

WORKS OF ART AS MODEL FORMS IN THE CONTACT OF RELIGIONS. GLIMPSES FROM JAPAN, CHINA AND INDIA

INTRODUCTION

Art objects are not just expressions of artistic creativity but frequently also manifestations of the contact between cultures or – in the case of objects with a religious connotation – of religions. The following paper will consider how the encounter of religious traditions takes place on the level of the object, that is in the object itself. This question is of particular relevance to art works from Asia, where different religions often existed side by side and mutually influenced each other, especially the material culture of their respective followers. The question is how this contact of religions manifests itself in an individual object and how individual objects have contributed to the emergence of certain images and concepts about religions.¹⁾

¹⁾ The paper presents selected results of the working group “Metaphern und Formular” of the Collaborative Research Center (CRC) 1475 “Metaphors of Religion”, Ruhr-Universität Bochum & Karlsruher Institut für Technologie. The CRC “Metaphors of Religion” is funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG; German Research Foundation) – SFB 1475 – Project ID 441126958.

To do so, selected art historical examples are analysed, including insights from the disciplines of Religious Studies and Social Phenomenology, and discussed based on objects from the area of missionary history. At the same time, the paper tries to sketch a possible theoretical foundation for the systematic revision of established concepts about the emergence of iconographies and visual conventions in Asia.

The contact of religions in terms of objects can occur in different forms. The production of objects almost invariably is connected to their transmission; objects circulate within a community or even beyond. This leads to different contact situations that in turn cause a transfer of objects – these include trade and donation as well as deprivation and the discovery of ‘abandoned’ objects. In modern societies, museums and art collections are among the locations where lasting contact situations occur.²⁾ This kind of contact that combines objects of different origin which are selected according to specific criteria, will not be discussed in detail in this paper. It will instead pursue the question how the contact of religions is manifested in the objects and how contact situations add to religious art works such as cult images. That this is the case is largely undisputed; we shall take a closer look at how this enhancement of religious works of art takes place. Unlike objects that were taken from their original context unchanged and were transferred to a private or public collection, the objects under discussion cannot be explained by merely categorising them as expressions of an asymmetric clash of different cultures and the resulting triumphal cultural appropriation by the dominant party. In fact, such objects in a way withstand the imperial colonial access as they do not become the focus of an immediate cultural appropriation in the sense of the adaptation or simulation of the original usage by the acquirer.

THE HISTORY OF ART AND RELIGION AS A HISTORY OF CONTACTS

In many cases the analysis of an object is limited to the statement that besides the visual language of the society it stems from the influence of ‘foreign’ cultures or religions can be recognised in its style of iconography. This ‘influence’ in a next step is explained by referencing

²⁾ See Krüger & Stünkel (2022) and Krüger & Radermacher (2020; 2021).

historical events thus alluding to potential or actual situations of contact. The question how different artistic ‘languages’ merge in the object usually is not addressed. Existing scholarship – in art history as well as in religious studies – usually demarcates different religious traditions and constructs. For example, pre-modern India was a static, authoritative affiliation to just one, firmly defined religion. This construction of clearly separated religious systems may be functional to a certain extent when texts and literary traditions are concerned. On a visual level, however, it is difficult to argue but is still maintained, as becomes obvious by the segmented discussion of Asian art under religious labels like ‘Buddhist’, ‘Hindu’ or ‘Daoist’ in printed studies as well as in museum exhibitions. This rigorous categorisation causes and perpetuates the idea that the religions discussed developed and consolidated their respective traditions – and their visual traditions – on their own terms, that means exclusively within their own community. In everyday life the expectation that imaginary demarcation lines separate religious traditions from each other is therefore deeply rooted. In reality, however, it seems instead that situations of contact were instrumental in the emergence and definition of religious traditions. This is reflected in literary transmissions; they are, however, of equal, if not greater importance for visual traditions. Situations of contact leave their traces in images and the development of iconography can hardly be imagined to take place without them.

In Religious Studies, recent years have seen a growing acceptance of the insight that religious history cannot be written based on the assumption of self-sufficient, closed religious units which developed, if they did so at all, exclusively according to internal criteria. Religions do not appear from nowhere; they do not emerge for no reason but develop due to contacts. The same also holds true for artistic creations and particularly in the case of objects with a religious connotation. A current approach in Religious Studies therefore emphasises the importance of situations of contact for the emergence, formation, consolidation and dynamisation of religious traditions. Research on religions focussed on the phenomenon of contact

‘[...] consists of the claim that the formation, establishment, spread and further development of the major religious traditions (as well as other religious traditions) have been affected by mutual influences, as well as that the formal unity of the history of religions mainly consists of religious contacts, i.e. of mutual perceptions of religious traditions as religious enti-

*ties that constitute regional religious fields and, in the long run, lead to a global religious field.'*³⁾

A religion therefore needs another religion; that means there is no religion without another religion. For example, Judaism and Christianity and their respective visual idioms emerge in a complex – synchronic as well as diachronic – process of dispute with each other and with other agents in their religious (for example the veneration of the Roman Emperors) and profane environment.⁴⁾ Equally, Daoism emerges from the confrontation with Confucian and Buddhist traditions which leave obvious traces in the visual repertoire of Daoism. In fact, only within a complex situation of contact – i.e., when they are challenged by the 'Other' – may the members of a community consider self-description as a possible option. This self-description can result in a demarcation which, as a consequence, is in need of the 'Other', that is another religion, to serve as a contrast against which the own convictions stand out.

But how can this contact-induced emergence, formation and development of religion(s) be described? The preconditions necessary to enable the description of a situation of contact are provided by the religions traditions themselves. In a situation of contact religions compare themselves with the other religion. Just as there is no religion without another religion, there is – in human interaction as well as among religions – no contact without comparison.⁵⁾ A situation of contact therefore implies that a comparison of religions immediately takes place. Comparative religion is therefore not just an academic discipline but an observable, repeatedly occurring phenomenon in the history of religion(s) – material for an academic discipline.⁶⁾ It is not just a sinister invention of some paper pushers and certainly no 'western' creation,⁷⁾ but can be encountered in the material itself, in the history of religions. A comparison, however, does only take place if there is something regarding which the contenders can compare with each other. In a situation of contact, the (representatives of the respective) religions compare with each other on the basis of selected aspects (*tertia*

³⁾ Krech (2012: 192).

⁴⁾ See Schäfer (2010: VIII-XI); also Boyarin 2007.

⁵⁾ Krech (2015: 41f.).

⁶⁾ Cf. Freiburger (2019).

⁷⁾ See Bergunder (2011: 51f.).

comparationis) and adjust their future dealings with the other tradition accordingly. At the same time their own religious thinking is modified as a result of the contact with another religious tradition. The history of religions therefore is a dynamic sequence of contacts and not an autarkic development rooted in fixed origins.

Situations of contact are manifold; they can occur in different ways and can result in a variety of outcomes:

‘The contacts of religions cannot be reduced to disputations and similar organised discussions but include every kind of description and self-description with regard to other religions as well as explicit or implicit adaptations of forms and contents – for example also in the form of marked or indirect quotes. The figurations of religious contacts are numerous. They range from mutual or unilateral identification to the adaptation of individual elements from another religion and demarcation and to complete extinction.’⁸⁾

Explicit or implicit adaptations of forms and contents are not restricted to texts. They take place in religious objects, too. These forms and contents are considered as detachable from their concrete manifestation by means of analysis. This process can be understood by employing the model form theory; model forms for texts and objects can be differentiated. The model form theory concerns itself with the functioning of sociality, that is the possibility of communication. A social group, a communication community, can develop and be perpetuated if a respective individual can be broadly communicated, if an individual experience can be made commonly accessible. To achieve this, model forms are required that consist of predetermined text and blanks; the blanks constitute the opportunity to fill in personal experiences in an otherwise given text.

