaces, was often defined by an overly heavy, ornately decorated roof frame resting on large wooden columns. Gothic churches usually have many steeples on their roofs, which are used extensively in the Xishiku Churches as a typical Western decoration. In contrast, the Wanghailou, which are also Gothic, do not have any steeple decoration. The small steeple is a good invention that the missionaries and the congregation liked. They can be found in many churches, and even some barn churches are decorated with steeples on the corners.

The influence of traditional Chinese building structures on church structures is limited due to the different functional requirements. However, Chinese-style decoration is relatively helpful in the indigenization of the church through appropriate adaptations.

On the façade, the Xishiku church demonstrates a good combination of traditional Gothic and Chinese decoration. For example, the glass windows are framed in Chinese white jade. Chinese elements such as door hoods, couplets and plaques are also used. The Chinese jade balustrades, sculptures, brickwork, and drainage inlets are also in Chinese style.

In contrast, the façade of the Wanghailou differs from the traditional Gothic in that it is high in the middle and low around, with no tall towers or a solid façade with little decoration, but only using the traditional Tianjin brickwork. Concerning the carvings, it is worth noting that the stone carvings in the Wanghailou use traditional Chinese imagery, such as Chinese knots and cranes, which are popular with the Chinese but are rare in churches, as these auspicious motifs do not fit in with the Christian theme of suffering [5].

Figure 4. The decoration of the Xishiku Church.
3. Exotic and Native

The development of church architecture is closely linked to the development of modern Chinese society. Although Chinese churches are much simplified compared to their Western natives, they are still quite exquisite. Church architecture began to change the face of modern Chinese cities. The important churches, particularly with their large scale and distinctive forms, have become a showcase for classic Western architecture in China. It was financed not only by donations from the congregation and funds obtained from particular sources but also, not to be overlooked, by large amounts of reparations for the church case and war [2].

When choosing an architectural style, the designer needed to consider the characteristics of the region where the church was located. Church buildings in China at the time were often designed by Western missionaries or church architects and were usually built by Chinese craftsmen. The church building was modeled on the traditional Western church form, and it was inevitable to introduce Western craftsmanship. However, it was built by local Chinese craftsmen.

The three main imported crafts are the wooden frame (trusses), the Western method of brickwork (cement mortar) and the buttresses [9]. It is worth noting that these processes were not the first to appear in China. Prototypes of buildings on the same principle had already appeared earlier but were not promoted.

3.1. Chinese Gothic

Different architects first built the two churches, but the main surviving style was designed by the French missionary Favier based on the original. The first one, designed and built in 1869 by the Lazarist Paul-Joseph Marty, was destroyed only a year later during the Tianjin Church Case, with only the principal façade remaining. In 1895, Favier was involved in negotiations with the Qing government to restore the Wanghailou, and Favier achieved a good outcome. The outcome included the complete restoration of the church and the erection of a Chinese white stone monument expressing the apologies of the Qing emperor for the victims of the 1870 Church Case, as well as a hillside pavilion covering the monument. In this restoration, Favier respected the original façade and only replaced the design of the nave. The church was later destroyed again during the Boxer Rebellion. It was rebuilt in 1903, with the front facade restored as it had been. The church lengthened to 55 meters (from 30 meters) and widened to 16 meters (from 10 meters), with the addition of the corner towers (two new towers were added to the smaller towers on either side in order to connect the church with the front facade). The height of the church measures 10 meters and that of the central tower 22 meters.

Favier was also instrumental in negotiating the relocation of the Xishiku Church, where he was both architect and site manager. The new church was completed in just ten months. When Favier was designing the Xishiku Church, it was found that some cultural adaptation was necessary for missionary activities in China. The final aesthetic character of the Xishiku Church is a blend of the East and the West, representing the slow transition from Western to Chinese style in Catholic churches from the late imperial period to the Republican period in China. The various elements of the church could easily be thought of as typical of the Gothic features in many French Catholic churches. However, elements of the façade and sides of Favier's design are closer to the decoration of Chinese temples.

In 1900, the largest Boxer Rebellion occurred, destroying many churches in Beijing. The Xishiku Church was the only one to survive. This was due to the high quality of the construction of its enclosure, the protection of the soldiers and the perseverance of Father Favier. After the Boxer Rebellion, the church and the congregation denounced the government and demanded it pay for the repairs. Favier raised the two Gothic towers directly to the city skyline of Beijing at the time. It proves that foreign religious forces were not suppressed after the Boxer Rebellion but went one step further in religious architecture.

