

Vietnam. Contemporary Religious Architecture as a Rare Good


Vietnam. La arquitectura religiosa contemporánea como un bien escaso

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ABSTRACT

In the 16th century, the first Spanish and Portuguese Dominican missionaries arrived in Southeast Asia, included Vietnam, but only after the first decades of the seventeenth century, Christianity began to take hold and lived through different episodes of the Proclamation of the Christian faith: first it was tolerated and then abandoned by the dynasties, supported by the colonialists, declined in the north by the communists, it expanded in the south under the Republic of Vietnam and stabilized until now after the reunification of the country followed by a long breakage due to political change. Along with this story, sacred architecture was interpreted in various ways to define identities in religious life and faith. However, the most difficult period of religious architecture is not only in the political conflict of the past, but also until now, the time of the economic boom. The change of values as well as the aesthetic system make sacred art and architecture remain a giant wheel stuck in mud.

KEYWORDS

Vietnam, Sacred Architecture, Genius Loci, Vatican II, System of Values.

RESUMEN

En el siglo XVI, los primeros misioneros dominicos españoles y portugueses llegaron al sudeste asiático, incluso a Vietnam, pero solo después de las primeras décadas del siglo XVII, el cristianismo comenzó a afianzarse y vivió diferentes episodios de la Proclamación de la fe cristiana: primero fue tolerado y luego abandonado por las dinastías, apoyado por los colonialistas, declinado en el al norte por los comunistas, se expandió en el sur bajo la República de Vietnam y se estabilizó hasta ahora después de la reunificación del país seguida de una larga ruptura debido al cambio político. Junto con esta historia, la arquitectura sagrada se interpretó de diversas formas para definir identidades en la vida religiosa y en la fe. Sin embargo, el período más difícil de la arquitectura religiosa no es solo en el conflicto político del pasado, sino también hasta ahora, la época del boom económico. El cambio de valores así como el sistema estético hacen que el arte y la arquitectura sagrados sigan siendo una rueda gigante atascada en el barro.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Vietnam, arquitectura religiosa, genius loci, Concilio Vaticano II, sistema de valores.

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INTRODUCTION

Arrived in Vietnam around 500 years ago, Christianity is now the second most important religion with around 7% of the entire population of Vietnam. While the church buildings during the earlier phases (approx. 1870-1975) bear the distinctive handwriting of both political and cultural historical events, it can be felt as if most of the religious buildings in the country since 2000 in the wake of the economic boom are only varied copies of the building corpus originated from the Internet and free of charge, apart from the modification of the external appearance, the examination of the liturgical movement as well as the sacred aesthetics in religious buildings has not been considered in detail.

PROCLAMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN VIETNAM. EARLY PERIODS UNDER EUROPEAN MISSIONARIES IN TONKIN & COCHIN CHINA

According to our research, the following periods of time play a major roles in understanding today's development of contemporary churches in Vietnam.

1550-1885: The arrival of the Spanish and Portuguese missionaries at the maritime borders marked the beginning of the proclamation of the Christian faith in Vietnam. In the 16th and 17th centuries the missionaries were temporarily tolerated by the dynasties and then driven out and killed.

1885-1954: The end of the Tonkin War in 1884 consolidated absolute French colonial rule over all of Vietnam and Indochina. During this period, the central pontifical institutions in Tonkin and Cochin China were also established.

1954-1975: The Geneva Convention was signed in July 1954. As part of the deal, the French agreed to withdraw their troops from North Vietnam. Vietnam was divided into two parts: the communist north (Democratic Republic of Vietnam) and the west-backed south (Republic of Vietnam). This was the exodus of the Christians to escape the communists from the North to the South.

In April 1975, the Vietnam War ended. Under the communist government, the practice of the Christian

faith was severely restricted and foreign priests had to leave the country. The priest education was interrupted and banned. Many Christian institutions were appropriated.

With the 1986 *Doi moi* reform to the *socialist market economy* and the lifting of the 19-year trade embargo against Vietnam by US President Bill Clinton in 1994, the country opened up international economic relations after the Vietnam War. On July 13, 2000, Vietnam and the USA signed the first bilateral trade agreement (BTA), which leads to the more noticeable economic boom since then. Slightly open freedom of belief and religion lead to rapid construction of religious institutions, which at the same time means the destruction of many historical churches and Buddhist temples.

Early periods of European in Tonkin & Cochin China (16th-17th century)

In the painting of the first sight of the European in Vietnam (Fig. 01), the structure of the city center behind the protective wall as well as the trading posts of the Dutch and English can be seen. The large wooden houses with many layers of roof were the royal buildings, the other residential houses were small and made of bamboo with thatched roofs. On the right of the picture were the first trading posts of England and Holland. It can be stated that the royals have remained at a distance from the foreign institutions.

Because Vietnam has a very long maritime borders, the missionaries arrived there and could only integrate into the villages of the coastal regions in the North and the South (Fig. 02).

Tonkin (north): 1583 the Dominican priests Diego Doropesa, Bartolomeo Ruiz, Pedro Ortiz, Francisco de Montila arrived in Quang Yen from the Philippines. In 1627 the Jesuit priests Alexandre de Rhodes and Pierre Marquez arrived in Cuu Bang (Thanh Hoa).