An individual can be understood when it can relate his life story by means of a model form, for example that of the biblical story of the lost

⁸⁾ *“Religionskontakte sind nicht auf Disputationen und ähnliche Dialogveranstaltungen zu reduzieren, sondern umfassen jegliche Form der Fremdbeschreibung und Selbstbeschreibung mit Blick auf andere Religionen sowie explizite oder implizite Übernahmen von Formen und Inhalten – zum Beispiel auch in Gestalt von kenntlich gemachten oder indirekten Zitaten. Die Figurationen des Religionskontakts sind zahlreich. Sie reichen von wechsel- oder einseitiger Identifikation über die Aufnahme von einzelnen Elementen einer anderen Religion und Demarkation bis zur vollständigen Auslöschung“*; Krech (2019: 286).

son, of the Odyssey or that of the dishwasher turned millionaire. Such model forms usually are derived from so-called ‘Großgeschichten’, major narratives from basic religious texts such as the bible, or from myths and legendary history; there are, however, group-specific model forms as well. By inscribing itself into these model forms, the individual explains itself; it becomes visible to others and commits itself to the respective narrative, just like a signature and date affirms the correctness of the information given in a bureaucratic form, e.g. a tax declaration.⁹⁾

If borders shall be passed, forms are required, that means identifications that enable communication, too – and this not only functions in the relation between an individual and a group but also in the relations between different groups (cultures). Each culture has model forms, that is major narratives with specific blanks that enable communications, at its disposal. By filling in blanks of external model forms with options from internal model forms the texts overlap and this allows for a mutual translation of content. This does not necessarily lead to an ‘adequate’ translation; the combination of both model forms rather creates a new story that may contain wrong or irrelevant identifications (e.g. the identification of Jesus as a Brahmin). Yet it enables a preliminary communication.

For this paper we will restrict considerations to a particular aspect of the religious object shaped by a situation of contact. For a full description it is necessary to analyse the individual object and its respective context. For the particular context of an object in a missionary collection focussed on religious history we have already suggested a three-tier model elsewhere.¹⁰⁾

The following considerations concentrate of the contact in the object itself as it can be observed for example in the image type of Buddha on the cross (Fig. 1).

The shape of the crucifix is well-known: the tortured body of Jesus on the cross, sometimes marked with the inscription INRI. As such, the material object might be interpreted as a texture connecting the story of Jesus, as the person depicted, to what became the symbol of the religious movement his followers formed. But there are more layers to the texture here: as a whole, the crucifix fixed visibly to a wall makes a statement of confession. However, there are also incidents of objects which adapt to

⁹⁾ Compare Stünkel (2019).

¹⁰⁾ Krüger & Stünkel (2022).

this form, but in which certain salient elements have been replaced. In this particular example, the position usually allotted to Jesus within the texture of the cross has been filled by a representation of the Buddha. Hence, the figure of Jesus within the whole has become a disposable element, and the free space has been inscribed with another signifier, changing the meaning of the whole while still referring to the old context.

At first glance, the Buddha on the cross could be interpreted as a more or less successful attempt to adequately adapt the teachings of Buddhism to Christianity or *vice versa*. It might be suggested that within the context of the cross, the salvatory function of Christ might be replaced by the function of the Buddha. However, the material object in question is an artefact from 17th century Japan, used by indigenous Christians in a situation of repression and persecution. Following the Expulsion Edict of 1614 and the persecution of Christians in Nagasaki in 1629, Christian communities were forced underground as Christianity was considered a threat to the basis of Japanese society: the Christian faith ultimately transfers loyalty to an otherworldly sphere:

‘Japanese thought held no preconception corresponding to the Christian predicate. The Japanese Critic found the notion of an omnipotent personal deity specious, its consequence disastrous. The foreign religion could be accused of otherworldliness; for the Christians removed the justification of human action from the social sphere to an extraterrestrial locus. The Christian dictate of supernal loyalty pre-empted loyalty to a secular sovereign.’¹¹⁾

Japanese authorities of the Tokugawa shogunate developed a cunning strategy to track down hidden Christians (*kirishitan*) and force them to retract: suspects were forced to stamp on images made of wood, stone or bronze depicting the crucified Christ or the Virgin Mary. If they refused, they were tortured and eventually executed.¹²⁾ The practice of trampling on Christian images developed into a public festival in some regions of Japan, and was not officially abandoned until 1873.

In order to achieve maximum control of the suspected converts, from the mid-seventeenth century onwards all Japanese subjects were required

¹¹⁾ Elison (1988: 1).

¹²⁾ Shin (2011: 6).

to associate, that means to have a bureaucratic affiliation to a Buddhist institution:

‘underground Christians had to register with local Buddhist temples, which functioned as an arm of the state, registering births, deaths, marriages, and so on. This meant that all underground Christians had to master the role of being nominally Buddhist as required, and secretly something forbidden.’¹³⁾

Due to this procedure, bureaucratised Buddhism became an instrumental institution fostering the interests of the Tokugawa state – an obligatory model form for all subjects. Elision stresses the intensity of bureaucratic control with a telling example:

‘Forced registry of all the land’s people in Buddhist temples made of Buddhism an instrument applied to the elimination of religious heterodoxy. [...] The suspiciousness of the Tokugawa officials, and the thoroughness of their control measures, reached a hysterical pitch akin to that of their Spanish contemporaries (or of those petty bureaucrats of modern Germany) who were bent on enforcing ‘racial purity’. Entry into almost any sort of service occupation involved the prior attestation that the person was not a Christian. For instance, a whore’s initial contract required such a formula; for officialdom was most concerned that the lady’s customers not be contaminated.’¹⁴⁾

However, this kind of formulaic bureaucracy did leave some loopholes that were eagerly exploited by secret dissenters. In spite of all the measures taken to track down converts to the forbidden faith, Christianity was never completely extinguished in Japan due to some techniques of secrecy¹⁵⁾ and subversion, many of which involved the careful use of model forms such as the crucifix mentioned above. *‘Many Christians secretly retained the faith by disguising their true religious identity with Buddhist paraphernalia.’¹⁶⁾* In order to forestall being forced to desecrate Christian symbols, and, thus,

¹³⁾ Nosco (2007: 91).

¹⁴⁾ Elision (1988: 4/5).

¹⁵⁾ On these techniques see Nosco (2007).

¹⁶⁾ Shin (2011: 1).

endangering either one's life or one's spiritual salvation, or being simply detected by the religious objects they possessed, Christians changed the texture of their venerated images – by emptying and refilling free spaces of this texture.

*'One distinctive feature of the non-textual material culture of the underground Christians is that it was, in general, visually indistinguishable from non-proscribed objects of everyday use associated with the Buddhist and eclectic folk religious traditions. What distinguished most of these objects to underground Christians was only the fact that they were of ritual or symbolic import to their communities, and so only rarely were underground Christians uncovered through discovery of their religious possessions.'*¹⁷⁾

Hence, in the crucifix mentioned above, in which the believer replaced the body of Christ with the figure of the Buddha, the confessional symbol and its texture were kept in place. Shin identifies some images of the Buddha used in this way as Amida, *'the savior and lord of afterlife paradise, [...] the most appealing Buddha to the Japanese populace.'* For a Christian audience, these aspects of the Buddha Amida sound familiar. Shin elaborates on this idea as follows:

*'Amida, unlike other Buddhas, has two distinctive theological aspects that are closely analogous to Christianity. First, the terms of salvation do not rely on the part of the believer, but on the compassion and will of Amida. [...] Since sinful men do not have the capacity to be freed from the eternal chain of karmic reincarnation and suffering, Amida allows them transferred to his paradisiacal Pure Land, where reborn believers will receive the profound teaching [...] and eventually proceed to nirvana.'*¹⁸⁾

For protective reasons, the crucifix in this case was treated as a model form and thus was able to retain its binding character. It was further strategically connected to a model form arising from another tradition, thereby profiting from its associate narratives. A similar phenomenon is

¹⁷⁾ Nosco (2007: 14).

