

## *Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre: Architectural Features*

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by Sylvia So  
translated by Norman Walling, S.J.

Anyone who has ever visited the Tao Fong Shan Christian Center will immediately remember an ancient Chinese building. The red columns and yellow eaves visible everywhere make visitors think that they have unwittingly entered a Buddhist retreat or a Daoist temple. However, the large cross--long a significant landmark in Shatin, the chapel altar covered with Christian symbols, the horizontal scroll on which the four Chinese characters, *Dao Cheng Rou Shen* (The Word Became Flesh), are written, and the crucifix in the prayer room all point to the fact that this place is dedicated to the preaching of the Christian gospel.

"Christianity must be imbued with Chinese traditional culture," said Dr. Karl Ludvig Reichelt. This was his concept and motivation for founding the Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre in 1930. Through this centre Dr. Reichelt wanted to inculturate Christianity, to attract Buddhists and Daoists to find the true "Way"--Jesus Christ and to realize his dream of gathering "other sheep." The name *Tao Fong Shan* was inspired by Scriptures: "In the beginning was the Dao [Tao] (Way), the Dao was with God and the Dao was God" (*John 1:1*). "The Feng [Fong] (Wind, Spirit) blows where it wills" (*John 3:8*). These words express the hope that the Dao who is with God and God's Spirit will, like the wind, blow all over the world. This is why Dr. Reichelt took the lotus crucifix used by the Nestorians during the Tang Dynasty and made it Tao Fong Shan's symbol.

This representation symbolizes the true light shining from the crucifix, which is the source of life for everything. This light makes the lotus flower blossom in all its purity despite having roots in the mud.

The question is: how can Christianity be adapted to traditional Chinese architecture? The Danish architect, Johannes Prip-Møller, faced this problem. He was not only an architect but also a missionary. He went to China in 1921 with his wife and began to study traditional Chinese architecture, especially the special style

of Buddhist temples and monasteries. He also assisted in the building of churches. Because he felt that architecture should fit the cultural background of place and time, linking religion, beauty and practicality into a harmonious whole, his designs often combined the architectural styles that he learned in the West with traditional Chinese architecture. He was inspired to initiate a special Chinese style of "painting columns on the roof."

When he was designing Tao Fong Shan, Johannes Prip-Møller explained his idea of using Christianity to bring new life to Chinese architecture. He said: "A building is constructed from the inside out; a building is but an exterior expression of an interior idea. As far as we missionaries are concerned, our task is to create an exterior structure that crystallizes the union of local culture with a foreign one. Don't just copy details but discern the influence behind these details."

By combining the architectural style of ordinary houses and temples of South China, and using a simple design and materials as well as the natural topography of Tao Fong Shan, he built the Christian Center into unique structure. He wanted Buddhist monks and nuns traveling from place to place, hoping to find new inspiration in other Buddhist monasteries and temples to meet Christianity at Tao Fong Shan and seek truth together with Christians.

The chapel at Tao Fong Shan is octagonal in shape representing the eight-fold path of Buddhism. It has a double-eaved roof with 40 bright red columns both inside and outside that act as supports. There are a large number of green square cross beams. The eaves in the chapel are also octagonal, painted a very deep blue, almost black. There are animals depicted on all eight sides of the eaves as well as some Buddhist and Daoist monks each with his own facial expression. These are very lifelike. These represent the main aim of Tao Fong Shan; that is, to preach the gospel to Buddhists.

The caisson ceiling in the chapel had an inlaid golden cross set against a grayish blue background. When the chapel was first built a star hung down from the cross which represented the star that led the three wise men to Jerusalem to find the new born king. There were also five lamps, but all these were later removed. The golden cross is in the exact center of the chapel. The horizontal scroll that was there when the church was first built had these four Chinese characters: *Tai Chu You Dao* (In the beginning was the Word". There

Announcing

## **Chinese Christian Art Exhibition**

In 1947 the Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre provided an impetus for the inculturation of Christian art by setting up a division of porcelain painting. One result of this effort has been a series of beautifully colored plates depicting gospel scenes done in a distinctive Chinese art form. This series has won worldwide acclaim.

Tao Fong Shan has also set up an art division whose chief purpose is to promote the development of Christian Chinese art and to support and encourage artists dedicated to creating these works of art that give such praise and glory to God.