Cochin China (south): 1550: The Portuguese Dominican priests Luis de Foncesca, Grégoire de la Motte and Gaspar de Santa Cruz came from Malacca to Ha Tien for the missionary.

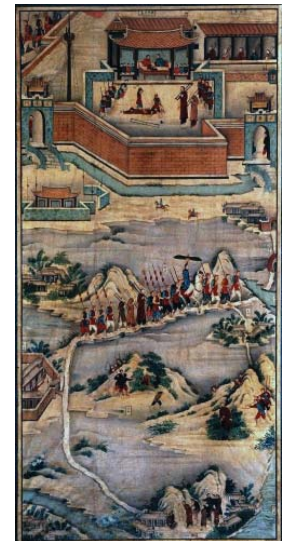


Fig. 01. The City of Cha-Cho, the Metropolis of Tonkin (left). Illustration to Samuel Baron's *A description of the kingdom of Tonkin*. Baron wrote from Fort St George, Madra, to Robert Hooke and Robert Hoskins in 1686 regarding the customs and manners of Tonkin [Hanoi], Vietnam. It was later published as part of *A collection of voyages and travels*, some now first printed from original manuscripts (London, 1732). 1. King's arsenal; 2. The sandbank where Te Ky Dao ceremony was got up; 3. The king's elephant cage; 4. Trading post of England; 5. Trading post of Dutch. Fig. 02. Vietnam in territory of French Indochina (1884-1945). Fig. 03. Pierre Hieu and J-B. Thanh, Arrestation of St. Paul Khoan, Ninh Binh (Vietnam), 1837.



Fig. 04. Two typical Western churches in Vietnam during early period: Quan Lieu Church, 1880-84, and Trung Lao Church, 1888-98, burned in 2017.



Annam (middle): 1615: The Jesuit priests Francesco Buzomi, Diego Carvalho came from Macau, in Cua Han.

No churches were built during this period. The missionaries stayed in the villages along the coastal regions, immersing themselves in local life. The Mass is celebrated in the bamboo houses or the first churches in the village were made of bamboo.

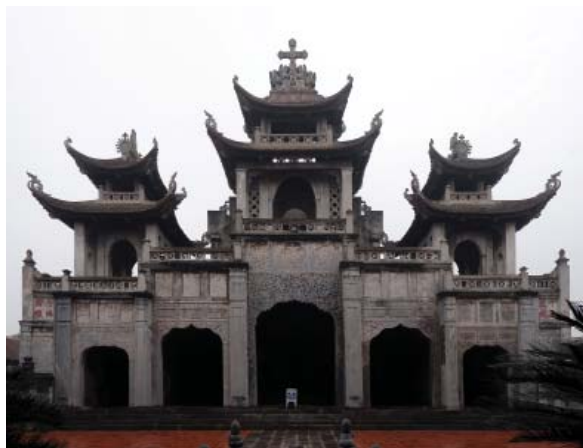
Vietnamese Martyrs in Tonkin & Cochin China

In many paintings about the martyrdom of Vietnam in the 16th-17th centuries, the depictions of the rural villages can be found as the first locations for proclamation of the Christian faith. In the Nguyen Dynasty (about 1830s, Minh Mang King) Christianity was abandoned (Fig. 03). The Vatican estimates the number of Vietnamese martyrs at between 130,000

and 300,000. Pope John Paul II decided to canonize those whose names are known and unknown, giving them a feast day of 24 November yearly for the 117 holy Martyrs of Indochina. They are also Vietnamese and European Missionaries.

PROTOTYPES OF THE CHRISTIAN SACRED ARCHITECTURE ALONG THE HISTORY OF VIETNAM

In the beginning the missionaries failed because they could not speak the local language. Until Alexandre de Rhodes researched the culture of Annam (language, geography, customs, etc.) and completed a Vietnamese-Portuguese-Latin dictionary and the first book with Vietnamese language published in Europe, based on the work of an early Vietnamese alphabet



that differs from earlier Portuguese missionaries developed. The Latin transcription of the Vietnamese language supported the missionary work and formed the good basis of the Christian faith in the coastal regions of Tonkin and Cochin China.

From 1885 the French colonial power ruled over Vietnam and since 1887 over the whole of Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia). The Christian institutions were supported by the French government. The period from the 1880s to the 1940s marked the significant emergence of Christian buildings such as churches, cathedrals and missionary centers in both Tonkin and Cochin China.

Western church

Western church (original European church styles) appeared in many rural mission centers, this early phase being the Spanish or Byzantine baroque churches. These are the huge churches in the country that were not connected to the political centers. Thus the churches were in a mixed style between western and eastern aesthetics. Local materials were used: clay, straw, molasses, wood, stone, mortar (Fig. 04). In Bui Chu Cathedral, a trefoil arch or three-foiled cusped arch, is an arch incorporating the shape or outline of a trefoil – three overlapping rings. It has been widely used for its symbolic significance in Christian architecture. It makes us to associate with cloud motifs in Vietnamese culture (traditional painting, carving, sculpture, cloth textures, etc.) (Fig. 05).