¹⁸⁾ Shin (2011: 28, 29, 32, 33).

found in the conflation of the image of Mary with the bodhisattva Kannon who had a similar role and appearance (Mary-Kannon, Fig. 2).

*'The double circumstances of persecution and isolation were bringing their religious imagery of Mary close to that of Kannon, since the latter not only protected their identity, but was filling in their incomplete and fading knowledge of Marian imagery and theology.'*¹⁹⁾

Model forms, thus, can well be employed subversively in situations of religious contact.

As in these cases, the combination of fixed and free (or open) elements within such a form often results in the emergence of a new texture, thereby transforming the supposed meaning of the fixed texts and the inscribed spaces. As Elison argues, deprived of expert pastors, underground Japanese Christianity transformed into *'a folk religion in which the Christian element was explicitly magical. The incantation of incomprehensible pseudo-Latin or pseudo-Portuguese formulas became the hallmark of the cult, along with the veneration of cruciform images and other such symbols concealed and absorbed within Buddhist icons. The major tenets of Christianity assumed a thoroughly legendary coloration.'*²⁰⁾ Likewise, Shin stresses that the conflation of Christian and Buddhist imaginaries gradually led to the emergence of a new religion that was neither Buddhist or Christian, thus hinting at the fact that the use of model forms allows for modifications of the fixed text that can dynamically lead to new contrasting religious formations.²¹⁾ In their operation, model forms are not merely confined to preserving a certain state (of communication) but are also instrumental in the (unintentional) formation of new traditions.

RELIGIOUS CONTACT IN THE OBJECT

While the image type of the Buddha on the cross disguises a Christian symbol in order to protect its owner from persecution, artistic production surrounding Christian mission usually has

¹⁹⁾ Shin (2011: 14).

²⁰⁾ Elison (1988: 222).

²¹⁾ Shin (2011: 3).

other intentions. It therefore cannot come as a surprise that religious situation of contact in an object become particularly obvious in those objects produced in a missionary context or that are used by recently proselytised groups. The idea behind it is to translate the religious content of a proselytising group into the visual language of the group they target and thus to represent the – still foreign – beliefs in well-established forms. This concept of inculturation serves as an antonym of colonialism and imperialism and their ruthless, paternalistic and accommodative methods of Christian mission; it describes a process of mutual adaptation of traditions in ongoing situations of contact. The term ‘inculturation’, used in a Catholic context, and ‘contextualisation’, more common in Protestant theology,²²⁾ serve to describe an integration of cultures with Christian beliefs, ideally resulting in the invigoration of the cultures on one hand and an enrichment of the Christian church on the other hand.²³⁾

In relevant literature the concept is described as follows:

‘Mission does not aim at the acceptance of the Christian faith, if that means the historically accrued dogmata and Jewish-Occidental ideas of morality. These contents rather shall be gained anew through dialogue, through Christian love. Thus only inculturation can take place and Jesus Christ himself receives a new countenance.’²⁴⁾

According to Pope Francis in his statement on mission, *Evangelii Gaudium*, ‘The Holy Spirit is at work both enriching culture and, with the values of culture the Spirit offers “new aspects of revelation” and gives the church “a new face”’.²⁵⁾

Another definition stresses the dynamic and local aspect of the contact situation implied in the process: “Inculturation”, as its etymology implies, refers to the attempt to “localize” or “indigenize” the gospel *into* cultures (to play on the *in* of “inculturation”), or more generally, to formulate a theology of the dynamics of the interaction between church and culture/world’.²⁶⁾ Particularly in the Catholic church, inculturation is one of the

²²⁾ See Küster (2020: 206).

²³⁾ Müller (1987: 178).

²⁴⁾ Hasenhüttl (1995: 56).

²⁵⁾ EG 116 quoted in Bevens (2019: 208).

²⁶⁾ Phan (2016: 232).

most frequently used terms of mission theology. It is applied to all aspects of religious life, amongst them popular piety, art and architecture.

For the Indian context, Michael Amaladoss describes an ideal inculturation process as follows:

‘The methodology of these inculturated theologies follows the pastoral-theological cycle. One starts from life in the world and the kind of questions it raises in the context of the faith. Sciences like sociology, anthropology, and psychology can help to analyze the situation of life and the questions that are raised in the context of faith. One then goes to the Bible to find out what it has to say to these questions. This dialogue between the Bible and the questions of life gives rise to reflection. The Bible is interpreted in living contexts, and past questions and answers from the Christian tradition serve to warn and guide. Then follows discernment to choose a particular course of action. Action leads to life experience, and the cycle starts again. This is not abstract or purely academic, but concrete, action-oriented theologizing.’²⁷⁾

The inculturation of the gospel can be described following different models; for our case the synthesised model of inculturation is of particular interest. It assumes that cultures grow and develop by their encounter and that they shape and enrich each other.²⁸⁾ To achieve this enrichment, certain elements of a foreign culture have to be manifest and visibly adapted.

An art work or a material object is one potential manifestation of inculturation. In that case, the object or its individual properties mediate between cultural or religious traditions. For the sphere of visual arts, Amaladoss refers to the element of contemplation as one possible inculturating intersection of Christian and Indian art:

‘The purpose of Indian art is neither information nor decoration alone, but also a form of contemplation that helps a person become one with God and the universe. [...] Indian painting and architecture, too, were temple-based arts. They are not merely illustrative but help the observer to concentration

²⁷⁾ Amaladoss (2020: 427).

²⁸⁾ Müller (1987: 179).

*which leads to silent absorption. Indian Christian artists like Jyoti Sahi continue the Indian tradition of art as prayer [...].*²⁹⁾

Yet, inculturation in a missionary context can only be planned to a certain extent. It can produce results that counteract the intentions of the involved parties. Consequently, its results are always looked at with a certain reservation – they may not contradict certain fundamental doctrinal assumptions to be acceptable. Despite all sympathy for the general idea Benedict XVI warned that the integrity and specificity of the Gospel and its particular culture should not be questioned in the process of inculturation.

The theological term of inculturation is employed to denominate the phenomenon – or maybe even an ethic and religious objective (of mission); it does not analyse the actual process and its essential components and the preconditions that allow this process to take place.

Art objects which display the cultural contact of Christian missionaries with non-western societies and thus the results of inculturation are rarely the subject of art historical research. This may be caused by the assumption of violent appropriation and an unconsenting transformation of indigenous artistic traditions that are generally ascribed to missionary artistic production. The artistic expression and the shape of the artworks are considered steeped in western culture and thus as no longer ‘authentic’ and ‘genuine’. As results of inculturation these objects are placed in a ‘no-man’s land’ between the cultures and seemingly cannot be located beyond doubt in their culture of origin or in the proselytising culture. A description of these objects usually is limited to the statement that European or Christian influence is manifest. The question how this influence occurs on the image or object level and how the ‘foreign’ can be inscribed into images and objects. Accordingly, the works created by Chinese painters who concentrated on Christian topics in their paintings, has either been interpreted as a European transformation of Chinese painting or as the sinicisation of Christian art. How the contact of religions takes place in the image can be exemplified in the paintings of a group of artists active in Beijing in the 1930s and 1940s and was named ‘Ars Sacra Pekinensis’ by the Verbite missionary Fritz Bornemann.