Figure 5. The Xishiku Church before and after 1900.
The rebuilt church at Xishiku was well regarded and loved by the Chinese Catholic community of the time, but many missionaries had a different voice. In a letter of 1917, the missionary Frédéric Vincent Lebbe described the Xishiku Church as a scar on the cityscape, a huge eyesore in the middle of Beijing, the whole oriental paradise, unattractive, with the whole cathedral deliberately avoiding the Chinese style [7]. This criticism is one-sided, and in fact, the Chinese decoration and craftsmanship employed in the Xishiku Church throughout the development of Chinese churches had already made several attempts in the period. However, the fact that it was still subject to such criticism indicates that some of the missionaries since then have increasingly pursued the Chinese style, and not only at the level of decoration [10].

In general, both churches start as Gothic but use Chinese decoration and craftsmanship simultaneously. The Church Case did not influence the initial Chinese decoration but rather the pragmatic use of decorations by the church designers and Chinese artisans. Both churches were enlarged in size after the influence of the Church Council, even to the extent that the expansion of the Xishiku Church exceeded the legal requirements of the Qing government. The xenophobic movement of the Boxer Rebellion achieved the exact opposite result in this aspect. Some scholars refer to this style as the triumphalist Gothic [11].

### 3.2. Persistence and Change

In the first half of the 20th century, two church building manuals were published in China, in 1926 and 1941, which were important reference materials for the construction of Catholic churches at the time and written testimonies to the thinking of some missionaries of the time. It also reflects some of the missionaries' and church designers' new understanding and thinking about church design after the Boxer Rebellion.

The 1926 construction manual was contributed by a series of conservative church designers such as Alphonse De Moerloose, who, as the first church designer to be promoted by Father Favier, was close to Favier's style, even more traditional. This construction manual argues that decoration is the only indigenous element that can be introduced into the construction of churches in China. Moerloose and Favier were educated in the Catholic Gothic style based on the principles of Augustus W. N Pugin. The churches they built in northern China conformed to Pugin's architectural standards and were the ideal style in the minds of the missionaries who promoted Eurocentrism before the First World War. The construction of the Xishiku Churches took place at the height of a wave of pro-Gothic sentiment sparked by Pugin's ideas. As a result, this also determined the main style of the church be Gothic.

It is clear from this manual that the ideas of many missionaries stayed the same even after the Boxer Rebellion. The Boxer Rebellion saw a decline in the number of Gothic churches built. Nevertheless, this was mainly due to the rise of anti-clericalism in France, which led to the separation of the churches in 1905, and the preference of missionaries outside France to adopt a style other than Gothic.

The Boxer Rebellion affected another group of missionaries who stood to respect Chinese culture. Their ideas were close to those contained in the second church building manual of 1941, Will we build churches, chapels, and schools in China, which strongly encouraged the indigenization of churches in China.

In 1919, the Pope issued an encyclical to the Catholic Church worldwide called Maximum illud, to the effect that missionaries everywhere were asked to integrate local culture and promote the indigenization of the Church [12]. The Vatican Church has shifted its missionary attitude at an official level, and the architectural style of the Church, as a representative of Christianity, should respect the local culture of each place. Missionaries such as the Pontifical Delegate to China, Celso Benigno Luigi Costantini, the Dutch Benedictine architect Dom Adelbert Gresnigt and Lebbe are representative of these ideas.

The most prominent of these was Costantini, who, as the first Pontifical Delegate to China, advocated the establishment of a normal and self-sustaining local church in China, which should be governed by Chinese people. It made him popular with the Chinese, hence his intense desire for the indigenization of the church in China. This idea began to take hold 20 years after the Boxer Rebellion. The indigenous style of Christian art promoted by Costantini went beyond a "policy of adaptation" to a "movement of indigenization" [13]. Unlike the original Jesuit missionaries, such as Matteo Ricci, Costantini's vision was no longer to transform Western architecture or painting into Chinese style but to create a new ecclesiastical style using traditional elements of Chinese architecture or painting, thus promoting the regeneration of Chinese art. This phase of indigenization mainly focused on the artwork phase, with fewer churches being built, represented by the Hongde Church built in Shanghai in 1928.

Thus, with reference to the previous division of stages in the development of the church in China, the dominant style of churches in China before 1949 can be divided into four stages. The multiple effects of domestic and foreign society influenced the transformation of the stages.