Applying this model from global intellectual history to the field of architectural and technological transfers, we consider the construction site the most crucial place of cross-cultural encounter at a local level: the construction site of a missionary church is a laboratory where different kinds of mediators interact at different levels: the missionary builder, middlemen and contractors, as well as the architect or the engineer (if there are such); not only words are translated

or created, but techniques, forms and processes are transferred and always more or less hybridized. This laboratory at a local level was always interconnected with global networks through Western colonialism and the universal Christian mission and contributed to spread aspects Western modernity. Motifs are unique, this is the meeting between Eastern and Western aesthetics.

In French Colonial, Basilicas were the large missionary center, the magnificent Cathedral with gothic architecture style and indigenous elements getting together. So Kien Basilica (Fig. 06) had western motifs and ratios, but the altar was red-lacquer trimmed with gold items as local temple or pagoda. The altar of Phú Nhai Basilica also was red-lacquer trimmed with gold items but it had Vietnamese Couplets inside and Chinese Couplets outside.

Southern church

In another side, the Southern churches (Vietnamese churches) even have the archetypical style of Buddhist temples with all aesthetical and constructional principles: the liturgy space has six column rows like the Buddhist temple in the shape of basilica, the altars were made with the traditional technics of red & gold lacquer wood with all the traditional ornaments, even temple bells were used in those churches. There are the most Vietnamese-Gothic eclecticism Churches in Ninh Binh, which have the shapes liked a pagoda with 6 rows of columns, two layers of roof, the altar was red-lacquer trimmed with gold items and Eastern motifs, only the liturgy room was set up in the shape of a path (Fig. 07).

Asians believe in *feng-shui*, so planning according to that concept, the lake will be in front, following yin and yang and the five elements. In case of many Southern Churches: The Cathedral/Church faces to the river/the stream running through the village, some churches have mirrors in front of the portals (to exorcise evil spirits, prevent anaerobic). According to the typical *feng-shui* theory at the Phat Diem Cathedral: the churches are facing south; the statue Jesus on the island also turned to the south - the direction of the emperor: “The sages turn their faces to the South when they give audience

Fig. 05. Bui Chu Cathedral (Vietnam), 1841-85; façade and the liturgy room, demolished in 2020.

Fig. 06. So Kien basilica (Vietnam), 1877-82

Fig. 07. Cathedral of Our Lady Queen of the Rosary, Phat Diem church, Ninh Binh (Vietnam), 1875-91.



Fig. 08. Drawing of Phat Diem Cathedral: 172. Cave & communal house area; 173. Saint Peter's chapel; 174. Saint Joseph's chapel; 175. Small three arched gate; 176. Heart of Jesus chapel; 177. Saint Roch's chapel; 178-179. Church of Our Lady of the Rosary; 180. Phuong Dinh (a bell tower), yard, the tomb of Father Six is behind the portico and in between of the yard; 181. The stone gate in the West; 182. The stone gate in the East; 183. Lake, the Jesus Christ the King statue in between of the lake and the square is before Phuong Dinh; 184. The liturgy of church; 185. Site plan.



Fig. 09. St. Joseph's Cathedral, Hanoi (Vietnam), 1884-88.

Fig. 10. Rong house; communal house of the ethnic group Ba Na, in the central highland, Vietnam.

Fig. 11. Father Boutary (french missionary), Cam Ly church (Vietnam), 1960/68; built with the inspiration from the roof of Rong house.



to all under the sky”. Above the pond, people built a gatehouse. According to the concept of *feng-shui*, the gatehouse is *Yang* (sunshine), the low pond is *Yin* (the young *Yin*). However, although of its height, the mirrored picture of the gatehouse is considered to be the young Yang. The pond and lake are low, but the surface of the pond receives sunlight and becomes bright, so it is called the Great Yin. The Sun, Young Yin, Young Yang, and Great Yin according to a dualistic concept give birth of the four poles, the four poles give birth of eight generals, and eight generals give birth of infinity. It symbolizes the sustainability and resurrection (Nguyen 2003)(Fig. 08).

With the typologies of western and southern churches in the rural and coastal regions, after long persecution and displacement, Christianity became the main religion in many areas of Tonkin, although Buddhism had been practiced there for several centuries. Today, this style of Southern church will never be built again because it is very difficult to build, strict rules of proportions do not have archival drawings, sculptures and details require high skill, a lot of precious wood, other natural materials today no longer exist, a lot of works, etc.

Western Cathedral at administrative places

In order to confirm their position of power after expulsions and infiltration in earlier periods, the important Christian institutions settled in the immediate vicinity of the administrative centers during the French colonial rule, following models from the mother country. St. Joseph Cathedral was built on the site of one of Hanoi’s four most important Buddhist temples (Nguyen 2003) (Fig. 09).

Although these churches were inspired or modeled by the old Western Baroque or Gothic, the ornaments, colors, and materials are still indigenous, and these structures express the features of colonial architecture (Nguyen et al 2004).

These symbols of power are, in many respects, the reason for mass copying in many church buildings in later periods, to which we will come back later.

In July 1954 the Geneva Convention was signed. As part of the deal, the French withdrew their troops from North Vietnam. Vietnam was divided into two

parts: the communist north (Democratic Republic of Vietnam) and the west-backed south (Republic of Vietnam). This was the exodus of Christians to escape the communists from the north to the south.