²⁹⁾ Amaledoss (2020: 426).

At the time this artists group was active, the representation of Christian topics in Chinese art already looked back at a long tradition; particular mention has to be made of the images created in in Beijing during the 18th century in the environment of Jesuit artists and who in turn were preceded by artistic activities supported by Franciscan missionaries.³⁰⁾

The images of the ‚Ars Sacra Pekinensis‘ did not originate from an immediate missionary context but rather were the attempt of a young generation of artists in the first half of the 20th century to introduce Christian motives into Chinese art.

In 1930 an art college was established at the Catholic University of Peking; it focussed on the training in Chinese painting and since 1943 it included a department of Chinese painting and one for European painting. The creation of such a training school was particularly encouraged by the Apostolic Delegate for China, arch bishop Celso Costantini (1876-1958); his most pressing task was to change the European character of Chinese Christianity and make in ‘Chinese’. Before his ecclesiastical career, Costantini worked as a freelance artist; besides his theological work he wrote several art historical studies and published handbooks of Christian art.³¹⁾

It is not surprising that he tried to achieve his objectives by training local artists to counteract the ‘Europeanism’ that dominated mission in Asia and regarded indigenous cultures as inferior.³²⁾ Costantini was of the opinion that European art was no suitable means for the Chinese church since the use of European compositions reinforced the impression that Christianity was a foreign religion. The church should rather pick up local art forms and use them to spread their doctrines. The artistic tradition of China he regarded as particularly suitable for this purpose.³³⁾ Costantini wanted to develop a Christian-Chinese visual language and at the same time to train the artists who should spread it. The art college focussed on architecture and painting; while Costantini preferred to see the development of a Chinese type of church architecture in European hands because he feared that Chinese architects might not understand the particularities

³⁰⁾ See Schüller 1940a: 16-20; 48-74. On the Jesuit artists in Peking see the works by George Robert Loehr (Ed. Walravens 2019).

³¹⁾ Bornemann (1950: 5).

³²⁾ Schüller (1940b: 10).

³³⁾ Lawton (1995: 472).

of the church space properly,³⁴⁾ he willingly handed the development of Christian Chinese painting over to indigenous artist. The department of architecture was thus headed by Adalbert Gresnigt (1877-1956), a Dutch Benedictine father and artist who was trained at the Beuron Art School; the department of painting was headed by the Chinese artist Luke Chen Yuandu. Costantini had met this young artist in the middle of the 1920s at an exhibition of modern art and had supported his work afterwards. Encouraged by Costantini, Chen turned his attention to Christian subjects; it is uncertain whether he had experimented with these themes already before he first met Costantini.³⁵⁾

Since 1930 Chen was employed by the art college where he studied the history of European art, particularly the painters of the Italian renaissance. A few years later he converted to Catholicism and was christened Luke, a reference to the titular saint of painters.³⁶⁾ During the first years of his work at the art college Chen taught exclusively traditional painting and pursued the study of Christian motifs only in private. Bornemann writes:

‘It is not easy for a Chinese professor to speak positively in front of colleagues and students about a Chinese art that takes on motifs of a foreign religion. Equally, it is not natural for a student to approve of a foreign religious subject and even less natural to take it as a model.’³⁷⁾

Following a suggestion by Berchman Brückner, another painter and Verbite Missionary employed at the art college, the painting class in autumn of 1934 occupied itself with the Christmas motif. An exhibition in September 1935 in Shanghai showed 20 paintings by Chen and 80 student works with Christian subjects.³⁸⁾ This exhibition marks the beginning of the *Ars Sacra*

³⁴⁾ Schüller (1940a: 89).

³⁵⁾ Clarke (2013: 240).

³⁶⁾ Clarke (2013: 163).

³⁷⁾ *“Nicht leicht ist es für einen chinesischen Professor, sich vor Kollegen oder Schülern über eine chinesische Kunst positiv zu äußern, die die Motive einer ausländischen Religion entnimmt. Ebenso wenig ist es für den Studenten selbstverständlich, den fremdreligiösen Stoff zu bejahen und noch weniger, ihn zur Vorlage zu nehmen“*; Bornemann (1950: 8f.).

³⁸⁾ Schüller (1940b: 11).

Pekinensis artists group; Luke Chen Yuandu is generally considered the instigator of this Christian Chinese painting tradition.³⁹⁾ The takeover of the university by the Chinese government in 1952 marked the end of the art college. In the rather brief period of its existence the college trained two generations of artists; among the artists of the second generation who studied at the art college during the 1940s there were several women artists.⁴⁰⁾

The exact number of artworks created in these 20 years at the art college is unknown. About 500 works are preserved as originals or in photographs;⁴¹⁾ larger collections are kept for example in the missionary collections of the Society of the Divine Word in St. Augustin (Germany) and Maria Enzersdorf (Austria).

The paintings of the Ars Sacra Pekinensis group are of particular interest for the analysis of religious situations of contact and their impact on the artistic production because the contact of religions can be traced in the archival documentation and can be correlated to the manifestation of this contact situation in the image. The contact situation has to be differentiated further into a *macro* and a *micro* level.

On the *macro* level, religious contacts have taken place between China and Europe in several waves of missionary activities, starting as early as the 14th century. By the early 20th century, multifaceted contacts between parts of the local population and different Christian orders had already occurred. While these situations of contact certainly did not include the entirety of people, colonial ambitions in the 19th century created multiple points of contact with large parts of the population.

On the *micro* level, contact took place individually between Celso Costantini and Luke Chen Yuandu, who at the time of their first meeting was not of the Christian faith and only converted to Catholicism in later years. Finally, the Ars Sacra Pekinensis artist group and the art works created by the members of this group are also part of this contact. It seems rather self-evident that substantial situations of contact are not limited to a single encounter but consist of a mosaic of individual situations. In this context, the encounter between Costantini and Chen is a piece of the mosaic. It forms a kind of prelude, but does not represent the complete

³⁹⁾ Schüller (1940a: 101).

⁴⁰⁾ Clarke (2013: 170f.).

⁴¹⁾ Leeb (2020: 32).

situation that initiated the art-historical impact, since on the micro level, a contact situation is extremely differentiated and is constituted by different facts and circumstances. This is partially because Chen studied European painting exclusively from the images in art historical literature accessible to him; it was centred around works from the Italian renaissance. This influence is manifest in his paintings and distinguishes them from those of other artists in this group who preferred the study of Central European paintings of the Middle Ages and early Modernity.

The focus of this paper is not to present a stylistic discussion of the paintings and their possible models; instead it will demonstrate how the Chinese painting tradition developed Christian motifs and how Christian content was included in the paintings. This can be observed in two paintings by Lu Hung Nien. Lu Hung Nien was one of the painters who adopted Christian subjects in autumn of 1934, following a suggestion by Berchman Brückner and who painted a Christmas motif for the exhibition of the art college. He completed his studies in 1936 and became a professor at the Catholic university in 1944.⁴²⁾

His representation of Mary and Joseph looking for a place to stay in Bethlehem (Fig. 3) was created in 1935. The scene shows a house near a river in a winter landscape; the house is situated within a walled enclosure. In front of the closed gate stands a wanderer with a bundle on his back as he asks for admission. One of the residents stands in the entrance, a second one can be seen through a window at the side. Immediately behind the closed gate there is a dog. In some distance to the gate, a female is standing in the deep snow; she wears a dark garment and her head is surrounded by a nimbus. The winter landscape and the very dark sky hint at the scene taking place in the evening; a setting underscored by the closed gate and people in the house that is lit by a candle. This way of painting a winter landscape follows the Chinese tradition; the landscape is therefore located in China. The artist takes up the well-known motif of the wanderer asking for a place to stay overnight. This motif is part of many nightly scenes in traditional Chinese painting,⁴³⁾ where it is usually located at the lower edge and indicates a nightly setting that would not be clearly recognisable in the rest of the painting. Often a pale full moon is added to the sky as another hint to the nightly setting. Into this well-established composi-

⁴²⁾ Bornemann (1950: 150).