Chinese Christian Art Exhibition, October 28- November 1, 1998

Place: WMCA Salsbury Road, Kowloon, Main Lobby

Participating artists: Ding Fong, Tang Guo, He Qi, Fan Pu, Lu Wei, Lu Lan

Other features: Seminar and lecture during Exhibit

Sponsored by Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre

The public is cordially invited to attend.

For details, please contact Miss Sylvia So, Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre. Tel: 2694-4008 FAX: 2694-4020

were also two hanging scrolls one read: *The Spiritual Light shines everywhere* and the other: *The great vow to spread mercy everywhere*. The objective of the scrolls was to inspire Buddhists to seek the true way: Jesus Christ. The horizontal scroll was later changed to: *The Word became flesh*, and the hanging scrolls were changed to *The Word was with God*, and *The Spirit blows where it wills*.

The exterior of the central altar, built in 1922, is painted in red and decorated with gold foil--a style quite similar to Chinese altars. The front of the altar has several carved layers each with different decorative patterns: in the centre of the upper layer is a spherical slightly convex carving with thirty seven golden rays streaming out in four directions. These represent divine light and the sun of justice. The middle layer is divided into three sections: the left section has this symbol, P, i.e. the Greek letters X and P, a simplified way of writing Christ's name. The triangle in the middle section represents the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Chinese tripod shape in the right section represents the Holy Spirit and the living water. The lotus crucifix in the centre of the lower level is the symbol of Tao Fong Shan, indicating that Christianity is rooted and growing in China. On the right is the tree of life bearing fruit. There is a vase containing myrrh by its side symbolizing the Passion of Christ. On the left are a lotus flower and its seedpod symbolizing the blossoming and bearing of fruit. There is a fish shaped golden carving at the base of the altar on both sides--the tail of the fish claps a red bead--the fish is an ancient Christian symbol. The lotus crucifix is situated to the left of the altar and a baptism font to the right.

As a whole the buildings at Tao Fong Shan have been built in Chinese style using rich Chinese colors extensively. For example, black is the color used in Ming and Ching temples, blue is used in the temple of heaven, bright red is the color for joyful occasions to express happiness, green is the color that represents life. Moon doors, curved eaves, white walls, and black tiles characterize architecture in South China. Thus, brightly colored Tao Fong Shan set on verdant rolling hills is like listening to a Chinese poem or viewing a Chinese painting. It touches the depths of one's feelings and brings the viewer to feel at one with heaven and earth.■



The Christ Chapel at the Tao Fung Shan Christian Centre, built in 1933-34, to foster interreligious dialogue.

建於一九三三至三四年的道風山基督教叢林的聖殿，目的是為促進宗教交談。



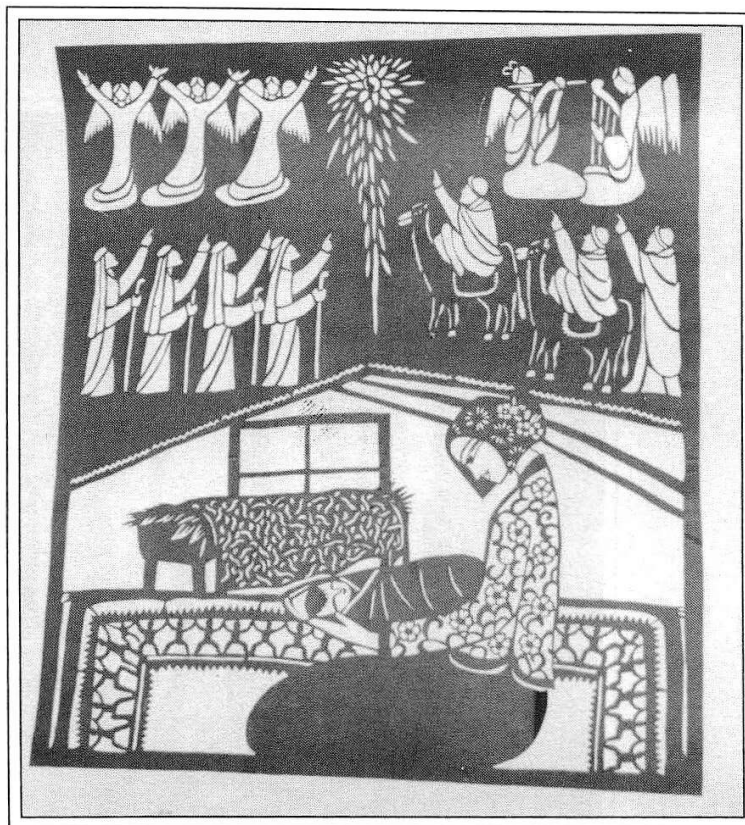
The famous altar in Christ Chapel described in the previous article.