Between 1954 and 1975, due to the political situations of Vietnam on the one side and the Influences of the Second Vatican Council on the other side, new churches and Christian institutions were built in South Vietnam with distinctive aesthetic characters and new interpretations of the local spirits.

In this phase we focus on Dalat —the last royal residence town on the Central Highlands— as a place of Christian education with supra-regional scope as well as the proclamation of faith among the ethnic mountain peoples. We also introduce an insight into the implementation of liturgical movement followed The Second Vatican Council in exemplary church buildings in South Vietnam

Highland archetype

In the Central Highland, the ethnic groups are diverse, they have their own languages, their own beliefs, cultural customs, and traditions, as well as their own construction forms and techniques. For the missionary work in the sense of inculturation, a lot of research and transcripts have been and are carried out, liturgical chanting and documentation are transcribed into their language using the Latin alphabet, from this way the customs, poems and chanting are recorded and preserved. The churches express themselves by exaggerating the ethnic community houses into holy places as symbols of the God’s house for the folk (Fig. 10). Local materials such as wood, bamboo or rattan are used with technical know-how and modern aesthetics, the entire liturgical rooms were defined by the construction, natural light as a unit with very few decorations (Fig. 11).

In case of Minh Hoa Priest Seminary (Fig. 12), the proportions have been minimally changed compared to the other buildings in the complex, the chapel is still lifted and appears powerful and distinct as a sacred building, the liturgical room is concentrated, warm and hearty thanks to natural materials like wood and human scale, ratio of Veranda-roof-courtyard created a space of solitude and calm. We have interesting

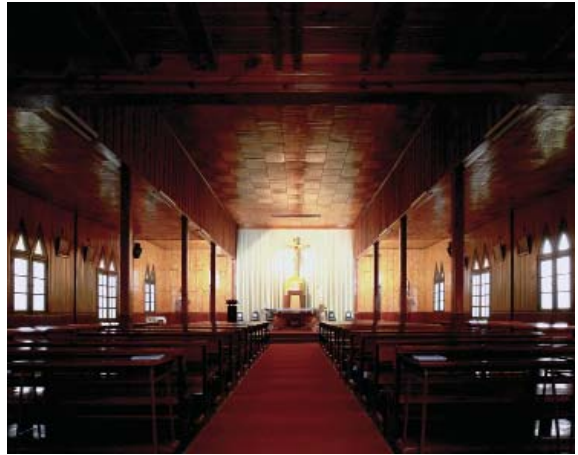
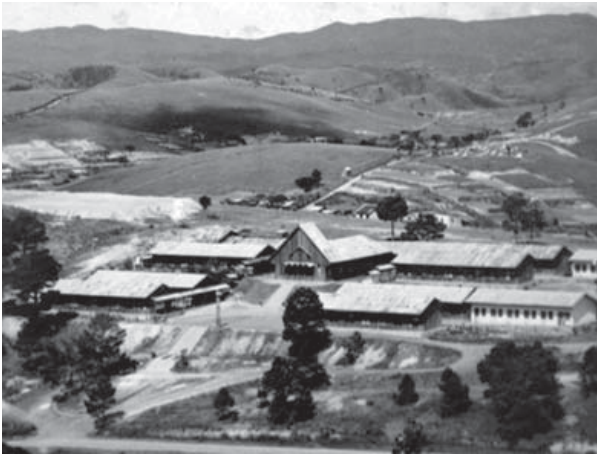


Fig. 12. Priest Seminary, Minh Hoa (Vietnam), 1967-80.
Fig. 13. The courtyard of the Priest Seminary (Minh Hoa, Vietnam, 1967/80) and the Peter Zumthor's Serpentine Gallery Pavilion courtyard (London, UK, 2011).
Fig. 14. Bishop Eugene Marie Allys, Phu Cam Cathedral (Vietnam), 1898-1902.
Fig. 15. Ngo Viet Thu, Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, Phu Cam (Vietnam), 1963-2000.





Fig. 16. Ngo Viet Thu (based on project of), Cathedral of St Philip Phan Van Minh, Vinh Long (Vietnam), 1964-67.

comparison between Minh Hoa Priest Seminary and Serpentine Gallery Pavilion 2011 by Peter Zumthor. In our opinion, good architecture is timeless, its elements can keep up with the changes in society and the environment, so that they are always inspirations for subsequent works if careful studies for design works are carried out (Fig. 13).

The modernist style

The government of the first Republic of South Vietnam (1955-63) under President Ngo Dinh Diem concentrated on Catholic education due to the strong influence of family power structures in politics, military and also in the Catholic Church. Christianity was eliminated as the state religion. The education and particularly in the art and architecture studying from the time of the colonial rule of Indochina (at the beginning at *École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine*, which led to the University of Indochina) bore fruit when many graduates from France and Europe returned to South Vietnam and exercised their profession. Urban planning, architecture and art experienced the spirit of optimism in harmony with modernity and the local accents in integration with the trend of the world, application of contemporary building techniques and aesthetic level.