⁴³⁾ See Lee-Kalisch (2001).

tion, the figure of a female has been 'implanted'; despite her East Asian physiognomy she is clearly recognisable as Mary. Her presence identifies the otherwise nameless wanderer as Joseph who asks for accommodation at an inn. It is the representation of Mary which provides an image that does not contain any other Christian or European references with a Christian context. The artist has introduced this Christian European visual motif into the scene and thus changes its content; it now represents an episode of the Christmas story.

In a similar manner, Lu Hung Nien composed his painting of the flight to Egypt (Fig. 4); in this painting that was also created in 1934, he employs the concept of a visual model form. The scene shows a shallow boat crossing a body of water. Reed indicates that the boat is near the bank. The water itself is only represented in the gentle waves caused by the moving boat; it merges with the sky that is visualised by two birds. In the bow of the boat stands the ferryman, his back turned towards the viewer. In the back part of the boat sits a man, in the middle a woman with a dark garment who holds a child in her lap. Except the ferryman who wears a round hat, the heads of all figures are surrounded by a nimbus. Again, in this painting the woman is clearly representing Mary. She has been inserted in the middle of the boat; a space that would have been left empty in a normal representation of a man crossing a river or a lake in a boat. It is again her presence that turns the scene into a Christian motif and identifies the represented figures as biblical protagonists. Of particular interest is the metaphorical representation of the journey through the crossing of a river or a lake. The boat passage does not appear in the story of the flight, but it is a common motif for overcoming a path or a journey in Chinese painting.

That in both cases the garment of Mary bears strong resemblance to that worn by precursors in Italian Renaissance paintings is no surprise. It should be noted, however, that only the garment has been adapted from the Italian paintings while the physiognomy of the figure remains that of a Chinese woman. Obviously, the garment can refer to a particular identity of a figure and can thus become a means of semantic reformulation of an image.

Both examples use a strategy for conveying Christian content through Chinese painting that introduces a component into a well-established pictorial motif that changes the overall meaning. In this way, the Christian content is clearly identified without touching the Chinese scenery. The picture still appears 'Chinese' to the viewer, although a new pictorial

semantics is created as a result of religious contact. If one adds the previously discussed examples of Buddha on the Cross, one could speak more generally of established ‘image forms’ in which the alteration or addition of one or more components of a fixed visual composition changes the overall message and thereby conveys additional or entirely different meanings.

From a European perspective the impression may arise that the artist merely picked an establishes visual element from Renaissance painting and added it as an element to a Chinese composition. It has to be considered, however, that the Christian mission in China until far into the 19th century employed an almost exclusively European visual language.

*‘The European missionary is tempted to introduce the domestic culture he is familiar with as a kind of paradigm into the foreign land he is proselytising’.*⁴⁴⁾

It is rather obvious that this attitude caused an asymmetry of power in which the images of the seemingly superior culture which sent its missionaries caused a lasting feeling of strangeness in the Chinese communities. Their religion is on the visual level, which contributes to the formation of a religious identity, even after generations still European and thus foreign. This is even more damaging since images as media of distribution are far more suggestive and have a far higher impact than writing or speech which operate in a more programmatic way. The creation of a Christian Chinese art was much more successful in building a Chinese Christian identity than the European images brought to China from abroad or produced there.

*‘Liberated from the rigidity and distance of the ancient church furnishings, the image now could be brought into the class rooms and living rooms and be exhibited there according to its importance’.*⁴⁵⁾

However, the transfer of motifs from European painting into a Chinese setting was done with care. The scenery is not only a backdrop for what

⁴⁴⁾ “Der europäische Missionar ist versucht, die ihm vertraute heimische Kultur als eine Art Vorbild in das fremde Missionsland einzuführen“; Schüller (1940a: 5).

⁴⁵⁾ “Von der Strenge und Ferne der alten Kirchengestaltung befreit, konnte das Bild nunmehr in die Unterrichtssäle und Wohnräume hineingetragen und dort seiner Bedeutung entsprechend herausgestellt werden“; Schüller (1940b: 8).

is now a Christian tradition taken to be 'Chinese', where the dramatis personae largely retain their European form. As already explained, the artist was concerned with connectivity of the Christian motifs to the Chinese pictorial content. This is evident in the *Wanderer*, who can be read as Joseph next to the figure of Mary. It becomes particularly obvious whenever the connection is made through common symbolic content, such as in the *Annunciation* (Fig. 5). Here a white lily is depicted in the Chinese image as well as in European models as an iconographic suggestion of pregnancy, since both cultures ascribe a very similar symbolism to this flower.

It shall not go unnoticed that before the *Ars Sacra Pekinensis* artists group came into existence, other attempts were made to transmit Christian ideas in the local visual language. Among the immediate precursors is the idea – pursued by several artists – to represent the Virgin Mary as the Empress of China. One example of these images is an image of Mary created by the Chinese Jesuit Siméon Lieou (1842-1912) dated to 1908 after a photograph of the widowed Chinese Empress Cixi; it was later regarded as particularly favourable.⁴⁶⁾

The image of the Empress Dowager as a blank space, which was rewritten as an image of Mary through the addition of a child and of ornaments with a Christian connotation, had already been used a few years earlier during the Boxer Rebellion, when the expulsion of enemy soldiers at Donglu was reported. In the Christian community there, it was said that a woman dressed in white and accompanied by a horseman had repelled the attack of the soldiers and was interpreted by the faithful as Our Lady accompanied by the archangel Michael. Referring to this miracle, the community of Donglu had an image of Mary made, which showed Our Lady in imperial regalia and was henceforth venerated as 'Our Lady of China'. In a way, the imperial regalia became a form in which the Mother of God could be inscribed as a spiritual queen, replacing the secular ruler. The image that made Donglu a Christian place of pilgrimage from the 1920s onwards was later destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The inscription of a Christian content in the blank space can still be clearly seen in the pictures at first. However, it was apparently in the artist's aim

⁴⁶⁾ Rzepkowski (1992: 121f.; 1999: 38); for a reproduction see Barmé (2008: Fig. 21). The creation of this image is dated by Barmé (2008: 109) to 1909. In his opinion a painting by the American artist Katherine A. Carl served as a template for the painting of Mary.

to grind away this visibility.⁴⁷⁾ This visual concept was frequently copied; the image from Donglu probably was the starting point of an entire chain of visual transmission.

SOCIAL RELEVANCE OF MODEL FORMS AND THE ENCOUNTER OF RELIGIONS IN THE OBJECT

The above-mentioned analyses of religious objects or art objects with religious content have shown that model forms are needed and used in contact situations. The concept of the model form will therefore be explained in more detail with regard to the elaboration of a possible theoretical basis for the systematic revision of established concepts about the emergence of iconographies and image conventions in Asia (and also for other contact zones). The core methodological concept of the model form, which is decisive for this treatment, was developed and defined in detail by Jürgen Frese in his major social-phenomenological work *Prozesse im Handlungsfeld* published in 1985.⁴⁸⁾

According to Frese, a model form can be described as a ‘*structure already partially filled in, thus strongly pre-determined in terms of content, with certain blank spaces in which individualising characteristics, data and facts can be entered. A model form is more than a mere structural determination of possible fulfilments, but less than a content determination.*’⁴⁹⁾

Model forms are indispensable syntactic precondition for *all* human operations, particularly for all *symbolic* operations. However, according to Frese, these necessary syntactic conditions of symbolic operations are not abstract structures, but rather concretely individualised sequences; their blank spaces allow for new entries and alternative turns.⁵⁰⁾ It is this

⁴⁷⁾ Schüller (1940a: 114).