上一篇文章談論到的聖殿內著名的聖壇。

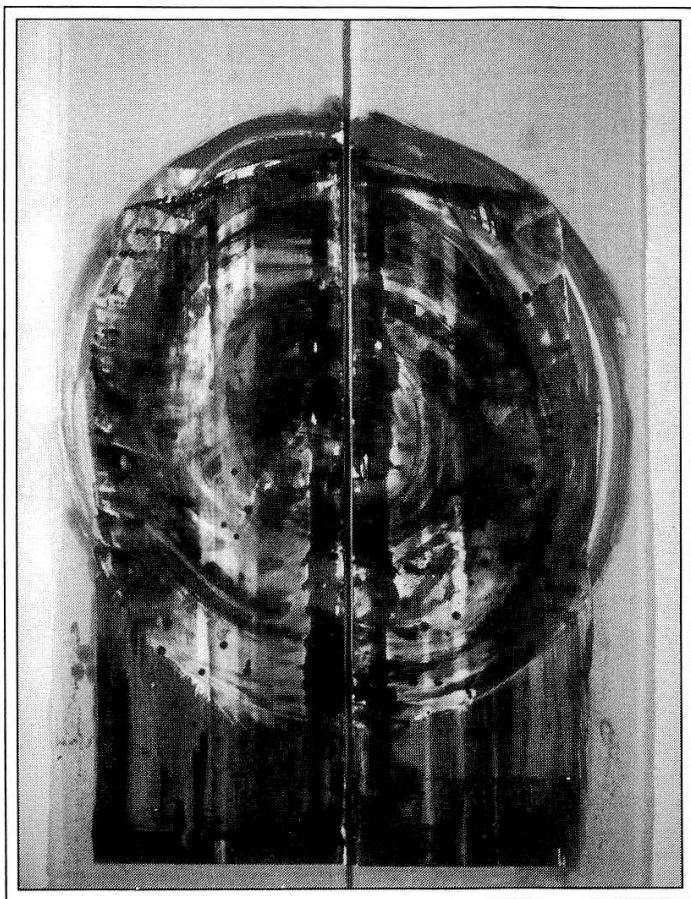
*Papercuts in Chinese Christian Art*



*Jesus and the  
Woman at the Well*  
Artist: Fan Pu



*The Nativity*  
Artist: Fan Pu



*The Breath*

by Paul Zhang.

Acrylic, bitumen and  
ink on paper.

氣 張琪凱 作  
紙本丙酸樹脂漆、瀝  
青、水墨設色  
100x159cm., 1996.

*The Journey*

by Paul Zhang.

Acrylic, bitumen and  
ink on paper.

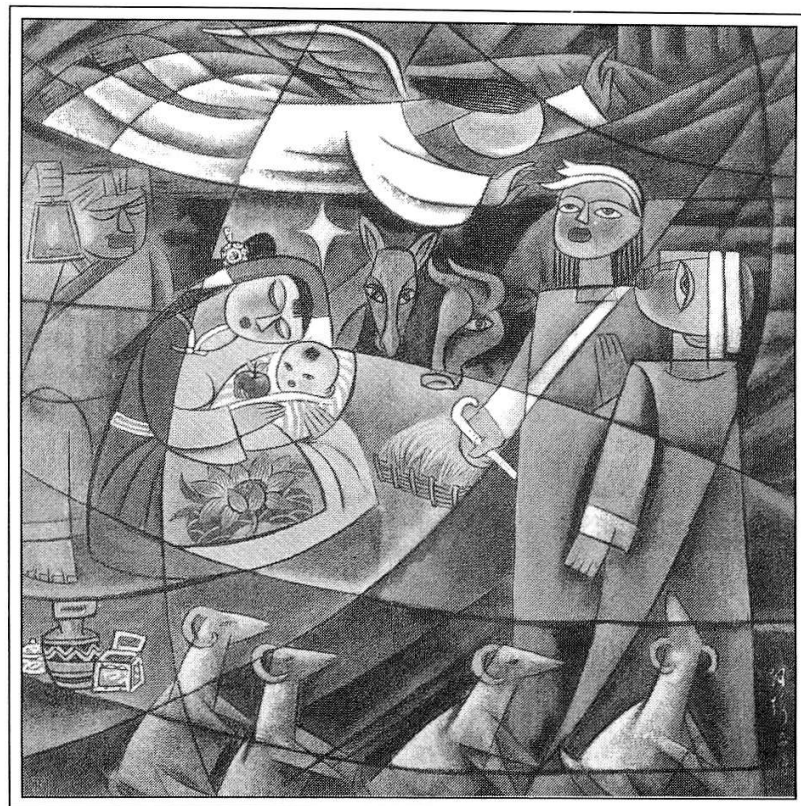
旅途 張琪凱  
作紙本丙烯酸樹脂  
漆、瀝青、水墨設色  
150x150cm., 1996.