A rare case of radical rebuilding of a previous church is the Phu Cam Cathedral. The previous Phu Cam church was built and destroyed more times under political and military changes (Fig. 14). The church was rebuilt under the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam 1954-75), designed by architect Ngo Viet Thu, when the country was still divided. The church is built with a concrete dome structure that creates order and rhythm of the liturgy room (Fig. 15). Until now, Phu Cam Cathedral (built 1963-2000) is still one of the radical churches that go against the wave of classical-imitated Catholic architecture in Vietnam. The same *zeitgeist* with very independent architectural languages such as Vinh Long Cathedral (Fig. 16).

VIETNAMESE CONTEMPORARY SACRED ARCHITECTURE-MOVEMENTS AND THE GIANT WHEEL IN THE MUD

Case 1: New construction using the cheap templates copied or modified from the well-known Cathedrals

The church buildings such as the Notre Dame Basilica in Saigon (1863-80) or the St. Joseph's Cathedral in Hanoi (1884-88) are so dominant due

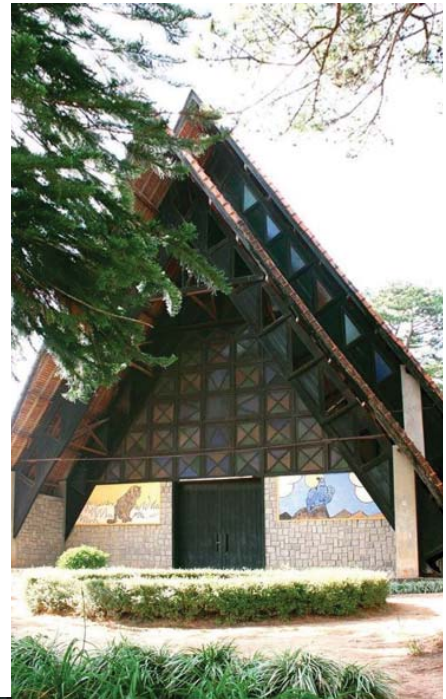
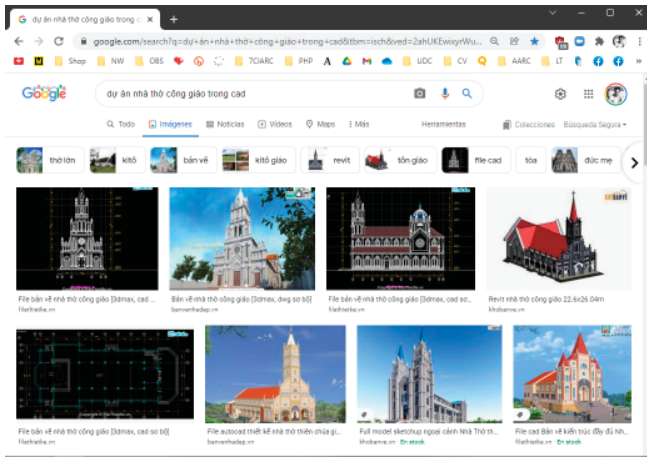


Fig. 17. Church design as mass-copied.
 Fig. 18. Nguyen Thanh Ho (contractor),
 Cam Ly parish church, Lam Dong
 (Vietnam), 1960-68.
 Fig. 19. Some churches in Lam Dong
 and Dong Nai; mass-copied and modify
 to many new versions.

to their meanings and urban planning locations, they are still sources of inspiration for new churches in the country, but not only in positive ways, namely as excessive copies, modifications and distortions from the Internet. Bulky models and CAD designs sell cheaply and only require an engineer or a quick architect to adapt the builder's idea to the construction site and apply for building permits. Many churches are copied in the classical style but with negligent techniques and materials in a short construction time (Fig. 17). It is completely understandable that these are the aspirations and needs of parishes and parishioners to create space for worship. In view of the rapid change in needs and their impermanence, we would still have to move more slowly or to make a real stop and think about a didactic and dignified sacred architecture, where the central question is the sustainable spiritual life of the community, instead of continuing to build *copied-pasted Christian churches* in the course of the rapid global social changes? (Brühne and Seng 2013).

The Cam Ly Church is a popular church for the Lach ethnic group in Dalat, designed and built by the French pastor Boutary: 1960/68. The church was copied en masse and modified into many new versions (Fig. 18). Mass copies or modifications without any statement about theological or liturgical principles and meanings in church buildings in Vietnam from 2000 to today are reminiscent of Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1962, if we tried to keep the meaning of inculturation superficial (Fig. 19). We would take a critical look at the phenomenon and associate it with the *decorated sheds* in *Learning From Las Vegas. The forgotten symbolism of the architectural form* (Venturi et al. 1977).

Case 2: Demolish the old church, try rebuilding with some modifications from the old

A remarkable design is the Cathedral Bui Chu in Spanish Baroque style (1885-2020), planned by Bishop Manuel Ignacio Riaño Hoa (1829-84) and built by Bishop Wenceslao Oñate Thuan (1841-97). The Cathedral was only made from local materials, bricks, and mortar, especially the ceiling was described as rattan arches made of straw and clay

(Fig. 05). The special thing is that the wooden pillars had been the column order of Vietnamese pagodas, and the altar had been created with the traditional technic of red & gold lacquer wooden. Like some other churches of this period, the combination of Asian-European textures and pattern elements created a special aesthetics of the colonial sacred architecture (Nguyen 2003).