⁴⁸⁾ Compare Stünkel (2017: 37-43).

⁴⁹⁾ “*bereits teilweise ausgefüllte, dadurch inhaltlich stark vorgeprägte Struktur mit bestimmten Leerstellen, in die individualisierende Charakteristika, Daten und Fakten eingetragen werden können. Ein Formular ist mehr als bloß strukturelle Festlegung möglicher Erfüllungen, aber weniger als inhaltliche Determination.*“ Frese (1985: 155).

⁵⁰⁾ Frese (1995: 56).

precise action-guiding mediating function between the individual and the general that gives the model form its sociality-creating potency. A new socialisation takes place through the model form; a new group emerges as a specific 'sociotext':

*'Our thesis is therefore that social processes can neither be determined structurally by the general, nor individually and historically by a particular. Only the partial filling of a structure or the partial functionalisation, the partial clearance of a history create the model forms in whose voids certain concrete actions can thus enter. In this respect, one could say that model forms are the 'living general' in social processes – and not only in those that take place linguistically.'*⁵¹⁾

Model forms enable action and specify it. They individualise on a specific as well as general level. In this regard, model forms are not limited to texts; rather, any 'structurally limited process sequence' – if some of its parts are treated as blanks – can become a model form, which is then determined by the preserved structural normal form as well as the contextual and situational environment of the model form at a certain point in time.⁵²⁾ Frese himself mentions image sequences in films, scenarios, sequences of consciousness and perception, communication and chains of action as examples. The decrease of content determination is responsible for the possibility of an individual 'inscription' into the model form and thus also results in a higher degree of (formal) obligation that emanates from this structure or sequence. Such a (formulaic) structure becomes thus a simultaneously general, known and individual sequence.

As syntactic conditions of human and especially symbolic operations, forms have a particular effect in and on the sociality of people. Model forms connect individuals to a communicating group. According to Frese,

⁵¹⁾ *"Unsere These ist also, daß weder ein Allgemeines strukturell, noch ein Besonderes individuell-geschichtlich in sozialen Prozessen diese determinieren können. Erst die Teilauffüllung einer Struktur bzw. die Teilfunktionalisierung, die Teilentleerung einer Geschichte schaffen die Formulare, in deren Leerstellen damit bestimmte konkrete Handlungen eintreten können. Insofern könnte man sagen, Formulare seien das 'lebendige Allgemeine' in Sozialprozessen – und zwar nicht nur in jenen, die sprachlich ablaufen."* Frese (1985: 156).

⁵²⁾ Frese (1995: 56).

the model form socialises in several ways. Firstly, it connects one's own experience with the texture of the situation in question:

'The review of memory elements by means of model forms can be developed into a systematised process of recognition in such a way that the isolated element of experience becomes describable as it can be inserted into the form.' ⁵³⁾

Experience is thus disciplined so that a socially relevant body can emerge in the form of a habitus. It acquires the character of familiarity, as it proves to be structured by the familiar form. Secondly, the model form establishes a connection with the event displayed here. The event and individual experience are no longer merely juxtaposed, but the acknowledging 'reader' of the text is inscribed in the text itself. The individual finds (its) expression in the model form. The (socio-)text affects and concerns on a personal level. And thirdly, the form unites self-world and co-world in a (new) common environment. This element is crucial for a contact situation. In personal affectation, a balance is established between generality and particularity: the *visibly individual* emerges in the medium of the general:

'In dealing with the form, experience structures and disciplines itself historically in such a way that between the general determinacy and the individual contingency of an event, a level that takes both sides into account and acknowledges them stabilises itself.' ⁵⁴⁾

Through the model form,, one's own life becomes a contingent necessity within an environment. This, in a contact situation, is established as a new common environment. The model form reveals the past as well as the future of the individual and thus determines his or her present.

⁵³⁾ "Das Durchprüfen von Erinnerungselementen mit Formularen kann zu einem systematisierten Prozeß des Wiedererkennens entwickelt werden, und zwar so, dass das isolierte Element von Erleben beschreibbar wird als einsetzbar in das Formular." Frese (1985: 157).

⁵⁴⁾ "Im Umgang mit dem Formular strukturiert und diszipliniert sich die Erfahrung geschichtlich so, dass zwischen allgemeiner Bestimmtheit und individueller Kontingenz eines Geschehens eine beide Seiten voll anerkennende und berücksichtigende Ebene sich stabilisiert." Frese (1985: 157).

*'The completed, consistent, socially acceptable, meaningfully readable model form creates a text in which (essentially) model form elements and completions merge indistinguishably. The content of the text is a story told along the guiding lines of the model form.'*⁵⁵⁾

The inscription of one's own experience in this kind of model form results in a consistent and socially readable text of one's own life story. An understanding is thus made possible for oneself and for others.

The building blocks of these new model forms are, for example, texts that the phenomenologist Wilhelm Schapp has called 'grand narratives', i.e. those texts through which the members of a certain tradition are defined as such – in the Western and Middle Eastern context, these are, for example, the myths of Homer, Hesiod and Gilgamesh, the Biblical history, the Alexander sagas, etc. As Schapp put it:

*'We are entangled not only in our own stories, but in stories all the way back to the creation of the world, and equally entangled sideways to the most distant human being, and, in our opinion, to every creature.'*⁵⁶⁾

A transcending element is inherent in these stories. Schapp points out that these grand or world narratives tend to cause a 'dependency on religions':

*'The reason is simply that we can only deal with existing world histories or with an existing world history, and that outside of this religious world history there is no world history as history in our sense, as history that shows the whole of us as entangled in a history.'*⁵⁷⁾

⁵⁵⁾ "Das fertig ausgefüllte, konsistente, sozial vertretbare, sinnvoll lesbare Formular bildet einen Text, in dem (grundsätzlich) Formular-Elemente und Ausfüllungen ununterscheidbar ineinander übergehen. Inhalt des Textes ist eine am Leitfaden des Formulars erzählte Geschichte." Frese (1985: 162).

⁵⁶⁾ "Wir sind nicht nur in unsere Geschichten verstrickt, sondern in die Geschichten bis zur Erschaffung der Welt und ebenso nach seitwärts verstrickt bis zum entferntesten Menschen, und, wie wir meinen, auch bis zu jeder Kreatur." Schapp (1981: 21).

⁵⁷⁾ "Der Grund liegt einfach darin, daß wir uns nur mit vorgefundenen Weltgeschichten oder mit einer vorgefundenen Weltgeschichte auseinandersetzen können, und daß es außerhalb dieser religiösen Weltgeschichte keine Weltgeschichte gibt als

The history of religion thus offers the most and most attractive model forms (sociotexts) of human action. Through their formulaic histories, religious traditions prove to be open to contact. The special structure of the model form as open to new entries and alternative turns and in its reference to past and future is also responsible for the *interpretation* of the respective sociotext, because

*'Model forms are first of all the syntactic conditions for the possibility of semantically revealing connections in the text. In particular, model forms constitute the connectability and continuability of symbolic processes. 'Meaning' is defined by connectability.'*⁵⁸⁾

Processes mediated by model forms produce a meaningful history that can be recounted as such. The concept of the model form can also be useful for an analysis of non-written material, such as pictures and plastic objects, especially with regard to the investigation of a possible contact situation that may be present in them. Just like texts, objects can also be described as model forms and analysed in terms of their creation and effect. In this context, the object as a model form (object form) has a special conciseness. In the object, religious traditions that meet are not arbitrary, but present in a formally structured way.