1) The predominant style was Chinese, and Western decoration was simply the erection of the cross, e.g., the Church of the King in Shanghai [14].
2) Predominantly Western style and a combination of Chinese and Western styles, with some eclectic features, e.g., the Xuanwumen Catholic Church in Beijing [15].
3) Predominantly Westernized style, with only Chinese elements remaining in the decoration, e.g., the Xishiku Church.
4) The Chinese and Western styles are predominant, giving rise to what is known in architectural circles as the "Chinese body, Western use" of traditional revival architecture, e.g., the Hongde Church in Shanghai.
3.3. Two Effects

In the third phase of the transformation process with its preceding and following phases, the factors that influenced the decisions of the missionary or church designer can be divided into two areas. How the architectural style influenced the architect’s perception of the church? How social movements influenced the architect’s decisions? The two worked together to create the outcome.

Favior was a great admirer of the Gothic Revival style. Pugin, a pioneer of the Gothic Revival style, summed up the three basic principles of Gothic Revival architecture [16]. Favior also retained these three points in the design of the Xishiku Church, and thus the Chinese changes made by Favior could not touch these same basic principles. Firstly, the function determines form. The building components and purpose should be easily accessible to the viewers. Secondly, decoration and structure are perfectly integrated. The decoration is subordinate to the structure and is intended to enrich and enhance it. Thirdly, the natural properties of the materials are respected, and the materials must be constructed rationally. The Chinese part of the Xishiku Church is mainly decorative. The Chinese approach to the plan includes the placement of the church on a pedestal, the placement of entirely Chinese pavilions on either side of the entrance, the use of a Chinese courtyard layout for the church and outbuildings in the general plan, and the orientation of the buildings facing north to south. These four Chinese features do not touch the internal plan of the Gothic building and are, therefore, perfectly acceptable. However, Favior has considered the Chinese approach to the main body of the building with great care but delicacy, with the sloping roof form of grey tiles, the use of Qing dynasty style balustrades at the entrance, and the shape of the drainage outlets. The most typical materials used are Chinese white jade for the rose windows and decorative elements such as statues of figures. The overall style of the Wanghailou differs considerably from that of the Xishiku but is still in the Gothic style. Chinese techniques are also close to that of the Xishiku Church, but Chinese motifs are used in the detailing of the decoration.

On a social level, there were already many church cases before the Boxer Rebellion. In terms of the impact of the Boxer Rebellion, there was a difference between the short-term and long-term effects of the Church Cases. The Church Cases worsened the missionary environment, and the relationship between the Qing government and the Church and the Christian countries would also be affected. The style of the damaged churches that were rebuilt using the reparation money from the Papacy would also have been affected. For example, the Xishiku Church and the Wanghailou were rebuilt with an enlarged scale, and the churches are in the Victory Gothic style. The new tower of the Xishiku Church directly transcends legal restrictions, reflecting the strained diplomatic relationship. However, 20 years later, the impact of the Chinese people's xenophobia led the Pope to adjust his missionary strategy. Although conservative missionaries still existed, the mainstream had begun shifting toward indigenous Christianity. In terms of its role in this respect alone, the Boxer Rebellion represented a short-term failure and a long-term success in the Church Case. Some other churches of the period were affected similarly.

4. Conclusion

This paper compares the plan, space, structure, and façade decoration of the Xishiku Church and the Wanghailou Catholic Church. In analyzing these features, a comparison is made with other contemporary Chinese churches. The differences between the architectural styles of Chinese and Western churches are analyzed, such as architectural specifications, decorative features, and choice of materials. The Chinese architectural features in common use were not identical from one period to the next, and the period around the Boxer Rebellion, for example, tends to be dominated by Chinese features in the general exterior layout and the local decoration. The interior plan is as close as possible to the Western style in terms of structure. The character of the church has not always been fixed but has changed in response to changes in the social environment. The Xishiku Church and the Wanghailou Church have been restored in an expanded form after the destruction, showing a contrasting dynamic of resistance.

There are also some differences between the two case churches and churches in other parts of China during the same period, either because the attitudes of church designers in the country were not entirely unified under a common ideology or were simply in different branches of Christianity, or because each region was influenced to a different degree by the case. A study of the case churches' characteristics reveals various perceptions of church architecture among the bishops and church architects of the time. There is the Gothic style, as in the case of the architect Favior, but there are also Chinese elements in the style of the churches. There is also the completely Western approach, as in the case of Joubert. There is also the localized style that would later dominate, with Costantini as a representative figure. This difference in perception is influenced on the one hand, by the designer's background and personal identity. At the same time, it was also influenced by social movements, such as the Education Project. The combination of these influences and the participation of church designers from different backgrounds has led to the development of Chinese churches through several different stages of development, from predominantly Chinese styles to a combination of Chinese and Western styles, to completely Western styles, and then to a combination of Chinese and Western styles.

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