However, the Cathedral was demolished in 2020, the diocese justified the demolition with the lack of space and the endangered structural condition for the users (Ucanews Hanoi 2019, Vatican News 2019) (Fig. 20). The demolishing was well known because of a lot of protest efforts by architects and conservationists inland and abroad. This is also the first time there had been a strong movement of protest against the destruction of ancient churches to rebuild new ones in imitation of antiquity. Although this series of activities did not prevent the decision of the diocese, it showed the recognition of a valuable religious work that embodies cultural and social life and is a contemporary witness (Ngo 2019, Tuoi tre 2019).

Unfortunately, this case ended like many other cases, the historic buildings have been torn down, the public was unable to find out or was only allowed to find out too late. There are then similar replicas in the same places, many people may be happy about them because they become a little bigger, because they become new and still supposedly could maintain the *tradition*. On the other hand, many other people feel pain and loss, because for them the contemporary witness has been wiped out, because the opportunity to learn about historical fragments, techniques, cultural traces, etc. get lost along with the demolition (Nguyen and Phan 2020, Brühne and Seng 2013).

Across the country, the antiquated churches have replaced the old churches. In the highlands, the wooden churches, built by missionaries with the identities of the houses of different ethnic groups are being rebuilt on a large scale in the old style with replicas. Obviously with these churches the question about the multipurpose uses of the congregation as well as the spirit of a sacred space do not play an important role (Longhi 2013) (Fig. 21).



Fig. 20. Bui Chu Cathedral (Vietnam); demolished on 2020, July 20.

Fig. 21. Langbiang parish church in the past (1950s) and after its renovation (2011 ca).
On the next page: Fig. 22. Trio concept, vn-a.



Inference

Church buildings had shaped qualitatively all the changes in Vietnam over various political and socio-cultural periods from the arrival of the first European missionaries in the 16th century to 1975.

The proclamation of the Christian faith as well as its church buildings in Vietnam (1550-1975) bear clearly the manuscripts of inculturation through transcription of the language or the adoption and further development of local forms of construction from the local religions and beliefs (Zahner 2007).

The phenomenon of contemporary sacred buildings in Vietnam then poses many questions that society as a whole has to seriously grapple with, namely:

- Could the aesthetic value system be changed by economic pressure?
- Would the broad participation of different disciplines be the salvation?
- Which rights and interactions do you have with historical religious buildings?
- Are there the exceptional affairs of the respective religious bearers or are interdisciplinary consultations and procedures necessary because of their social relevance?
- How can and may one proceed if they are not official registered monuments despite their great importance?
- Who will bear the responsibility and the right to determine their fate?
- Would it be the right approach to demolish a historic building without the official participation of expert reports, to rebuild it in the old style with imitations?
- What form of role model and educational function would then be appropriate? How can we further protect history?
- Can/may/should a contemporary handwriting/intention also be used?

THE NEW HOPE-RETURN OF THE *GENIUS LOCI*. SOME WORKS OF STUDIO VN-A

Ever since we started dealing with Christian architecture in 2007, the question that haunts us to this day

and will certainly continue to do so: where will God's people gather? vn-a always pursues three conceptual elements: the *genius loci*, the transparency and the native home (Fig. 22). For vn-a it is important to define God's house for the people and not a house of God. The intention of being at home reinforces the spirit of the place and leads the team to a vision for the new church design.

In the New Testament, it is signified at no place and space of the God-official meeting as a temple, church or sanctum. The temple of the new alliance is Jesus of Nazareth, in whom «the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily» lives (Col 2:9). Christ is the real temple of the new alliance; the municipality Christ is the temple sanctified by Him; the site of Christian meeting can be called only in a limited sense house of God.

...but which picture should I invent for God, because, nevertheless, basically the person himself is a God's image? Which temple should I build to him, because the whole world, the work of his hands, to him is not able to touch? (Adam 1984, 15).

Genius Loci. The term *Genius loci*, in Latin (Genius = protection, *Geist*; *loci* = genitive singular from *locus* = place) describes originally in the Roman mythology the protective mind or the protective divinity of a temple, or a holy place often shown in the form of a queue (Neddens and Wucher 1987, Schroer 2005).

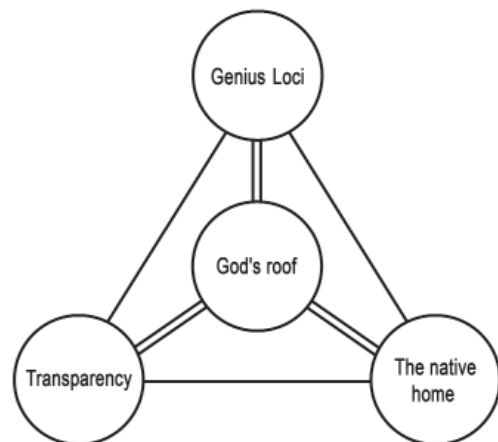




Fig. 23. Early missionary under the ethnic group Churu in Lam Dong (Highland, Vietnam), 1960ca; Bishop Jean Cassaigne was preaching in village, Kadon (Vietnam), 1930ca; Palm Sunday without church, Kadon (Vietnam), 1991.