On the artistic level, the model form concept means that a new pictorial element is inserted into an already existing picture or motif. In the process, the established motif, which the artist presumes the viewer to be familiar with, remains largely untouched. The new pictorial element is 'written in' as a supplement and uses the previous motif as a kind of frame. Thus, the known motif becomes the carrier (medium) of the added pictorial element, which gives a new meaning to the entire picture. In the case of religious art, this process usually reflects a contact situation, the consequence of which is an adaptation or reshaping of religious traditions. This process

Geschichte in unserem Sinne, als Geschichte, die das ganze Wir als in eine Geschichte verstrickt aufweist." Schapp (2004: 201).

⁵⁸⁾ *"Formulare sind zunächst die syntaktischen Bedingungen der Möglichkeit von semantisch aufschlußreichen Anschlüssen im Text. Formulare konstituieren insbesondere Anschließbarkeit und Fortsetzbarkeit symbolischer Prozesse. 'Sinn' wird definiert über Anschließbarkeit.*" Frese (1995: 56).

can be observed with particular clarity in pictorial works from missionary contexts.

This becomes most obvious in the deliberate merging of different traditions, such as in the media used for the Christian mission, which transport Christian (image) content by means of non-Christian imagery. Here, religious contact is objectified in concrete terms. In this way, the non-Christian visual language becomes a model form where it is possible to inscribe Christian content. The emergence and function of such 'hybrid' objects is therefore particularly interesting for the analysis of contact situations. Object-related religious contact thrives precisely on cultural contamination. Exactly these objects make the respective contact most vividly and succinctly comprehensible; they therefore ought to be studied preferentially by scholars of both art and religion.

As already shown, clothing is a meaningful example of non-textual model forms. Its use is not limited to a particular group, but can be filled in by others. Clothing conveys meaning: the person who wears it is connected to a context of meaning that is meaningful to a particular tradition and becomes 'legible' to them. Their actions become meaningful – for example, when John the Baptist was depicted in the clothing of a Brahmin by the Indian painter Alfred David Thomas (Fig. 6). In the Christian art of Japan, this can be exemplified an image of Christ inserted into the garment of the Chinese goddess Guanyin and depicted in the meditating position of the Buddha (Fig. 7). This method of depiction is not limited to China, however, but has been applied in many areas of mission. An example of this is the depiction of the search for a hostel by the painter Lu Hung Nien, already discussed, which takes up the motif of the wanderer and transforms its content. Here, the characters are replaced by or reinterpreted as the personnel of the biblical story so that a new meaning emerges; this in turn can be retold and connected to other motifs and stories. The motif of the wanderer or of wandering in general in Chinese art is part of the motif of exile. Huiwen Zhang speaks of

"The yield of the wanderer motif against the Chinese cultural background: key words such as living and dying, wandering (where to) and returning (what to), homelessness and lostness run through the entire spectrum of classical Chinese philosophy and literature: from antiquity – Yijing [...] (Book of Changes), Chu ci [...] (Elegies of Chu) and Gushi shijiu shou [...] (Nineteen Venerable Poems) – on to the Middle Ages – first and foremost

*the two pinnacles of the Jin dynasty Tao Yuanming [...] and Xie Lingyun [...] as well as the poets recognised respectively as “poet god” and “poet saint” Li Bai [...] and Du Fu [...] from the Tang dynasty – until modern times – the poets Su Dongpo [...] and Xin Qiji [...], equally regarded as the most important representatives of ci [...] in the Western and Southern Song periods.’*⁵⁹⁾

The Christian Christmas story is inscribed into the model form of the story of the wanderer, known in Chinese tradition, and its pictorial representation; thus, it substantiates and individualises the wanderer narrative with regard to the religious event of salvation reported here. This inscription enables the Chinese viewer of the painting to recognise traditional heritage in a new, substantiated contextualisation that at the same time retains the familiar character of the wanderer motif, which is bound by tradition. The recognising viewer of the image is thus himself inscribed in a new sociotext, in a new sociality that contains the Chinese tradition in a specific interpretation (concretisation) and thus creates new (religious) meaning through familiarity. The same applies in reverse for a (Western) Christian viewer: Chinese elements are inscribed in the form of the Christmas story, etc. In this way, connectability is created in both directions, which can serve as a basis for future mutual translations.

⁵⁹⁾ “Ergiebigkeit der Wanderer-Motivik vor dem chinesischen Kulturhintergrund: Schlüsselwörter wie Leben und Sterben, (Wohin-)Wandern und (Wozu-)Zurückkehren, Heimatlosigkeit und Verlorenheit ziehen sich durch das ganze Spektrum der klassischen chinesischen Philosophie und Literatur: vom Altertum –Yijing [...] (Buch der Wandlungen), Chuci [...] (Elegien von Chu) und Gushi shijiu shou [...] (Neunzehn ehrwürdige Gedichte) – über das Mittelalter – allen voran die beiden Gipfelpunkte der Jin-Dynastie Tao Yuanming [...] und Xie Lingyun [...] sowie die jeweils als »Dichtergott« und »Dichterheiliger« anerkannten Poeten Li Bai [...] und Du Fu [...] aus der Tang-Dynastie – bis in die Neuzeit – die gleichberechtigt als bedeutendste Repräsentanten des ci [...] zur Westlichen und Südlichen Song Zeit geltenden Lyriker Su Dongpo [...] und Xin Qiji [...].“ Huiwen Zhang (2012: 41).

MODEL FORMS AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR ICONOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS?

It would now be worth considering whether the model form theory presented above could provide a useful approach for the study of iconographic developments. Methodologically, the analysis of the contact situation manifested in the object combines an art historical and religious and historical investigation of the motif history and image content with a historical biography of the object. This approach is based on the assumption that images with religious connotations are not unique objects of artistic creation, but primarily the reproduction of fixed types of images.

Contact situations, as has already been shown, lead to change or an expansion of the image motif. This is initially visible, but this visibility diminishes over time. The initially foreign or new element is no longer perceived as such in the picture. New and old merge in the picture or are perceived as a fusion, especially when this is underpinned by pictorial narratives (myths or legends invented to explain the image). On the object level, the contact-induced development and differentiation process of religious traditions, whose diverse dynamics are fed by contact situations, is thus repeated.

To what extent can the concept of the model form be used to analyse iconographic types and image conventions in Asia? This will be briefly outlined using the example of Buddha images in East Asian art. In art historical observations, Buddha images are often described as more or less similar and unchanged in comparison to the ancient Indian Buddha image. When Buddhism spread to East Asia, the pictorial idea of a monk sitting on a throne carried by lions, usually in a meditative posture, remained basically unchanged. Adaptations to regional pictorial traditions, certainly also with the idea of differentiation from Indian Buddhism, took place primarily through style. The folding of the robe became a decorative element and the physiognomy was adapted to East Asian pictorial traditions in order to create the image of a Chinese Buddha. It is therefore often overlooked that the Buddha image manifests religious contact situations on several levels. First of all, this concerns the transformation from the ancient Indian image, which emerged in the first centuries of our time in the region of Mathurā in northern India, to the East Asian cult image, which was and is understood by the believers in this region not as an 'Indian import', but as part of their

own tradition. Secondly, it has to be taken into account that the Indian Buddha image itself is also already the result of religious contact situations. In this context, the ancient Indian Buddha image cannot be considered on its own, but has to be discussed in connection with the image of Jina, since the image traditions of Buddhism and Jainism in ancient India are closely intertwined. The cult images of both religious traditions take up the same basic motif, the image of the ascetic in a characteristic pose, and both associate this ascetic figure with the royal throne.⁶⁰⁾

The outward similarity of Buddhist and Jain cult images in ancient India is usually simply explained by art historians citing mutual influences.⁶¹⁾ Both cult images show an ascetic sitting on a throne pedestal supported by lions. Nevertheless, a completely preserved cult image can be clearly assigned to a Buddhist or Jain context on the basis of other features; the overall image is therefore not ambiguous. However, the type of image behind it, which has been and continues to be reproduced again and again with only minor changes to this day, proves that the cult images were created in close contact, based on a common repertoire of pictorial motifs. This means that the religions do not meet in the individual cult image, but that in this case a basic image type 'Buddha' or 'Jina' or generalised 'founder figure', which was meaningful for both groups, was formed from the encounter with each other and in mutual reaction to the developments of the respective other religion.⁶²⁾

This interpretation of the representations of a founder figure is based on the assumption that the cult images of both religions are multiplications or reproductions of a canonical visual. The cult image is not newly created again and again, but is reproduced following established and binding iconographic specifications. That cultural contact in an image is often multilayered becomes obvious in the use of the lion throne for Buddha and Jina.