*The  
Annunciation*  
by He Qi.  
Ink and color  
on paper.

聖母領報  
何琦 作  
紙本水墨設  
色



*Nativity*  
by He Qi.  
Ink and color  
on paper.

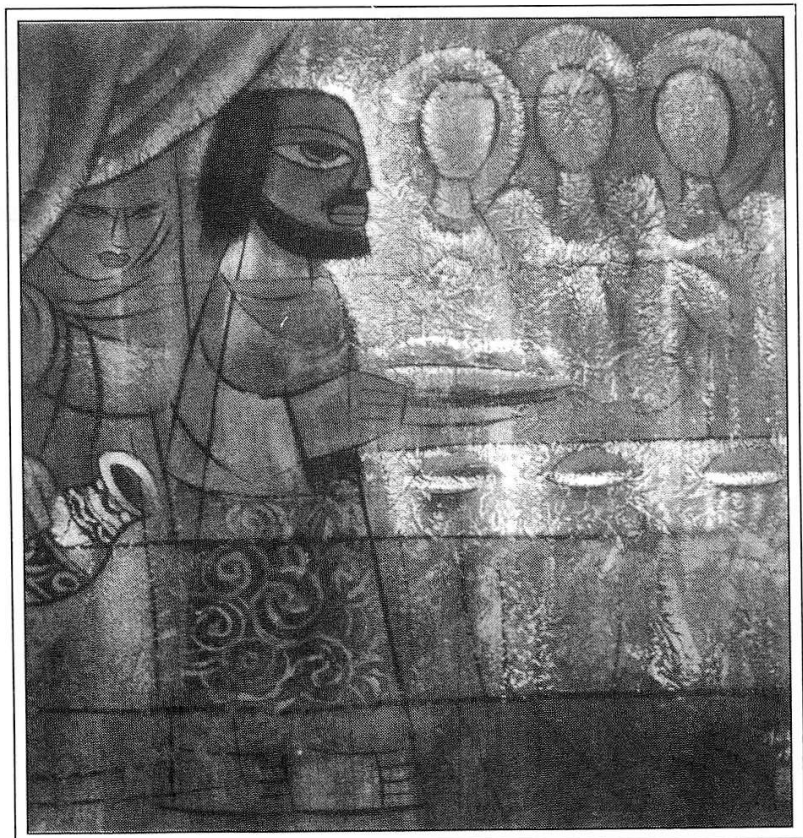
聖誕  
何琦 作  
紙本水墨設  
色





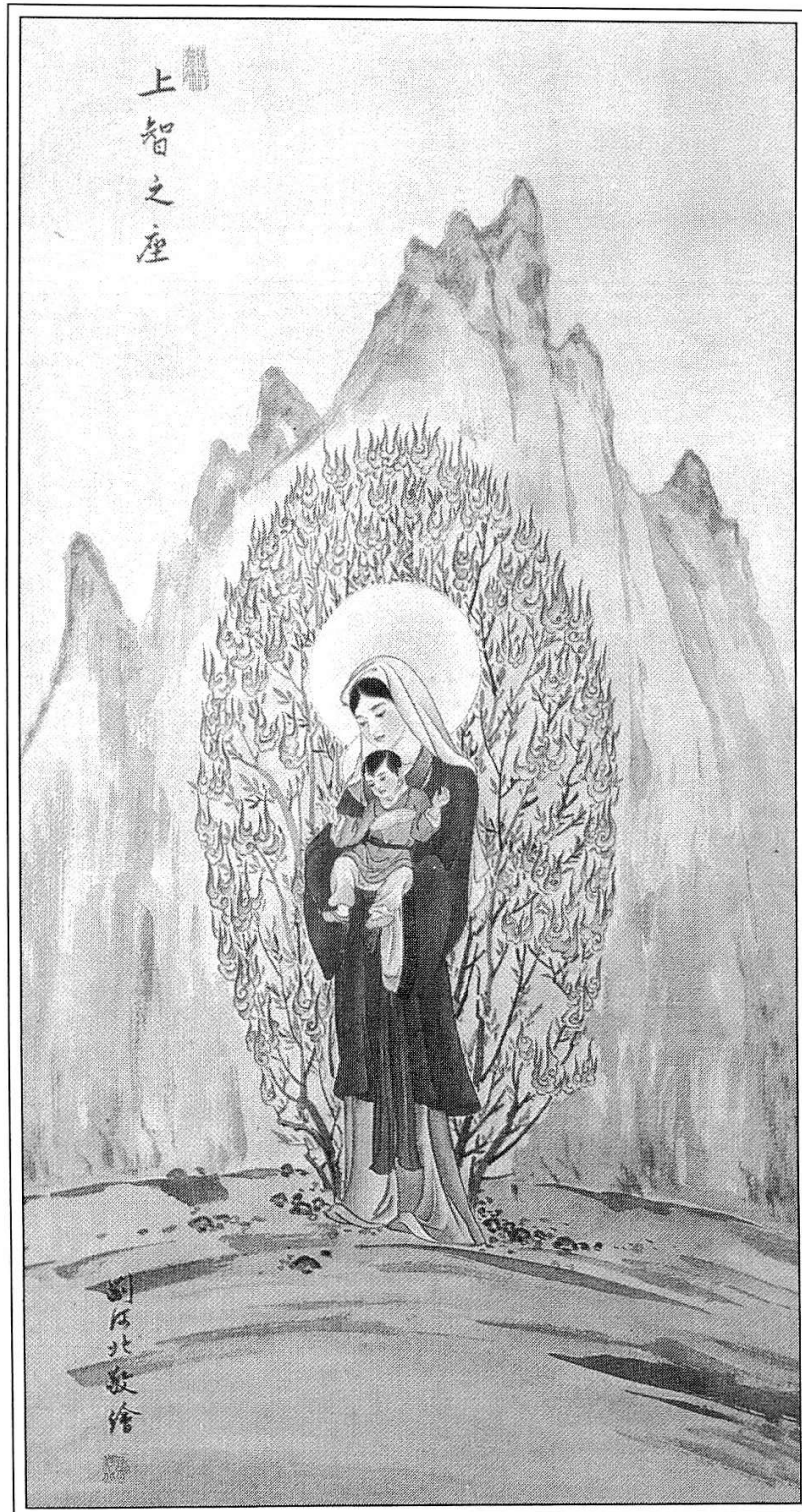
*Mary visits  
Elizabeth*  
by He Qi.  
Ink and color  
on paper.

瑪利亞訪問  
伊利莎白  
何琦 作  
紙本水墨設  
色



*Three Angels  
appearing to  
Abraham*  
by He Qi.  
Ink and color on  
paper.

三天使出現于亞  
伯拉罕前  
何琦 作  
紙本水墨設色



*Seat of Wisdom* by Monica Liu. (Printed by the Franciscans.)

上智之座 劉河北 作 (方濟會會士印)



*Christmas Night* by Magdalena Liu.

聖誕夜 劉彥斌 作 34.5x69cm., 1989.

## *The Gospel in Chinese Art on Procelain*

*The gospel in Chinese Art* on porcelain is the work of the Tao Fung Shan Porcelain Work Shop established in 1947.

The white porcelain is handpainted, fired in a kiln, and finally readied for sale in the Porcelain Work Shop showroom.



*Peter's Confession* Of Jesus, Peter confessed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16)

彼得認耶穌為主

西門彼得回答說：‘你是基督，是永生上帝的兒子。’

(太 16:16)