Fig. 24. vn-a, Kadon parish church (Vietnam), 2014; floor plan. 1. Main worship space; 2. Sacristy; 3. Multi-functions room; 4. Catechism classroom; 5. Veranda, extention of worship space; 6. Museum; 7. Existing parsonage; 8. Existing parsonage; 9. Bell tower.

Transparency. «Transparency means a contemporaneous perception of different spatial layers» (Rowe and Slutzky 1997, 23).

The native home. vn-a does not only consider the term *native home* in the physical sense of the word due to the archetype or indigenous materials, it is much more at the core of the questions: how and when does the place/room/building become the *home of the community*? What makes place/space/building so that *the native home* is fulfilled there? Is it possible that there can be a place of longing for both the community and individual? How can we break the border among different cultures/ social backgrounds/ political point of views to come together? (Ferreiros 1971, Adam 1984, Schroer 2005).

Project 1: New building of the parish church Ka Don in Don Duong, Lam Dong

Return of the Genius-Loci. A roof for a folk and Mission: announcement of the Christian faith under the ethnic group Churu (finished 2014).

The parish of Kadon —Diocese of Dalat— belongs to the province of Lam Dong in the central highlands of Vietnam with approx 5000 members from many ethnic groups. Among them, the Churu and K’ho ethnic groups are in the majority. In the parish center of Kadon, the catechism and liturgical documents are translated into the Latin scriptures in the language of the Churu. Many folk songs, poems, and vocabulary of the Churu could be recorded

through the transcription. They are very important contributions to the recognition of the existence of ethnic peoples, to preserve and protect their cultures and languages for social development. In addition to liturgical activities, festivals and cultural exchanges take place in the parish (Fig. 23).

After analysis of the traditional house of Churu and many other local house types, vn-a decided to follow the spatial organization and the principle of the roof structure of the Churu’s traditional house. With this decision, the design wanted to accentuate the feeling of being home (Tran 2005).



Fig. 25. vn-a, Kadon parish church (Vietnam), 2014.



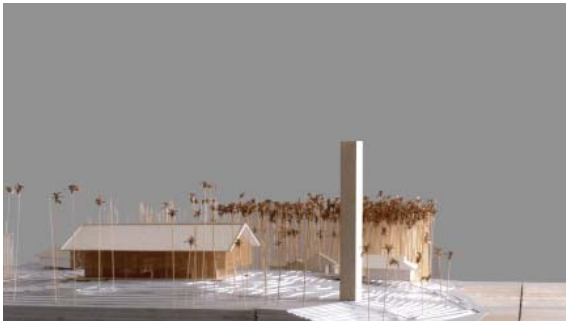


Fig. 26. vn-a, Cu Va Church (Vietnam), 2018; models and groundbreaking ceremony.

Fig. 27. Cu Va Church (Vietnam), (2021); façade (this is not a design of vn-a).

The floor plan shows a concentration of sacredness at the altar and the extension of the liturgical space follows the columns up to the final contour of the roof and based on *opened ring* principle for worship space by Rudolf Schwarz (Schwarz 1938, Hasler 2000) (Fig. 24).

The concept proposed a very flexible and compact floor plan to take advantage of the building. The main liturgical room can accommodate up to 700 people. The teaching and multi-purpose rooms and a large veranda lean besides the main liturgical room.

In a large mass, all these rooms and the large veranda can be opened to each other; this spatial structure forms a large church for more than 3000 people. This unites liturgical meaning and architectural elements under one roof.

Inside of the church, the columns define the flexibly changeable liturgical space from the daily chapel to the huge church for more than 1200 people in the main worship. The nature flows into the church and it is conducive to the holy atmosphere of the worship. The church should be a borderless object, which

doesn't block the views of the outside scenery. The filigree columns stand close in each other; form a quite smooth threshold between secular and sacred worlds (Meisenheimer 2004). The rhythms of the wood laths and columns define the transparency. The landscape scenery is the jewelry for the worship space.

The church adapts itself to this landscape scenery. Only the bell tower is the vertical element, which raises the cross to be visible for the far recumbent villages (Fig. 25).

Project 2: New church of the parish Cu Va, Quang Ngai; unbuilt

Cu Va is a small parish with around 300 parishioners in Tinh Giang, Son Tinh, Quang Ngai, Vietnam. At the Sunday worship, there are also visitors and believers from the surrounding communities. The building plot of the parish church of Cu Va is located in a rural area with extensive landscapes. The area and the plateau of the community center to be built are characterized by many areca palm trees. As with the Ka Don parish church, the trio concept was consistently pursued in the design of the Cu Va parish church. According to the traditional principle of the transept house, the transverse liturgy room was proposed there, followed by Rudolf Schwarz's *open ring*. The church building was also designed as a multi-purpose building. Thanks to the transparency, the horizontal textures of the wall elements merge with the vertical and super slim structure of the Areca palm trees to create a surreal sacred atmosphere under light and shadow (Fig. 26).

Not too long after the very lofty groundbreaking ceremony with the local bishop, parishioners and numerous guests from many parts of the country, vn-a nevertheless decided to withdraw the planning due to the various interests of the project participants. Now another design is chosen and built on the site (Fig. 27).