Since the 1st century CE the Buddhas as well as the Jina are represented on a seat supported by lions.⁶³⁾ This assignment of the throne to both the human and the divine ruler as well as to the Buddha – and the Jina as the redeemer – refers to the original context of the lion's throne, which

⁶⁰⁾ Krüger & Stünkel (2022: 37f.)

⁶¹⁾ E. g. Sharma (1995: 156).

⁶²⁾ Krüger (2020).

⁶³⁾ Rosenfield (1967: 183–186); Auboyer (1949: 32f. and 125ff.).

in the ancient Orient symbolised a sacred kingship that equated the lion with the god-king. This idea is subsequently taken up in various forms in many ancient cultures. In the Indian tradition, for example, the physique of the ruler of the world (*cakravartin*) is compared to that of the lion, and during the reign of Aśoka the Buddha was called the 'lion of the [lineage of] Śākyas' (*śākyasiṃha*). In early Buddhist texts, from India as well as from China, the characteristics of the Buddha, especially his voice that he uses to spread the doctrine, are said to be like that of a lion⁶⁴) and the distinctive sign (*cihna*) of Jina Mahāvīra is the lion. The idea of a god-king as a mediator between gods and humans goes back a long way and can first be traced to early dynastic Egypt. While the animals in ancient Egypt were still the revelation bearers of the deity, in later cultures they were downgraded to simple companions or mounts,⁶⁵) i.e. the image of the lion-like ruler was replaced by the king carried by lions. The lion, which was originally regarded as the representative of the ruler, thus became a bearer and guardian animal and finally the emblem of royal rule and as such has adorned the king's throne ever since. The fact that Buddha and Jina also occupied a royal throne suggests that the idea of a lion-borne seat of power was brought to India relatively late.

The object-related contact situation can, as in the present case, be very diverse and often is not immediately visible. All the more important is a precise and careful analysis that strives to do justice to the complexity of (art) objects from the point of view of contact. The presented concept of the model form can be a suitable instrument to carry out such an analysis.

CONCLUSION

Due to its tendency towards authenticity, research in the fields of religion and art allows itself certain narrow-mindedness and blind spots with regard to groups of objects that are significant for the study of these subjects. This holds true for those groups of objects that have been neglected or even explicitly excluded from traditional research on non-European religion and art due to their hybridity or supposed lack of artistic originality and aesthetic quality. It is precisely the study of these

⁶⁴) Gail (2007: 56).

⁶⁵) Lurker (1958: 28).

ostensibly ‘non-authentic’ objects that often yields the most meaningful results in terms of religious studies and art history. They are best described as manifestations of religious or cultural contacts.

The analysis of selected objects from Japan, China and India has shown: religious contacts enable the formation of certain images and ideas about religions. They are manifested in the individual object. These objects thus contribute to the formation of religious meaning, in this case to the emergence of iconographies and image conventions in Asia. For the religious/cultural traditions present in the contact situation, it becomes apparent that the readability or comprehensibility of cultural traditions is not dependent on their authentic mediation, which fully represents all aspects of the other tradition. Rather, representatives of one religious tradition understand the other tradition they encounter by inscribing it in existing model forms. This creates a new sociotext that serves as a (permanently improvable) basis for future contacts. For adequate research, it is therefore important to describe the situation, its formulaic design and the result that emerges from it as a (new) sociotext.

In terms of objects, religious contacts are often found in several layers – ‘visible’ to the viewer or ground down to ‘invisibility’. As demonstrated by the example of the apparently unambiguous lion’s throne assigned to just one tradition, these contacts may not be obvious at first glance and require explication in terms of the history of religion. For this explication, the differentiating analysis of macro and micro levels of the respective contact situation is of decisive importance.

Contact situations are the prerequisite for the further development of religious traditions, especially of Christianity as a paradigmatic missionary religious tradition. Christian theologies have tried to take this into account by referring to concepts of inculturation or contextualisation. The condition for the possibility of inculturation and contextualisation, however, is the model form that is filled out in the respective contact situation. ‘Religious contact is productive of religion, and therefore it is worthwhile to study it in terms of religious studies’.⁶⁶⁾ This also applies in particular to the formulaic religious contact in the object, which is worthy of both religious studies and art studies investigation.

⁶⁶⁾ “*Religionskontakt ist religionsproduktiv, und deshalb lohnt es, ihn religionswissenschaftlich zu studieren*“; Krech (2019: 287).

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↑ Fig. 1. Buddha on the cross, Japan, c. 19th century, Museum Forum der Völker, Werl (currently closed), (Photo: Patrick Felix Krüger)

← Fig. 2. Wooden sculpture of the Mary-Kannon, China, early 20th century, Museum Forum der Völker, Werl (currently closed), (Photo: Patrick Felix Krüger)



Fig. 3. Lu Hung Nien, *Seeking shelter*, 1935
(after Bornemann 1950: 157)



Fig. 4. Lu Hung Nien, *Flight into Egypt*, 1934 (after
Bornemann 1950: 153)



Fig. 5. Wang Su-ta, *The Annunciation*, 1946
(after Bornemann 1950: 146)

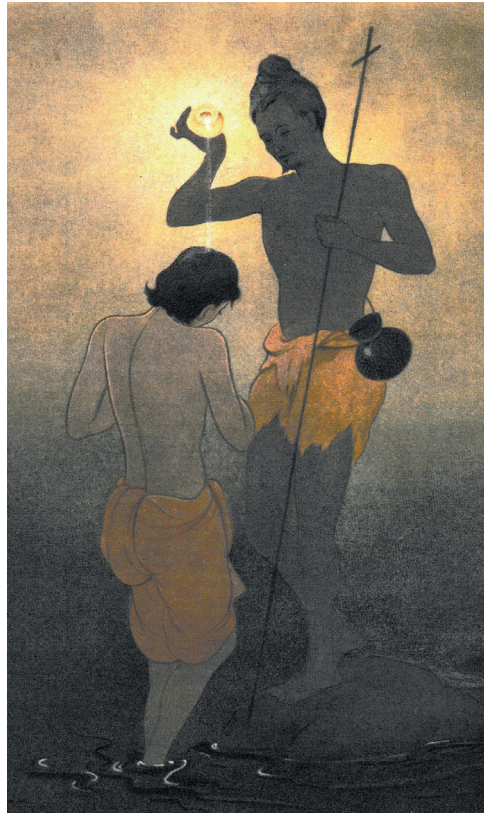


Fig. 6. Alfred David Thomas, *The Baptism*, c. 1940
(after Thomas 1948: 17)



Fig. 7. Yokai Sadakata, *The first temptation*, c. 1930
(after Schüller 1939: 98)