Project 3: New church of the parish Thoi Hoa, Binh Duong; in process

The parish of Thói Hoa is young and large with more than twelve thousand members in an industrial area belonging the district of Ben Cat, Binh Duong. Known as one of the large production locations in

Vietnam, the cityscape of Ben Cat is shaped by the rapid urbanization of the narrow workers' housings made of corrugated metal sheets between the tube houses. This explains the structure of the members of the Thoi Hoa parish: young, colorful, and active.

The parish priest wishes a church with the atmosphere of a factory for his members, but this factory, he says, is not for production, but for God's love. The design follows our liturgical trio concept with all the necessary elements for the tropical urban climate zones (Neumeyer 2002).

The place is a typical narrow urban situation, so vn-a chooses *the path* as the liturgical principle for the church. For the design task vn-a decides a structural system in the form of figures of the 12 Apostles, the biblical narrative of the *tent of encounter* as a place of encounter with God (Neumeyer 2002) (Fig. 28).

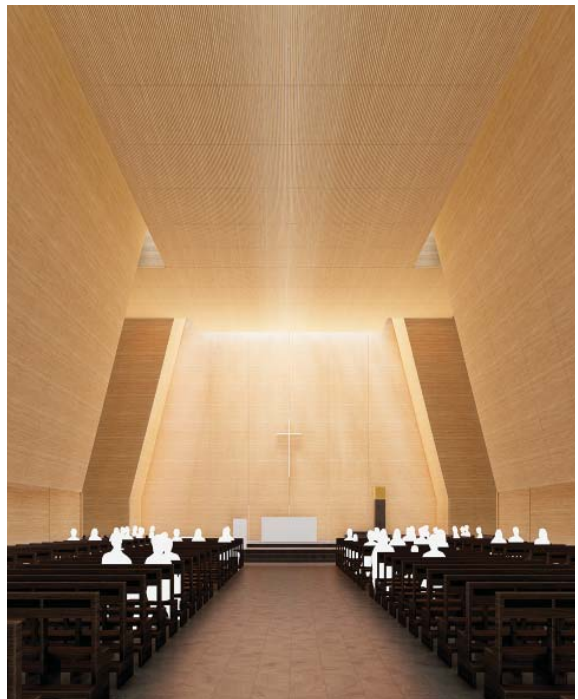
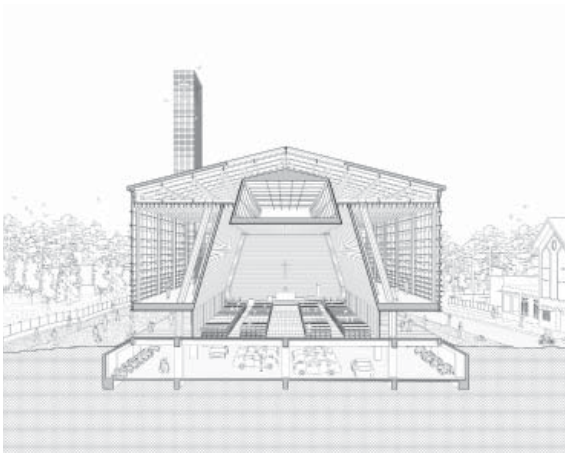
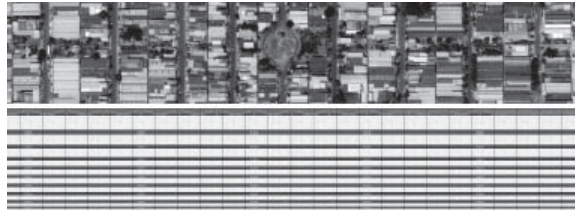
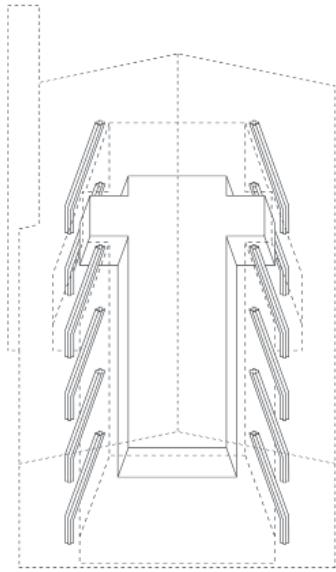
The building is designed with a double skin and several spatial layers to create the transparency in the liturgy room and to create the filter at the same time: between the profane world and the sacred liturgical room, between the hot outside space via a threshold to the protected and thus cooled interior (Stock 2002) (Fig. 29).

CONCLUSION

The examined cases are only mentioned as examples, but they show a very distinctive character of the mostly structural activities in the Christian buildings of Vietnam. After almost 500 years of existence, they are still looking for recognition. Nevertheless, the importance of sacred buildings in a country like Vietnam is undisputed: they serve as open communities, as contact points for many socio-cultural matters and make important contributions to the provision of existence. One can observe with confidence that the social changes promote and demand new positive ways of thinking and movements in building up the community. And the expressions of these new ways of thinking can also be reflected in the aesthetics of their sacred communal spaces.

Fig. 28. vn-a, Thoi Hoa parish church, Binh Duong (Vietnam), in process; concept idea: the Twelve Apostles and the Holy Cross.

Fig. 29. vn-a, Thoi Hoa parish church, Binh Duong (Vietnam), in process; model of façade study; Ben Cat urban layout as façade idea; principle section; 3D-interior.



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